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Wednesday 8 March 2017

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 8 March 2017

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Portfolio Question Time

Education and Skills

Remote and Rural Schools

1. Peter Chapman (North East Scotland)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that remote and rural schools are not disadvantaged compared to those in urban areas. (S5O-00732)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that there is access to high-quality education in rural and remote communities and is taking a number of steps to make sure that that happens. In line with the recommendations of the commission on the delivery of rural education, the Scottish Government made a series of amendments in 2014 to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 to provide additional protection for rural schools. Those amendments included the establishment of a presumption against the closure of rural schools and additional consultation requirements in respect of the likely impact on the community and the likely effect of different travelling arrangements. The member will be aware that the local authority funding distribution formula also includes a number of adjustments to ensure that remote and rural schools are not disadvantaged compared with those in urban areas.

Peter Chapman: In north-east Scotland—particularly in Aberdeenshire—there is a high teacher vacancy rate and a problem with teacher shortages. Maria Walker, who is the director of education and children’s services for Aberdeenshire Council, has described the current situation as “cruel” and said that

“teacher recruitment is our constant worry”.

Northern alliance councils such as Aberdeenshire Council want more varied routes into the profession and have even had to ask parents to help to find qualified staff. What action will the Scottish Government take to alleviate the problems that are being experienced in Aberdeenshire, bearing in mind the fact that one in 10 teacher training places goes unfilled?

John Swinney: The Government is taking a number of steps to address the issue. I have discussed such matters with Maria Walker, the director of education at Aberdeenshire Council. At my instigation, we have invited the colleges of education to propose a range of routes that will improve the speed with which individuals can enter the teaching profession, subject to the assurance of the General Teaching Council for Scotland that the requisite levels of quality have been achieved by the individuals who are pursuing those routes.

In addition, I recently increased the intake of students into the colleges of education for the sixth year in succession. As Mr Chapman may be aware, I recently announced a teacher recruitment campaign under the headline “Teaching Makes People”, to encourage more individuals to enter the teaching profession.

I assure Mr Chapman that I recognise the difficulties that are caused by the shortage of teachers and that we are doing everything in our power to address them. That includes asking the General Teaching Council for Scotland to work with teachers who are registered to teach but are not currently teaching in Scotland to ensure that they are available and asking it to provide the easiest and swiftest route to entering the profession for teachers who have experience from other parts of the United Kingdom and who wish to teach in Scotland.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): What analysis does the Scottish Government undertake to compare teacher numbers in rural and urban schools on a school-by-school basis?

John Swinney: Pupil teacher ratios are monitored across the country and are shown by local authority area. Those numbers vary because pupil teacher ratios in rural authorities are generally lower than those in urban authorities. Under the fair local government settlement, all local authorities have a collective obligation to maintain the national ratio of teachers to pupils in classrooms. Nevertheless, Kate Forbes’s question highlights the fact that the pupil teacher ratio is generally lower in rural authorities than it is in urban authorities.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): In his initial answer to Peter Chapman, the Deputy First Minister mentioned that the local government formula takes into account rural and island issues. When the cabinet secretary considers revisions to the pupil equity fund, will he consider taking those aspects into that fund? When he was in Lerwick last Monday, he will have recognised that, although Shetland Islands Council is gaining £200,000 from that fund, that is for 24 schools, so we have considerable challenges to address,

which could be done with a formula that was more advantageous to the islands.

John Swinney: I am certainly open to pursuing such questions. As I have said to Mr Scott before, I am open to considering the issues with the formula by which pupil equity funding is distributed. We have used free school meal eligibility to give us a detailed picture of the prevalence of poverty around the country. That is a better mechanism than the Scottish index of multiple deprivation in its geographic coverage, but I would be the first to accept that the methodology has limitations. I am therefore happy to engage on the question.

I had a helpful meeting with the convener and the deputy convener of education at Shetland Islands Council when I was in the islands just the other week. I also had an interesting visit to Anderson high school, where I paid close attention to the names on the dux board.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary outline his thoughts on the recommendation from the commission on widening access that

“Universities, colleges and local authorities should work together to provide access to a range of Higher and Advanced Higher subjects, which ensures that those from disadvantaged backgrounds or living in rural areas are not restricted in their ability to access higher education by the subject choices available to them”?

Does he agree that, as elected representatives, we have a duty to speak about education in a way that encourages those who are considering entering the profession?

John Swinney: I am certainly happy to address the issues that Gillian Martin has raised from the commission on widening access, which set out clearly the necessity of ensuring that young people have the chance to study for appropriate qualifications by better integrating provision in our senior schools and colleges. A tremendous amount of innovation is under way in the country that gives young people access to such opportunities, and I want to ensure that that is taken further.

Digital connectivity assists us in a number of respects by ensuring that we can extend the scope and range of opportunities for young people to acquire the qualifications that will ensure that they can access higher and further education. We need to ensure that that good practice and those opportunities are available to young people in rural areas, too. When the Government looks at the learner journey from 16 to 24, we will consider those issues.

It is important that we have a positive debate about the opportunities in education. The Government’s campaign to motivate individuals to

enter the teaching profession is called “Teaching Makes People” because that is exactly the product of the fine work that teachers do. It is important that we support them in their efforts.

Teachers (Recruitment and Retention)

2. **Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to retain and recruit teachers to tackle shortages. (S5O-00733)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is taking a number of actions to help to recruit and retain teachers. We are spending £88 million this year to make sure that every school has access to the right number of teachers; we are opening up new and innovative routes into teaching; we have increased student teacher intake targets for the sixth year in a row; and we are setting targets to train teachers in the subjects where they are needed most. We also launched a teacher recruitment campaign on 8 February; it builds on the success of last year’s inspiring teachers campaign, which helped to drive a 19 per cent increase in postgraduate diploma in education applications to Scottish universities compared with the previous year.

Elaine Smith: As it is international women’s day, it is pertinent to ask what actions the Scottish Government is taking specifically to address gender inequality and violence against women and to keep women teachers in the profession, given the reports that misogyny and sexual harassment are on the increase in schools.

John Swinney: Any misogyny, bullying, sexual harassment or discrimination against women is wholly unacceptable in our education system, and any member of staff who feels that they are experiencing such conduct has my full support and encouragement to raise those issues through the relevant channels, to protect their interests. It is important that our schools have a strong and tolerant learning environment in which young people can learn and teachers can teach. Those values will certainly be reflected in the general work that the Government takes forward.

On female access to teacher education, we are particularly concerned to ensure that, in our wider science, technology, engineering and mathematics work, we encourage more and more women to become involved in the STEM subjects, and that is reflected in the campaigns that we take forward.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware from his recent visit to Moray, which I was grateful for, that a shortage of teachers continues to be an issue there. He may also be aware that the northern alliance—of which

Moray Council is part and in which directors of education work closely together—believes that empowering local authorities to have more say over teacher training might be part of the solution to the issue of attracting more home-grown teachers into the profession. Will he give more thought to that solution? Is it on his agenda?

John Swinney: The work of the northern alliance is important and beneficial, because it brings together expertise across seven local authority areas to create a much stronger advisory support arrangement for the delivery of education in the north of Scotland. The feedback from all the local authorities that are involved is that they appreciate and value the approach that is being taken. The northern alliance is taking forward an illustrative model for the rest of Scotland.

The relationship between the university community and the colleges that generate the teaching profession, and the work of our schools, is critical to a strong approach to the learning and teaching of our teaching workforce.

I am happy to consider the issues that the northern alliance has raised. Local authorities are already involved in determining teacher recruitment levels, as they are part of the workforce planning that the Government undertakes. I am keen for the colleges of education to be closely involved in that process.

Graduate Apprenticeships (Costs)

3. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how much it has spent on graduate apprenticeships since they were introduced. (S5O-00734)

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): The week is Scottish apprenticeship week, which is a chance for us collectively to mark the success of Scottish apprentices and our apprenticeship offerings, so the question is timely.

The Scottish Government spent £200,000 on graduate-level apprenticeships in 2015-16, the year in which they were introduced. The projected spend for 2016-17 is £1,372,000 and, in the coming financial year, we estimate that we will spend £4.7 million.

Anas Sarwar: As the minister has just set out, the Government has spent more than £1.5 million on the graduate apprenticeship scheme up to the end of this financial year. However, that scheme has delivered only 27 opportunities. That means that each one of those graduate apprenticeships has cost the Scottish Government £58,222, which is more than the cost of sending someone to Harvard University and more than the Government spends on educating a single young person from

first year to sixth year. Does he honestly think that that is good value for money?

Jamie Hepburn: Anas Sarwar may have confused opportunities with starts. I urge him to do his homework rather better.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Will the minister confirm that the Labour Party has voted against every increase in apprenticeship numbers since the Scottish National Party Government came to office in 2007? Will he also confirm that, under this Government, the number of apprenticeships in North Ayrshire has increased by more than 89 per cent, compared with 63 per cent in Scotland as a whole?

Jamie Hepburn: The Government's apprenticeship offering is inextricably interlinked with its budget process, and it is on the record that the Labour Party voted against our budget this year, along with the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats; that would have denied apprentices and potential apprentices across the country that opportunity.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome Scottish apprenticeship week. After 10 years of this Government, why does Scotland have only half as many apprenticeships per head of population as the rest of the United Kingdom?

Jamie Hepburn: It is intriguing that Mr Lockhart has asked that question of me again. We have a high-quality offering here in Scotland—it is different from what exists south of the border. We explored that matter in a debate last week. On the face of it, the ambition that the UK Government has for a rapid expansion of apprenticeship numbers may look attractive, but I cannot see how it will lead to an increase in quality. We have a high-quality offering here and we will continue to progress with that.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Having served an apprenticeship, I know that good tutors and lecturers are required to get people through an apprenticeship programme. Is the minister aware that, on Friday, Heriot-Watt University announced 100 redundancies? How will that redundancy programme, which is being carried out to fill a £14 million gap, help to increase the number of graduate apprentices?

Jamie Hepburn: Funding for universities has increased over the period. There are undoubtedly problems associated with Brexit for the position of universities in Scotland—we are not quite sure whether Neil Findlay supports or opposes Brexit. I recognise his fundamental point: that our apprenticeship opportunities rely on good-quality people to deliver them, and I am very grateful that we have good-quality people delivering apprenticeships right across Scotland.

Named Person Scheme Reform (Consultation)

4. Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that the consultation on reforms to its named person scheme has been described by one group as a “sham”. (S5O-00735)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): As I set out in my statement to Parliament yesterday, the three-month engagement involved more than 50 meetings with 250 organisations and groups. It included around 700 young people, parents, carers, practitioners, professionals and leaders from health, local authorities, faith communities, police, unions and charities. We engaged with a number of stakeholders, who gave a range of views and perspectives throughout the engagement programme. They included a number of organisations that had concerns, including Christian Action Research and Education Scotland, Clan Childlaw, Together and the Scottish Parent Teacher Council.

Gordon Lindhurst: I thank the cabinet secretary for what I think was a repeat of what he said yesterday. Notwithstanding the statement that he made yesterday—and of course my question was lodged before he made it—will he meet with the no to named person campaign group to discuss his revisals of the scheme?

John Swinney: Yesterday, I went through Gordon Lindhurst’s question as courteously as I could. The view that I have taken on it is that the discussions that I have had on taking forward this agenda have been to implement and put into practice the named person provision. The no to named person campaign does not want named persons at all. The formal consultation on the policy took place in 2012 and Parliament legislated for it as a consequence of that. It is my duty as a minister to implement the will of Parliament and implement what has been legislated for, and to make arrangements to address the issues that have been put in front of us by the Supreme Court. That is precisely what I have done in the course of action that I set out to Parliament.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary confirm whether any parties voted against the creation in law of the named person service? If no party did, would he agree that, in the same spirit, all parties should recognise the benefits to our most vulnerable young people of the service, rather than playing politics with it?

John Swinney: The Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill was passed by Parliament by 103 votes to 0, with, if my memory serves me right, 16 abstentions. No member of Parliament

voted against the bill at stage 3, before its enactment in 2014. I intend to do what Parliament would expect of me, which in this instance is to address the Supreme Court’s issues, and I believe that I have done that fully and comprehensively. I will bring forward the legislation for the highest amount of parliamentary scrutiny that any issue can be given. Parliament has been invited to legislate on the issue and can come to its conclusions in due course. I hope that, when it considers the legislation, it does so on the basis of values and principles that I believe have underpinned much of its thinking since its foundation, which include the importance of taking steps to get it right for every child and ensuring that we take every measure to support young people on their journey through our society. That is the thinking that I have applied to the legislation.

Schools (Support Staff)

5. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that schools have adequate numbers of support staff. (S5O-00736)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): It is for education authorities to ensure that schools have adequate numbers of support staff. Education authorities will take resourcing decisions based on their commitments, including statutory duties under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, and local circumstances and priorities.

Miles Briggs: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will acknowledge that support staff play a vital role in our schools in helping teachers to support pupils with additional needs. Under the watch of this Government and the Scottish National Party-Labour Party-run City of Edinburgh Council, the number of support staff in Edinburgh’s secondary schools has declined by almost 20 per cent since 2010, which is one of the largest drops in Scotland. How does the cabinet secretary reconcile that record with the Scottish Government’s desire to close the attainment gap?

John Swinney: Around the country, the number of staff who support pupils with additional support needs was 12,572 in 2008 and, in 2016, it was 12,883. That demonstrates the ability of local authorities around the country to make decisions, because they have those powers. That is as it should be.

What I find quite strange about Miles Briggs’s question is that, at the weekend, his party leader called for more powers to be given to local authorities. Miles Briggs is complaining about local authorities exercising the powers that they currently—

Miles Briggs: What is the cabinet secretary doing about it?

John Swinney: I am respecting local authorities' decisions. It is up to local authorities to take decisions within the resources that are available to them. Mr Briggs cannot have it both ways—he cannot argue for more powers for local authorities, then complain when they exercise those powers and make the choices that they want to make.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the cabinet secretary.

What are the cabinet secretary and Scottish ministers doing to give effect to the measures in the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015, including supporting children with a hearing impairment in their education?

John Swinney: The Scottish Government is taking forward a number of measures to support individuals who are British Sign Language users. We were the first Government to introduce BSL legislation and, last week, the Scottish Government launched a consultation on the first British Sign Language national plan. The consultation, which will run until 31 May 2017, will actively seek the views of a wide range of stakeholders. The draft plan includes the actions that the Scottish Government—and the national public bodies for which Scottish ministers have responsibility—proposes to undertake to support the promotion of British Sign Language.

We are committed to supporting children with a hearing impairment to reach their full potential. My officials are working with key stakeholders to identify and develop the actions that are needed to respond to the Education and Skills Committee inquiry into the attainment of pupils with sensory impairments. I understand that the development of the action plan is at an advanced stage and will be finalised shortly.

All those actions are based on the very positive initiative that was taken by Mr Griffin in the previous parliamentary session to advance legislation on BSL.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): Given the importance of the assessment of need in securing additional help through support staff for a child, the cabinet secretary will be aware that 28 per cent of pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds have been assessed as having additional support needs in comparison with 16 per cent of pupils from the least disadvantaged backgrounds, according to his Government's figures for 2015. Despite that, only 1.3 per cent of pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds have a co-ordinated support plan in comparison with 2 per

cent of pupils from the least disadvantaged backgrounds.

Why does that inequality in support exist? What action will the cabinet secretary take to ensure that young people secure the support that they need to sustain their place in mainstream education? Does he recognise the importance of the level of support staff for young people in disadvantaged areas who already face significant barriers to learning?

John Swinney: Every young person who should have a co-ordinated support plan must have a co-ordinated support plan, regardless of their background. The commitment that we make with regard to our work to get it right for every child means that, whatever the circumstances of the young person, they should have the assistance that they require. Fundamentally, that issue is handled by local authorities in exercising their statutory duty. We had a discussion at the Education and Skills Committee this morning about some of those questions and whether there are enough requirements and obligations to ensure that that is the case. I undertook to take that issue away and to consider it further.

My commitment, which is on the record, is that regardless of a child's circumstances any child who requires a co-ordinated support plan should have one. If we need to provide support to families from deprived backgrounds to secure the support to which their child has an entitlement, the Government will give consideration to that issue.

On the question of support for young people who have additional needs, the way in which the Government is taking forward pupil equity funding puts resources into schools to enable them to take decisions on many of these questions.

Pupil Equity Funding (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley)

6. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how much support will be provided to schools in the Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley constituency through pupil equity funding, and when this will commence. (S5O-00737)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Just over £2.16 million of the £120 million pupil equity funding will be provided to schools in the Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley constituency and it will be available to use from the start of the 2017-18 financial year. The funding is part of the Scottish Government's commitment to provide £750 million during the current parliamentary session to provide targeted support for children, schools and communities to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

Willie Coffey: The funding will make a huge difference to many youngsters in my constituency and it will give them the chance to at least catch up with their counterparts across Scotland, despite Tory and Labour MPs voting against it. Does the Government intend to report regularly on progress with the initiative so that we can track where the successes are being made and so that we can share good practice across the country?

John Swinney: As we take forward what is an innovative approach to the empowerment of schools, I am keen that we learn lessons on good practice and share them across the country. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development analysis of Scottish education shows that there are strong elements of educational thinking and practice in the country, but the challenge is for us to ensure that that is systemic. The Government has put in place a national improvement hub that provides a reference point for the teaching profession around the country so that it can identify interventions and measures that will help in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap. That material is available and it will be enhanced to ensure that best practice is available to give us a fantastic opportunity to close the poverty-related attainment gap in Scottish education.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): What protocols have been set for using this investment, how do they define attainment, and how do they measure any change?

Is there provision within the framework for choosing to invest outside the classroom in the most important ways such as in transport for pupils who are participating in after-school activities, breakfast clubs or outdoor learning?

John Swinney: Guidance about the handling of the resources has been discussed and agreed with local authorities and made available to schools. Some of the points that Mr Whittle makes are entirely legitimate because, in some circumstances, the young people involved will not be able to gain access to some of the trips that ordinarily, in other family circumstances, might have been possible and would be of significant personal, educational and developmental benefit to the young people concerned.

Care must be taken with the decisions that are made about the use of the resources. However, during the past few weeks, I was given tremendous confidence when I met hundreds of headteachers around the country at our briefing events on pupil equity funding. The teaching leadership in Scotland is absolutely determined to make maximum impact with these resources and they want to take up the point that Mr Coffey made about knowing what are the best interventions that can be used to best effect to transform the lives of

young people in Scotland. That approach is to be welcomed and I look forward to seeing its fruits in due course.

Personal and Social Health Education (Reform)

7. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to reform personal and social health education, in light of evidence presented to the Education and Skills Committee on 22 February 2017. (S5O-00738)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): I provided evidence to the Education and Skills Committee this morning on, amongst other things, personal and social education. I will carefully consider any outcomes and recommendations from the committee's inquiry on PSE as part of our own work on health and wellbeing in the curriculum.

We are all aware of the role that high-quality PSE can have on children and young people's health and wellbeing, and ensuring that it can be delivered will form part of my contribution to the forthcoming mental health strategy. This morning, I said to the Education and Skills Committee that I am open to considering how we can undertake that activity more effectively and I look forward to hearing the outcome of the committee's deliberations on the matter.

Patrick Harvie: It has long been recognised that, not just in Scotland but throughout the United Kingdom, the situation is patchy as regards the provision of education in relation to sexual health, mental health, consent and a wide range of other critical life skills that young people need to have access to. There has been some success south of the border, with a cross-party campaign, including a private member's bill by my colleague Caroline Lucas, pushing the UK Government to acknowledge the need to make PSHE mandatory in all schools.

Does the cabinet secretary accept that the situation is patchy in Scotland? Does he agree that young people in our schools have a right to high-quality education on these issues? Will he ensure that by the means that I have mentioned or by other means, we achieve the objective of ensuring that young people in Scotland are no longer in a lottery as regards the provision of these important skills?

John Swinney: I agree entirely with Mr Harvie's point that it is important that all young people in Scotland are able to be equipped with the requisite knowledge and awareness of the important issues around their health and wellbeing and their sexual health, including issues of consent. We discussed many of those issues at the committee this

morning in what I thought was a helpful conversation.

Mr Harvie rather makes my point for me in saying that there might be a different route by which we undertake that work in Scotland given that we do not have a fixed curriculum. However, health and wellbeing is one of the three principal areas of the curriculum for excellence and, within health and wellbeing, there will be education on relationships and sexual health.

As Mr Harvie will be aware, the Equalities and Human Rights Committee has asked me for an opportunity to reflect on some of the issues that should be in our refreshed strategy. I await the committee's response in that respect. Once I have that, and have reflected on the conclusions of the Education and Skills Committee, I will be able to address fully the issues that Mr Harvie raises. It is important that young people have that awareness and the opportunity to form their views on these important questions.

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary join me in welcoming the fact that the time for inclusive education campaign pledge for inclusive education has now received the support of a majority of MSPs? What is the response of the Government to that? Will the cabinet secretary tell the chamber what steps the Government will take to implement the actions in the pledge, now that Parliament has the will to act, so that we can educate to liberate?

John Swinney: As I said to Patrick Harvie, the Government is addressing those issues through the work that is being undertaken on relationships, sexual health and parenthood education, which needs to be comprehensive and inclusive.

The Equalities and Human Rights Committee has asked me for an opportunity to consider some of the issues that have been raised in its deliberations. I have provided that opportunity and await the committee's conclusions in that respect. Once that information is to hand, the Government will take forward steps to ensure that the approach that we take on relationships, sexual health and parenthood education as part of health and wellbeing, which is one of the three core curricular areas in Scotland, is advanced comprehensively in Scottish education.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): What action is the Scottish Government taking to promote healthy relationships among young people? What progress is being made on addressing risky behaviour by our young people?

John Swinney: Fundamentally, children and young people should be able to feel safe, respected, happy and included in their learning environment, and all staff must be proactive in the

school situation in ensuring that that is the case. Within and outwith schools, young people must be able to operate in an environment in which there is a complete intolerance of bullying, whatever the motivation of that happens to be, and through their education they should be able to learn tolerance, respect, equality and good citizenship as part of fulfilling the four capacities of the curriculum for excellence.

Prejudice has no place in Scotland and the Government continues to work with a range of organisations, such as Stonewall Scotland, LGBT Youth Scotland and the TIE campaign, to ensure that we address the important LGBT issues that young people face, and to ensure that young people are supported in that respect.

I reiterate to Mr Beattie the points that I have made to Mr Harvie and Mr Thomson about the importance of the guidance that will be issued on relationships, sexual health and parenthood education, which will largely reflect the conclusions of the analysis that we will undertake.

Early Learning and Childcare

8. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that children receive quality early learning and childcare. (S5O-00739)

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): A high-quality experience for children is key to our approach to early learning and childcare and will remain at the heart of the expansion of entitlement to 1140 hours.

The quality of early learning and childcare is regulated through co-ordinated inspections by the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland. Ultimately, the delivery of a quality ELC experience is driven by a highly skilled and qualified workforce. The Scottish Social Services Council regulates the early learning and childcare workforce by setting standards for practice, conduct, training and education, and supporting professional development.

Graham Simpson: Research by the fair funding for our kids campaign shows that 73 per cent of all free childcare places for three to five-year-olds in Scotland are offered in council-run nurseries. Of those places, 89 per cent are for half days only and local authorities in Scotland are underfunding places in private nurseries by up to £492 per child. When does the Scottish Government anticipate that a full-day nursery place will be available to every child who needs one?

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Cabinet secretary. I am sorry—minister.

Mark McDonald: Thank you for the unexpected promotion, Presiding Officer.

Those points have been raised with me repeatedly in the chamber, and I have met the fair funding for our kids campaign group to discuss those very issues. The Government has a manifesto commitment to deliver 1140 hours of early learning and childcare by 2020, we have recently undertaken a wide-ranging consultation on our blueprint for that, and I will report to Parliament when we have determined the way forward following the consultation responses.

On the point that Mr Simpson raised, there is a clear direction from this Government on flexibility in relation to early learning and childcare. Local authorities have a responsibility properly to consult families in their areas on their requirements for early learning and childcare, and we are determined to ensure that flexibility will form a key part of the expansion, while also ensuring that quality is at the heart of what we take forward, as I said in my initial answer to Mr Simpson.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

Last week the Family and Childcare Trust published a report showing that the cost of childcare rose by 4.5 per cent in Scotland last year, while it has been falling in the rest of the UK. With the added pressure on nurseries of an increase in business rates—there is an average rise of 64 per cent in Edinburgh alone—what assurances can the minister give that inflation-busting increases in the cost of childcare will not continue?

Mark McDonald: I am aware of the research undertaken by the Family and Childcare Trust. However, we have raised with the trust a number of concerns about some of those research findings in the Scottish context—for example, we do not feel that it accurately reflects policy and practice in Scotland, and we are already taking forward all of the actions that the report highlighted and called for.

On business rates, Mr Johnson will be aware that powers now exist for local authorities to undertake business rate reduction schemes to support key sectors in their communities, and additional money for that was allocated as part of the budget agreement that the Government reached with the Green Party. Those allocations enable councils to take forward such schemes, and a number of local authorities are already doing so. That is on top of the national rates relief scheme that Mr Mackay outlined in the chamber.

It would perhaps be appropriate for Mr Johnson to speak to his colleagues in the City of Edinburgh Council, where I know that the Labour Party forms part of the administration, about what proposals they have to take forward localised rates relief schemes such as exist in other local authorities following their budget discussions.

School Uniform Costs (Assistance for Low-income Families)

9. James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that school uniform costs for pupils from low-income families can be met. (S5O-00740)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): All children in Scotland should have equal access to education regardless of their financial circumstances and background.

The Scottish Government provides funding to local authorities to help low-income parents to afford the basic costs associated with school, such as the cost of suitable clothing. That provides support for families impacted by austerity, putting money back into the pockets of the families who need it most and, importantly, ensuring that all children and young people have suitable clothing to enable them to learn and to thrive at school.

The Education (Scotland) Act 2016 allows Scottish ministers to make regulations so that local authorities pay a minimum for school clothing grants. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has indicated a willingness to reach a voluntary arrangement to create a national clothing grant. Discussions are continuing to explore how that can best be achieved.

James Kelly: The Child Poverty Action Group estimates that the basic minimum cost of a school uniform is £129, not including the cost of wear and tear to that uniform throughout the year. Given that the recommended minimum school clothing grant is £70, which is well below the £129 figure, and given the cuts to local government budgets of £170 million, what assurances can the cabinet secretary give to pupils from families with parents who are on low incomes that they will be able to afford adequate school uniform?

John Swinney: I am very sympathetic to Mr Kelly's point, but he will not be surprised to hear that I am not sympathetic to his analysis of local government finance. I had a helpful discussion with the Child Poverty Action Group and a number of parents that it had brought to see me who went through many of the legitimate and well-researched issues that Mr Kelly has raised. I am keen to make progress on this question, because I recognise that school uniforms can be central to creating the ethos of a school and that no child should feel excluded or in any way unable to participate in that fully.

Mr Kelly raises substantial issues and I assure him that we will continue discussions with COSLA in order to make progress.

Education

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-04456, in the name of Iain Gray, on the Scottish Government and education: 10 years of letting down teachers, parents and pupils.

14:42

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Too often, when we debate education in general and schools in particular, we forget the historical context. The truth is that the responsibility of this Parliament and this Government for the education of our children and grandchildren sits at the front of a long and broad historical sweep. It is 500 years since the reformation, which, in Scotland especially, had the revolutionary idea of universal schooling running through it; 145 years since school attendance became compulsory; 50 years since circular 600 comprehensivised our schools and ended the 11-plus; 35 years since standard grades heralded assessment for all; 15 years since the launch of the national debate on education, which led to curriculum for excellence; and 10 years since this Scottish National Party Government assumed responsibility for our schools.

That responsibility began neither when Nicola Sturgeon became First Minister nor when John Swinney became the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills; rather, it spans the introduction of curriculum for excellence in schools and covers a fifth of the history of comprehensive schools in this country. A cohort of pupils have almost completed their whole schooling under the SNP. It is therefore right and reasonable to take this moment to judge the Government's record on education, as it has invited us to do, but to do so over the past decade.

I suppose that, in a way, the Government's amendment tries to do that, too. There is not much in it to disagree with, but the trouble is that it is ridiculously partial. Above all, it fails to mention the repeated evidence of slipping standards in literacy, numeracy and science from the Government's own Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy, its improvement framework data and, most dramatically, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's programme for international student assessment results.

The Scottish Government acknowledges the challenges, but ignores the failures. If we take this week's positive destination figures, which the amendment references, it is welcome that more young people are leaving school for a positive destination, but we cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that children from poorer families are still three

times more likely than their richer counterparts to be not in education, training or work. This week, the SNP put out a press release on the figures, which featured—somewhat inappropriately—the convener of the Education and Skills Committee. I have it here. He welcomes the figures, as we would expect, but he then spends two thirds of his remarks denouncing schools in England. The release is completed with a link to the Scottish figures and six links to information on English schools.

For the whole sweep of the history of our schools, we have aspired not even just to have the best schools in the world—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask Mr Sarwar and Mr Dornan not to have a discussion across the chamber.

Iain Gray: We have aspired to have the best schools that we can imagine. Now, it seems that the Government's benchmark is to be less bad than England. Is that really the level of aspiration that the party of Government sets for what the First Minister called her "sacred responsibility"?

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I hear what the member says, so let us talk about the situation in Scotland. Is he aware that West Dunbartonshire Council sought to cut the school week by half a day? That had to be reversed by the opposition, which called a special meeting. What would that have done for the poorest people? Every school in West Dunbartonshire qualifies for additional funds. What does Mr Gray have to say about the way in which his party treats education in Scotland?

Iain Gray: To tell the truth, when it comes to cutting the school week, what I remember best is the massive public meeting in Renfrewshire when the council there was run by the SNP. I attended to support the parents who were fighting that.

Curriculum for excellence is about setting our sights higher and freeing our teachers to teach, inspire and innovate to the maximum. The education secretary occasionally asks me whether we still support curriculum for excellence. We do, and it is exactly because we support it that it pains us to see the mess that this Government has made of its implementation. The decade of CFE implementation has been a decade of cuts to school budgets. We now have more than 4,000 fewer teachers, more than 1,000 fewer support staff and class sizes that are increasing steadily.

Yesterday, the education secretary said that spending on schools increased last year. It did, but the same figures show that school budgets are still hundreds of millions of pounds lower in real terms than they were in 2007, when the SNP came to power. One swallow doth not a summer make, nor does one year undo a decade of cuts. In any case,

the Government has achieved the remarkable feat of losing thousands of teachers' jobs and creating a teacher shortage at the same time. As the education secretary said earlier, he has increased the number of teacher training places, but universities struggle to fill them.

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): Iain Gray cites teacher shortages. Does he feel that it is sensible for Labour-led Aberdeen City Council to have written out to teachers to offer them voluntary severance or early retirement while complaining of a teacher shortage?

Iain Gray: Every council in the country has laboured under the strain of the £1.5 billion of cuts that local government has suffered in the past few years.

Mr Swinney sometimes likes to accuse us of being to blame for the shortage and of talking teachers down, but I am a teacher to trade and members will not catch me talking teachers down. I know that a fully trained professional teaching force has always been the greatest strength of our schools, and I know that, despite the cuts, our teachers deliver remarkable success and inspire our children every day of the week. We should thank them, but if we keep cutting their number, those thanks are worthless.

We pay teachers less than similar countries do; we provide them with less preparation time, fewer support staff and fewer resources than other countries do; we put them in front of bigger classes than pretty well every other country in the developed world; and then we wonder why we cannot recruit enough of them. Thanking teachers means nothing unless we listen to their concerns.

The Parliament's Education and Skills Committee has done just that. It has listened to teachers, who told it that they had lost confidence in the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Education Scotland and that reductions in additional support staff were making life difficult. However, the education secretary rubbished the committee's work. He said that it was not a proper sample, and then he told the committee that the valid view was what teachers told him when he visited schools. I am reminded of the old chestnut about the Queen thinking that the world permanently smells of fresh paint.

Now we hear that the cabinet secretary has delayed his governance reforms, but, again, he is not listening. The responses to the review tell him that its proposed reforms miss the point. The Educational Institute of Scotland, which represents teachers, said:

"The greatest barrier is and has been the imposition of austerity driven budgets and the underfunding of the Scottish Education system over the past period."

It is not just teachers; a group of parents from Aberdeen said:

"Local council budgets have been reduced year on year for a considerable number of years. Teacher shortages impact the ability to deliver excellence and equity for all".

Dundee City Council, which is run by the SNP, said:

"The real barriers have been imposed on councils over recent years following a series of past and present reductions to the budget."

The Royal Society for Edinburgh summed it up neatly when it said:

"it is not clear how the proposed governance changes will lead to improved educational experiences and outcomes".

Is not the real reason why the Government has delayed its great reforms that the responses are telling it that they are the wrong ones and that what we actually need in our schools is more resources, more teachers and more time?

There is also little or no support for the plans to centralise school budgets. Mr Swinney sometimes asks me whether we support anything that he does. Well, we do: we support the equity fund to close the attainment gap. Why would we not support that? From the moment the attainment fund was introduced, we said that it should be bigger and that it should follow pupils to whichever school they attend. We even argued that entitlement to free school meals is the best proxy for poverty and that funds should go direct to headteachers. The Government clearly agreed, because that is what it has done.

However, we cannot ignore the fact that that £120 million is set against cuts of £170 million to councils' core budgets, nor can we ignore the fact that the devolution of that £120 million of funding is set against the removal of core school budgets from local control and their being set centrally by a formula. In other words, £120 million has been devolved and £4 billion has been centralised. To paraphrase the First Minister, only in the world of the SNP can that be called decentralisation and not centralisation.

There is a primary school in my constituency with more than 1,000 pupils—it is one of the biggest in the country—while others just down the road have fewer than 20. The idea that some algorithm at Victoria Quay will know enough about those schools and the communities that they serve to make a rational decision on their budgets is ridiculous. To remove local control of their budgets does not serve the interests of the parents, the schools or the teachers any more than it serves their interests to cut teacher numbers, reduce support staff and increase class sizes.

Our schools need reform, but we need reforms that take teachers and parents with us. We have tried to maintain an open mind on the education secretary's core reform of national standardised assessments, but he has failed to take teachers with him. That is why the vast majority of councils are saying that they are going to use those assessments on top of what they did before, which will increase workload and testing. It is also why we have seen the league tables that we were promised we would not see—and the defence that the Scottish Government publishes not the league tables but just the numbers, which someone can then put in order, is just ridiculous.

Our schools need reform. The new exams need to be reformed because they are narrowing the curriculum and reducing attainment. Local charging for exam re-marks needs to be reformed—indeed, it should end. The senior phase needs reform backed by a comprehensive career guidance system, and achievement could be universally acknowledged, maybe through a Scottish graduation certificate. Every school should have a counselling service available to it, and a breakfast club, and there should be more collaboration between schools and within and across education authorities.

The SQA certainly needs to be reformed, refocused and resourced; the inspectorate should be independent again; and Education Scotland should serve teachers and not ministers. If it was regionalised, perhaps it could provide the strengthened “middle” that the OECD has suggested that we need. Above all, our schools need more teachers with more support, more time and more resources to do the job that they do so well. That is the core reform, and failure to deliver it is the defining characteristic of the SNP's decade in charge of education.

The cabinet secretary should not delay his reform programme. He should ditch it now and start to invest properly in schools. That is what parents, teachers and SNP councillors tell him, too.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the evidence submitted to the Education and Skills Committee that many teachers have lost confidence in Education Scotland and the SQA; notes Scottish Government figures, which show falling numbers of teachers and support staff; is disappointed in the results of the OECD's PISA worldwide survey, which show a decline in reading, maths and science scores in Scotland in both absolute and relative terms; notes a number of significant responses to the Scottish Government review of the governance of schools, which question its thrust and direction, and believes that its stewardship of education is failing teachers, parents and pupils.

14:56

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Iain Gray said that it is “right and reasonable” to hold the Government to account. That is, of course, correct. The Government is here to be held to account, and I accept that accountability. However, all parties in Parliament need to be consistent.

Iain Gray's criticism of my amendment was that it is “ridiculously partial”. My amendment acknowledges that despite the progress—I will come back to progress—that has been made,

“there remains significant challenges in closing the attainment gap and raising standards for all; further acknowledges the wider challenges that exist within Scottish education, including budget pressures, the wider impacts of poverty on educational opportunity, teacher recruitment, teacher workload and the role of key agencies, such as the SQA and Education Scotland”.

That is a fair assessment of Scottish education. Iain Gray's motion says absolutely nothing good whatsoever about Scottish education. It is a disgraceful motion for him to have lodged, and I utterly refute its characterisation of Scottish education. Mr Gray referred to schools in his constituency. I refuse to believe that if he went into Knox academy, Dunbar grammar school, North Berwick high school, Ross high school or Preston Lodge high school, he would find their character to be as pathetically miserable as the characterisation in his motion.

Iain Gray: I regularly go to all those high schools, and what they tell me is that they ain't got enough teachers and cannot recruit teachers for the vacancies that they have.

John Swinney: What those schools will also tell Mr Gray—[*Interruption.*] Lewis Macdonald is shouting that I should answer the point. I have answered in my amendment the points that are at issue about teacher recruitment, workload and other issues. Mr Gray's miserable motion fails to take account of the fact that we have a record number of advanced higher passes, the second-highest level of achievement in higher passes, and a rising number of positive destinations being achieved by young people as a product of the education system. What is stopping Mr Gray putting some of that on the record to compliment what our teachers and pupils are able to achieve? What is wrong with celebrating what is actually achieved in the schools of Scotland?

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Mr Swinney mentioned teacher training and recruitment. That is precisely the crisis that local authorities across the north of Scotland face. Mr Swinney referred to that in answering Richard Lochhead's question earlier. All that he has done

in the past six years has failed to address that teacher recruitment crisis.

John Swinney: We have introduced 11 new mechanisms to encourage people to join the teaching profession, we increased postgraduate diploma in education intake by 19 per cent last year, and I have increased the intake by 370 teachers this year. For my efforts, Aberdeen City Council wants to offer teachers voluntary redundancy. How is that in any way a sensible step for Aberdeen City Council to take?

The Government has set out in the national improvement framework an agenda for strengthening education based on the foundations that we have. I am the first to accept, as I have accepted in the Government's amendment, that challenges exist. However, there is an opportunity for the political parties in Parliament to work with the Government to progress the agenda and to contribute positively to it. What concerns me about the characterisation of Scottish education that we have heard from Mr Gray today is the unwillingness to acknowledge the strength of the performance that has been achieved.

Iain Gray: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

John Swinney: Hold on a second.

We have had a 30 per cent increase in higher passes since 2007, an increase to 93.3 per cent in positive destinations being achieved by young people leaving education, and nine out of 10 young people from deprived communities are now continuing in education, with the attainment gap among young people from deprived backgrounds who are able to achieve qualifications at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 5 closing from 36.8 percentage points to 20.9 percentage points. Those are achievements in Scottish education. I do not understand why Mr Gray will not celebrate them.

Iain Gray: Mr Swinney must acknowledge that I did celebrate successes in education in my speech. The point that he misses is that the motion is about his and his Government's stewardship of Scottish education, which is succeeding in spite of his failures and not because of his successes. He has yet to tell us about one of his successes.

John Swinney: I will go through them again in case Mr Gray did not hear. Since 2007, when this Government came to office, we have had a 30 per cent increase in the higher pass rate. This Government has seen an increasing, year-on-year delivery of 93.3 per cent—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Just a wee minute. I would like to hear all speeches, please, thank you.

John Swinney: Yes—those achievements have been by the young people of Scotland, but they have done that in an education system over which this Government has been presiding. That is what Mr Gray has to accept as part of the process. On his point about his speech recognising all of the achievements, I ask Mr Gray to go and look at the miserable motion that he lodged, which characterises Scottish education in an unrepresentative fashion that does not take account of the progress that has been made. Mr Gray must take account of that progress.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but the cabinet secretary is in his last minute.

John Swinney: Okay, Presiding Officer.

I will conclude by outlining some of the measures that the Government is taking to address the issues. The Government has made available £120 million of pupil equity funding directly to schools to ensure that they can take into account young people's circumstances in order to boost their educational attainment and possibilities. The Scottish attainment challenge fund puts £50 million directly into nine local authorities in which there are high levels of deprivation, and there is Government support in place to maintain the number of teachers at 51,000 in the schools of Scotland so that they are all able to contribute to the high-quality education of young people. That is what the Government is doing.

I am interested in having a debate about how we could strengthen education, but we have to have that debate from the standpoint of what is being achieved already in education. After a process of reform, it is performing at a high level in respect of achievement of positive destinations, and in respect of higher passes and advanced higher passes. Those are being delivered as a consequence of our efforts. We are determined to ensure that we improve that performance in a way that is consistent with the national improvement framework, and that we work with schools and local authorities to achieve that.

It would help us if the Opposition would engage in constructive debate rather than carp from the sidelines, which is exactly what Mr Gray has done today.

I move amendment S5M-04456.2, to leave out from first "notes" to end and insert:

"congratulates pupils and teachers on their achievements during the period of curriculum reform including, in 2016, the record number of Advanced Higher passes and second highest number of Higher passes ever achieved by young people; notes the most recent statistics, which show a continued increase in the positive

destinations for young people leaving school in 2015-16, including a record figure of 88.7% of young people from deprived communities continuing their education, entering training or getting a job after they leave school; acknowledges that, despite this progress, there remain significant challenges in closing the attainment gap and raising standards for all; further acknowledges the wider challenges that exist within Scottish education, including budget pressures, the wider impacts of poverty on educational opportunity, teacher recruitment, teacher workload and the role of key agencies, such as the SQA and Education Scotland; recognises that Scottish education has always been a collaborative effort involving local government, the Scottish Government, key agencies, professional organisations, teachers, parents, pupils and educationalists, and believes that the recommendations made by the OECD in its 2015 review of Scottish education should form the basis for the way ahead in Scottish education.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Liz Smith. You have seven minutes, please.

14:28

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I will start on what I hope is a constructive note, because I think that some of Mr Gray’s analysis is correct, and that some of the cabinet secretary’s analysis is correct. That exchange between them flags up what I think is a deeper problem, which is not about who is right and who is wrong but about the nature of the evidence by which we make our judgments. That came through very strongly at the meeting of the Education and Skills Committee this morning, but it has also been coming through in many studies that have been done on Scottish education.

One of the base problems that we face, which has been picked up by the OECD and by some of our education experts, is that in order to make a value judgment—which is what we are all looking for; I do not doubt the integrity of every member to do what is best for education—we need to be absolutely clear that the base evidence is relevant and accurate. One of the great sadnesses about CFE was that evidence was not taken at the appropriate time. It is therefore very difficult for us to measure progress—or, in some cases, the lack of progress. That judgment is crucial, so if we are going to do what is right for education—which will bind together some points that Mr Gray made and some points that the cabinet secretary has made—that evidence is also absolutely crucial.

I will go back to evidence to the Education and Skills Committee. The committee has been criticised on the bases that some of the judgments that we have made have not been formulated around a wide enough evidence base, that evidence has been unbalanced, and that, in some cases, the committee has perhaps not given due credibility to some people who have been involved in the debate. I worry about that, because I think that one of the most important things in Parliament

is its committee system and how we scrutinise what is going on. I give credit to the committee’s current convener, who I think has had a very difficult job in trying to marshal the evidence.

The committee had to apply a lot of our value judgments on what teachers were saying to us in formal evidence to committee, in evidence that we heard in private focus groups, and in evidence that we, as members of the Scottish Parliament, collect when we go round the schools. We have had to listen to the teachers in great numbers and to all the associations that represent them, but it does not matter whether it was geography teachers, the Modern Studies Association, computing experts or people in the unions, because much of the other part of the research base was not there, which makes making a judgment difficult.

On assessing where we stand on CFE just now, I say that there are very good things going on in Scottish education—of course there are, and we need to acknowledge that. Incidentally, just before I came into the chamber, I heard about the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland being ranked third in the world for performing arts education institutions. That is a tremendous accolade for Scottish education, and we should all recognise it. *[Applause.]*

However, let us not detract from the motion. Mr Gray is absolutely right to flag up a lot of the great difficulties in education just now. When the PISA results came out, the cabinet secretary had the good grace to acknowledge the extent of the challenge that we face. Let us just deal with the extent of that challenge, because—my goodness!—it is extensive. The PISA scores show us exactly where we have to go to ensure that we are bringing Scottish education up—not just for the lower attainment group but for the higher attainment group, as well. It is not just about closing the attainment gap; it is also about raising the level of the whole of Scottish education. We know from the PISA scores exactly how much we have to do.

We also know that we have problems in teacher recruitment, which were well spelled out by the Labour Party this afternoon. Last week, we learned that we have serious shortages in key subjects including English and maths. That is a serious worry for education.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: Of course.

Neil Findlay: Does Liz Smith agree that closure of the undergraduate primary teaching degree course at the University of Edinburgh will be a further hindrance to recruiting teachers?

Liz Smith: Yes, I agree. There are serious concerns about that closure, so it must be looked at. I know that the cabinet secretary has initiated a new discussion about routes into teaching and how we undertake professional training of new recruits. There are serious questions to be asked about that because—let us be honest—the teacher shortages are very serious, as Richard Lochhead said in committee this morning.

Those are serious concerns for education that we must not shy away from, because if we pretend that the evidence is not accurate or that there is a way to get round it, we will not deal head-on with what curriculum for excellence is supposed to be doing. We all agree—and I record Conservative support for it—with the principles of curriculum for excellence, but the curriculum is currently not being delivered particularly well.

I will finish by coming back to the point that came up throughout our committee meetings in November and December, when the education agencies found it very difficult to give us cast-iron reasons why certain decisions had been taken. For me, that is a worry, because even if I disagree with a decision I want to know why it was taken. If we do not know why decisions were taken, we will never be able to make progress. I say to the cabinet secretary that one of the most important challenges that we face is in ensuring that education agencies make the right decisions, based on accurate evidence—which we all know we are trying to collect.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in her last minute.

Liz Smith: For that reason alone, we must do something positive to ensure that delivery of curriculum for excellence meets the aspirations of all the teachers who do a fantastic job in very difficult circumstances, and that it meets the aspirations of parents and pupils.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I can give everyone a tight six minutes.

15:11

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I will take the opportunity to raise an issue that I have raised several times with the Scottish Government: the situation that is faced by our pupils who have additional support needs and by our vital support staff.

We know, because parents tell us, that the number of pupils who require additional support has more than doubled since 2010 while the number of support staff has gone down. The

Scottish children's services coalition warned that we

"face the prospect of a lost generation"

of children with additional support needs, and just last week, the Association of Heads and Deputies in Scotland made a submission to the Education and Skills Committee in which it warned that teachers do not have sufficient resources to deal with increasing demand. When I and other members raise the issue in Parliament, ministers are always quick to tell us that the large increase in numbers is down to changes in how additional support needs are calculated. Of course, I acknowledge and understand that, but given that we now have better data and a better understanding of pupils' additional support needs, surely we should be seeing an increase and not a decline in the number of additional support needs staff. I have heard ministers argue in Parliament time and again that the large increase in additional support needs is partly due to temporary support needs, but that does not justify the falling number of support staff in our schools year on year.

It is not just the number of support for learning teachers that has reduced since 2010. We also have 4,000 fewer teachers overall, as Iain Gray said, and there are 1,000 fewer support staff since the Scottish National Party Government came to power. That is the record that we are considering in this debate. That means that the overall team that is needed to keep a school running from day to day, from librarians to cleaning staff to teaching assistants, has been much reduced over the past few years. More and more pressure has been piled on to teachers, and the subsequent misguided plans for school governance reform are all the more difficult to implement when the basic resources that our pupils need are being constantly cut back.

Unison's report, "Hard Lessons: A survey of Scotland's school support staff", which was published a month or so ago, after Unison surveyed 900 support staff, sets the issues out clearly. If our teachers are telling us that they do not have the resources that they need in order to cope with additional learning needs, the Government needs to listen to their concerns and use the powers of Parliament to reverse some of the cuts to local authorities, which some members want to deny.

I declare an interest, not just as an elected member of South Lanarkshire Council but as a parent and a person who listens to people. I noted a Twitter comment that came from a parent—I do not know where he lives. He said:

"My son has an autism diagnosis, and arranging necessary support in education and health is a constant battle for us. I know that it is the same for parents across the country."

He does not care about the political colour of the local authority. The point is that resources are missing.

Mark McDonald: Monica Lennon has raised—as she has done before—the allocation of resources to local authorities. For 10 years, we were told by Labour politicians in this chamber and in local authorities that we needed to unfreeze the council tax and to free up local authorities to raise revenue locally. We have done that. Can Monica Lennon tell me what her local authority in South Lanarkshire did and what other Labour-led councils did in relation to the council tax?

Monica Lennon: I am not going to waste time talking about things that are on the public record. I had hoped that Mark McDonald would say something about the parent who texted to tell us about their experience. The council tax has not been frozen, anyway, because council tax bills will rise.

The point is that we are here to discuss—*[Interruption.]* The minister can point his finger all that he likes, but—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please stop, Ms Lennon, and sit down a minute. That is not appropriate, minister.

Monica Lennon: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Let us talk about the attainment gap. Attempts to close the attainment gap—this Government's attainment gap—will continue to be made more difficult if the focus and attention of our classroom teachers is being constantly divided and stretched because of pressure to meet additional support needs without the help that they need to do so.

More resources in our schools to support children's mental health and wellbeing are part of the broader picture around resources. We have a delayed mental health strategy, and I have been asking the Minister for Mental Health—we welcome that post and acknowledge that it is an important one—to work with the cabinet secretary and the education team not to point fingers but to find solutions. I await a reply from the First Minister, although I asked about the matter a few weeks ago.

Every young person with additional support needs deserves the help that will allow them to succeed, and to receive the education to which they are entitled. Behind all the statistics that we all mention are young people who are struggling to get the education that they deserve because of lack of resources, and teachers who are struggling to keep up with demand.

Recently, I heard from a young carer who has a younger brother with significant additional support needs who attends a special school. That young woman told me that because of staffing cuts at the

school and escalation of her brother's needs, he is now sent home from school after lunch every day. That means not only that he is missing out on his full educational entitlement, but that there is increased pressure on the family in terms of their caring responsibilities and the arrangements that they have to make. We must do more to ensure that cases like that cannot continue to be the norm. We cannot shrug our shoulders. Every child in Scotland deserves the chance to fulfil their potential, and it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that our schools and teachers have the resources that they need to do that.

The SNP Government has been in power for 10 years. That is a decade of stewardship of Scotland's education sector that has seen staff numbers fall and pupil outcomes decline. That is not good enough. All the people in Scotland's education sector deserve much better than the failing efforts of the SNP Government.

15:17

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer for the cabinet secretary.

I heard someone's voice when I read the Labour Party's motion. It was not the voices of my registration class, chattering away as we began our school day. It was not the voice of my primary headteacher, Mrs Wood, the sound of which could stop us dead in our tracks. It was not the voices of the young apprentices who I had the fortune to meet on Monday at Diageo in Leven. *[Interruption.]* Now I cannot hear myself for Labour members talking.

No, it was the ominous voice of a character who we might associate with hogmanay—Mr Happy himself. I am not talking about Iain Gray; it was of course the Rev I M Jolly: "Hello. What sort of year have you had? Has it been happy for you? Did something wonderful happen to you?" Well, we had a record number of advanced higher passes, four out of 10 students from Scotland's most deprived areas left school with at least one higher or the equivalent and more than 90 per cent of school leavers are now going on to a positive destination. I would say that it was not too bad.

However, far be it from me to be accused of blind party loyalty when it comes to the challenges that we undoubtedly face in education. As any good teacher would do, I tried to find an area—any area—of today's depressingly predictable Labour motion that I could agree with or at least give an ounce of recognition to.

Labour moves

“That the Parliament notes the evidence submitted to the Education and Skills Committee that many teachers have lost confidence in Education Scotland and the SQA”.

I find it hard to disagree with that part of the motion. Some teachers have lost faith in those organisations—we know that through the committee’s work. I know that from working in our schools. It should therefore be incumbent on every party and every member of the Scottish Parliament to ensure that that trust is restored.

We know that the OECD results are not good enough at the moment—no SNP members have denied that—but the data that the OECD provided has been the catalyst for the Government’s education reforms.

Iain Gray: Ms Gilruth makes the perfectly fair point that we need to rebuild trust in the SQA and Education Scotland. I made at least two suggestions for reorganising Education Scotland to do that. What does she think the Scottish Government should do?

Jenny Gilruth: What do I think the Scottish Government should do? On where we go from here, I will discuss some of the issues that I came up against in the classroom with the organisation of those structures.

It is important to look at the rhetoric and at what Labour-run authorities do on the ground. There is a narrative that necessitates radical reform, so for the motion to leap to the assertion that the Government’s

“stewardship of education is failing teachers, parents and pupils”

is beyond parody.

Monica Lennon: Will the member give way?

Jenny Gilruth: I would like to make progress, thank you.

In the governance review, all authorities were asked:

“What changes to governance arrangements are required to support decisions about children’s learning and school life being taken at school level?”

Here is what Labour-led Fife Council said:

“The review paper states the wish to see more decisions about school life being driven by schools themselves, starting with the presumption that decisions about children’s learning and school life should be taken at school level. However, there is no identification of what decisions about school life are not currently driven by schools. Therefore, it is not possible to identify, at a local level, what changes to governance arrangements are required.”

I declare an interest as a former principal teacher who worked for Fife Council, and I will tell members which decisions about school life are not currently driven by schools in that authority.

First, on resources, procurement practice in Fife’s schools means that staff have to purchase textbooks and jotters from a predetermined provider. It does not matter if a school can source those resources more cheaply elsewhere—it will pay what the authority has agreed to.

I recently met a headteacher who was forced to use her school budget to pay the authority—her employer—£3,000 to have essential painting work carried out. The head knew that she could have the painting work done more cheaply through a local company but, because of procurement practices, she was not allowed to do so. Another headteacher in my constituency told me that she had to use her school budget to pay for her entire school to be linked up to wi-fi whereas, in new schools across Fife, wi-fi is provided free of charge and her counterparts do not have the cost deducted from their school budget.

Last year, my office submitted a freedom of information request to Fife Council that focused on this very issue. We asked for details of all spending on procurement by the council annually since 2012 in each primary and secondary school in Fife. The response stated:

“The information you have requested is subject to an exemption in terms of Section 17 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act”.

The Labour motion

“notes Scottish Government figures, which show falling numbers of teachers and support staff”.

However, across the water in Fife, Labour is proposing to cut 100 front-line teaching posts that are vacant. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry—sit down, please, Ms Gilruth. I know that we are all passionate about the debate, but conversations across the chamber are not helping. Please continue, Ms Gilruth.

Jenny Gilruth: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The EIS has called the proposals “a recipe for disaster” and has asserted that they will increase staff sickness rates and class sizes and pile further pressure on the education service. There is an abject disconnect between the rhetoric from Labour in the chamber and the reality in Labour-led councils.

Talking of teacher numbers, in November 2014, I had a vacancy in my department, but I was not allowed to advertise for a new teacher. Instead, another teacher, who was employed by the authority on a four-day contract elsewhere, was parachuted into my department from another school. That teacher was employed on a permanent contract with the authority.

Fife Council regularly moves individuals around schools according to contractual obligations, with no cognisance whatever taken of pupils in that process. Eventually, a job might be advertised, but that is usually done internally, which does not allow for a wide range of applicants to be sourced nationally and, furthermore, works to protect individuals who are already employed in the council. Is that closing the attainment gap? I think not. When it comes to teacher vacancies, the Labour-led council is resolutely focused on job protectionism.

A narrative of resistance to change runs through Labour-led Fife Council's entire response to the governance review, which absolutely reflects the response that is presented in today's motion. However, the argument that we have aye done it this way no longer stacks up. In Levenmouth and Glenrothes, one child in three lives in poverty. The structure for the delivery of education needs to be questioned, and the OECD results have provided the catalyst for a shake-up of Scottish education. Is it not time that the Labour Party got behind improving pupils' life chances and really put kids before cuts?

15:24

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank Iain Gray for introducing this important debate on education. I put on record my party's thanks to teachers, support staff and everyone else who is involved in the hard work that is carried out daily in our schools. At a time when workloads are increasing, it is imperative to thank them for their continued drive and ambition to ensure that the education of Scottish children is the top priority. However, over the past few months, it has become clear that that has not been the Government's top priority. From falling standards in numeracy and literacy to the fall in teacher numbers, education has taken a back seat.

At meetings of the Education and Skills Committee, it has become evident that Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority have lost the respect of many teachers and parents. From surveys and submissions, the committee has heard from teachers and parents about the steady erosion of trust in those education agencies. An example comes from the treatment of candidates for the SQA exams. I am sure that many of us remember the days of sitting exams—the hours of revision and the trepidation that we felt going into exam halls. Perhaps a few more hours of revision would have reduced my trepidation.

The Scottish Association of Geography Teachers asked its members about the 2016 higher paper, and 54 per cent said that it was poor

and possibly the worst ever—nothing like the specimen or previous papers. That is not the only subject to have been affected. In recent times, the new higher maths and computing exam papers have had errors and been unlike specimen papers. A petition was signed by 20,000 pupils to demand the lowering of the pass mark for the national 5 mathematics exam after it contained completely different content from previous exam papers. We might expect some teenagers to rebel—and not without a cause—but not in their tens of thousands.

The situation is worrying. I am glad that Mr Swinney admitted in November that

“it is intolerable if there are errors ... in exam papers.”—*[Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 2 November 2016; c 19.]*

However, we are still left wondering whether more errors will arise in future exams unless action is taken.

Unfortunately, the issue does not stop with exam errors. The guidance that the SQA has distributed on qualifications is lengthy, unclear and perplexing. The Education and Skills Committee has heard how complicated accessing the guidance is; one example relates to physics, for which 81 pages of guidance are spread across five different documents. That is leaving teachers to drown in a sea of jargon—that is not my word, but that of Dr Janet Brown, the SQA's chief executive. It is not only many teachers but parents who have been overwhelmed with jargon. The National Parent Forum of Scotland criticised communication and said that it could not take part in the survey about the SQA's performance because people did not understand the survey.

The situation has to change. We need clarity in guidance on national qualifications. We need to ensure that teachers and the SQA are singing from the same hymn sheet. We need to make sure that our school pupils face consistent and trusted tests. They will live with their qualifications for years to come, so it is only fair for education agencies to treat them consistently. Our young people should not have to hit a moving target.

Action must be taken to ensure that Education Scotland and the SQA rebuild the trust of teachers and parents. I reflect on the words of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney, who said:

“I readily concede that the world of education is complicated”.—*[Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 21 December 2016; c 4.]*

Let us keep it simple. One thing is absolutely clear: Mr Swinney should note the concerns that have been raised in today's debate and set about fixing the problems to get Scottish education back on track.

15:28

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):

The thrust of my speech relates to my role as the convener of the Education and Skills Committee. However, I would be slacking from my duty as an MSP if I did not comment on the tone of negativity and defeatism that oozes from the Labour motion. I am at a loss to understand how Labour's depressing and negative attitude to Scottish education helps pupils, parents or teachers. How does constant criticism from that Opposition party do anything to encourage teachers in their undoubted challenge of closing the attainment gap?

The day after the best figures for destination outcomes have been announced, we have today been told again by Labour, which is no longer even the main Opposition party, that the chances of our children amounting to anything are slight. Why is it saying that? Because it has nothing left to offer but doom and gloom. It hopes that, if it squeezes any signs of positivity out of politics, people will go back to Labour. Fat chance—has it learned nothing in the past 10 years?

Local government needs to be accountable for its role in the education system. Teacher recruitment is the responsibility of councils, not the Government. If Iain Gray has questions about staff recruitment, perhaps he should speak to his colleagues in local authorities across the country.

Monica Lennon: Why is it that every time we hear about problems in education, they are the fault of local government, but any time anything good happens, it is because of the Scottish Government?

James Dornan: That would be a good point if it was factual. The reality is that we are talking about teacher numbers, and the responsibility for them lies not with the Scottish Government but with local authorities. Members are quick to put the responsibility on the Scottish Government—and it should take responsibility for what is its responsibility—but they have to put the responsibility at the local government level if that is where it lies. In the same way, if Labour ever gets round to it, it should criticise Westminster when responsibility for a problem lies there.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): We know that the SNP Government has cut £1.5 billion from the local government budget, and we know from yesterday's Accounts Commission report that more than 70 per cent of local government services spending goes straight to schools. Will James Dornan take responsibility for his Government's cuts and their consequences?

James Dornan: I would love to take responsibility for the fact that the funding goes

straight to schools, but I will give that credit to John Swinney.

We must recognise that the figures that came out show that local authorities still have huge reserves and that the cuts to local authority budgets were exactly in keeping with the cuts to the Scottish Government budget from Westminster. Westminster is the one level of government that I never hear the Labour Party criticise—why that is the case has always been a mystery to me.

If Labour was serious about supporting education, we would have had a different motion—one that recognised where Scottish education is, acknowledged that we still face numerous challenges and made suggestions about how we face up to those challenges.

I will put my convener's hat on now. *[Laughter.]* Well, my first one was my MSP's hat. It is nice to have two faces for the debate; I have been told that that comes in handy for politicians.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will wait and see about that.

James Dornan: Other members have discussed the review of the agencies. I will discuss the information that the committee has gathered on school education since the recent inquiry concluded.

Before I do that, I thank the thousands of educators up and down Scotland who have committed their time and careers to giving our children, young people and many adults the best start that they can. Educators are more than just teachers. They are often the only constant in the lives of some of our most vulnerable children, and I highly commend anyone who has the courage and good will to enter the field of education.

Parents in Scotland want the best for their children, and it has been my pleasure to meet parents who take an active role, through many different organisations, in moulding our education system. I had the pleasure recently of visiting the joint campus of St Margaret Mary's and St Conval's in Castlemilk, which is having a hugely positive impact on pupils and staff. As is often the case with such things, there was a shaky start, but now everyone can see the benefit of the joint campus, although there are clearly still some issues.

On 12 January, the committee held a chamber debate in which I spoke in detail about the evidence that the committee took from teachers and others and about the issues that arose from it. I refer members to my speech in that debate.

The committee has continued to focus on inclusivity and has made sure that it hears directly from those who have practical experience of

school life, as they are best placed to inform our work. By my calculations, we have through various means taken views from more than 200 teachers since the inquiry began into the SQA, Education Scotland, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland. That excludes social media comments received but includes five more focus groups, a school visit, formal evidence taking and written submissions from teachers on issues such as additional support needs and personal and social education. We also have the results of a survey that was sent to headteachers on subject choices in the curriculum for excellence senior phase. That number of teachers does not include those who contributed views in correspondence that we received, unprompted, from teacher collectives. As the convener, I am delighted with the committee's progress in establishing itself as a conduit for the views of children, young people, parents and front-line staff.

The committee is mindful of the diverse evidence that we hear and the challenge of analysing it to make recommendations to the Government. It is worth noting that a theme that has arisen from a number of the recent focus groups is the continued support for curriculum for excellence.

Beyond that theme, we have heard very different experiences by hearing from so many individuals, as members would expect. Each focus group and each written submission reflects distinct experiences of different teachers in different settings, who are teaching different ages of pupil and different subjects.

The evidence also highlights that, if we really want to know what is going on in education, the committee needs to keep doing what it is doing. We need to keep going out to schools, holding focus groups and gathering more information to further inform our work.

The committee has agreed to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny on the education bill and it will lead on the scrutiny of that bill. To ensure the best scrutiny, it is crucial that our deliberations are informed by all those who have something to say. Although we have heard a number of concerns and comments about how we could improve things in different aspects of education, nowhere have I got the sense of doom that the Labour Party motion has dragged us down to.

I thank all those who have contributed to our work and I encourage them and others who we are yet to hear from to contact us with their perspective on school education. The committee's website has a video on the front page that details all the different ways in which people can get in touch.

I urge all members to accept that, although there is much room for improvement, Scottish education is still something that we should all be very proud of, and we should all make sure that parents, pupils and teachers hear that message loud and clear.

15:35

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I am grateful to the Labour Party for bringing forward this debate. The SNP Government has asked to be judged in this Parliament on its success in education, particularly on closing the attainment gap between the most and least deprived young people. The Scottish Greens focused our Opposition business debate on education and I am glad that the Labour Party has chosen to do the same.

As Liz Smith said, we all agree on the principle of high-quality education for everyone; the issue is how that can be achieved. Although I am glad that the Labour Party has brought the issue to the chamber, I would have liked to see not just the issues, but the solutions in the motion.

I am reassured at least that the Government amendment omits the most controversial aspects of its education policy. It does not mention standardised testing or the deeply unnecessary education governance review. I believe that the Parliament remains completely unconvinced by the focus on governance and structure, when the issues are clearly policy, delivery and resource. Following the concerns that have been raised by teachers, parents and others, the Government should consider whether the review will be a costly and time-consuming effort that addresses a question that is entirely different from the one that is being asked by so many—where are the resources? Where are the staff who used to be there? An as-yet abstract level of regional governance will not resolve that issue.

The other major component of the Government agenda that the Greens do not believe addresses the major issues in education is the introduction of—or the expansion of—standardised assessments. There is simply no evidence to suggest that the assessment of six-year-olds is needed. Teachers need the time and the resources to support their pupils. When they are not overstretched and overworked by the loss of colleagues and resources, teachers know their pupils as individuals and they can support their pupils' individual needs. The standardised assessments approach runs counter to the principles of the curriculum for excellence, and the Greens will continue to oppose its expansion.

It is easy to criticise—I have done plenty of that in meetings of the Education and Skills

Committee, including this morning—but we all have a duty to come forward with solutions. In the unselected Green amendment, we outlined specific proposals to improve education and the lives of our young people, and we ask that the cabinet secretary takes those on board.

I welcome the Scottish Government's movement on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex inclusion in schools, but it is not enough. Nine in ten LGBTI young people have experienced bullying at school based on who they are and many have even been driven to self-harm or to attempt suicide. Despite new guidance in 2014, a culture of intolerance has persisted. The Education and Skills Committee received damning evidence of that in a recent round-table discussion.

We cannot continue to act as if nothing is wrong or expect guidance documents alone to resolve the issue. It would be a welcome first step if the Scottish Government could at least agree today to take on the two proposals for inclusive education from the TIE—time for inclusive education—campaign, which were outlined in the Green amendment. Explicitly recording all incidences of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in schools is vital. We look forward to ensuring that the Scottish Government and our local councils live up to their responsibility to LGBTI young people on that issue.

Proper training for teachers on those issues is also an essential step forward. It would finally undo the legacy of section 28, which we found still looms large over many schools. By ensuring that LGBTI issues are addressed in both initial teacher education and in free-to-access further training, we can take a meaningful step towards inclusive education for all our young people.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Does the member agree that the same training is required for the other protected areas such as disability, race and gender? Does he agree that we should not put one above the other and that all the protected areas should be looked at as a whole?

Ross Greer: I agree that all teachers require training in all issues of protected characteristics and I would take an intersectional approach to all oppressed minority groups. I will cover that later in my speech.

With a majority of MSPs now having signed up to the TIE campaign's pledge, I am optimistic that Parliament will ensure further progress towards genuinely inclusive education. For LGBT young people in particular, that is a pressing issue; they cannot afford for us to wait.

The Government must ensure that all new teachers receive proper training on additional support needs. One in four pupils in Scottish

schools has an additional support need. As the definition has become broader, the training, resources and specialist teachers have not kept pace. Indeed, the number of staff has gone backwards, with one in seven ASN teachers having been cut since 2010.

At last week's Education and Skills Committee round-table on additional support needs, we heard how teachers and pupils are not being adequately supported. That included the damning example of a member of staff being directed to watch "The Big Bang Theory" to better understand Asperger's syndrome. We should not read too much into a specific incident, but that is indicative of the results of budget cuts and the erosion of ASN training. Again, I am sure that the Parliament will hold the Government to account if it fails to ensure that more training, and more accessible training, is available for teachers.

Finally, the Green amendment called for the Scottish Government to poverty proof our schools. The EIS has run a great campaign on the issue by highlighting what schools can do across a range of issues from hunger to homework. With one in five children in Scotland living in poverty, schools must be supported to help their pupils.

I am disappointed that our amendment was not selected, but I ask the closing speakers from all other parties to respond to what the Greens and the EIS are calling for. The Government has at least acknowledged in its amendment the contribution of budget cuts, teacher workload and the exceptionally poor performance of agencies, including the SQA. Labour has laid out the issues that are being faced across the board, although, as I said, the Greens would like to see more solutions coming forward and not just problems being highlighted.

The Greens will continue to propose the solutions that we believe are necessary to provide a high-quality and inclusive education for all Scotland's young people.

15:41

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I recognise the privileged position that Mr Swinney holds as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, which I would contend is the best job in the Government. I was a little sorry that it was not Mr Chips that we got today but Mr Angry.

All of us who understand the power of education and have felt or seen its liberating power and how it supports people to achieve their potential, who have watched a child struggling to learn or an adult celebrating learning for the first time, would relish Mr Swinney's job as a chance to make a real difference to Scotland, despite its challenges.

I know that the Government's strategy for today is to say that the Labour Party is being negative, but saying it does not make it so. It is because of my optimism about Scotland and the potential of education to liberate our young people that I insist that the Scottish Government focuses on what it could do to make a real difference to people's lives. As we all know, it cannot just be about caring for education; it is about effective action that is shaped by an honest understanding of the scale of the problem and an approach that is based on evidence of what has been done and will be done to make a difference to the lives of our young people.

The strategy for today's debate is to delegate blame and there has been manifest whataboutery in the chamber. Members demean themselves if their only job is to delegate blame rather than to look at the challenges confronting education.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Who is to blame for the percentage of pupils achieving highers going up from 42 to 60 per cent since 2007?

Johann Lamont: A well-prepared intervention goes down well, but that makes my point for me. This is not simply about who takes credit and who takes the blame; it is about how we ensure that our education system is fit for purpose.

I do not want to lay at John Swinney's door all the woes of the education system in the past 10 years. As a back bencher long before that, I was willing to take on my own Government and local authority over what they were doing. I only wish that those on the back benches who can give voice to criticisms of local government would occasionally find the voice to take on their own front bench. We know that John Swinney has been doing the job only since last May, but there is no doubt that his decisions as finance minister to cut local government budgets and disproportionately cut college budgets have made his job now a great deal more difficult.

There are massive challenges. I recommend to members the measured and thoughtful report of the Education and Skills Committee, which was unanimously agreed. The report seeks to address the grave anxiety that our education agencies, particularly the SQA and Education Scotland, are creating. It is car-crash television. In an attempt to give people confidence, more questions are thrown up about what is happening in our schools.

For our teaching and other staff, there is an issue about confidence. The report was, in part, shaped by the evidence of teachers—an overwhelming, heartfelt response, giving voice to their frustration at what they were expected to do and their professional frustration at what was happening. Something serious is going on. If this

Parliament is serious about being rooted in the real world, it needs to listen to that.

The cabinet secretary's approach to that report has been the ministerial equivalent of saying, "Nothing to see here; just move on." Sadly, rather than reflecting on what the report says, the cabinet secretary settled for what is easy: faux outrage in this debate, rather than fierce determination to understand what is being said. He throws up a straw man—or, perhaps, on international women's day, a straw person—and says that, of course, the evidence is not a balanced enough sample. However, we know that what the responses said chimed with every bit of evidence that we have heard across the board. It will not do to belittle or impugn the motives of those who raise concerns. What an irony that the side of the chamber that I am on is accused of talking down teaching at the very time that the Government comes after those teachers who dare to raise their voices to say that there are problems.

John Swinney: Will Johann Lamont give way?

Johann Lamont: The truth is that, in response to criticism—

John Swinney: Will Johann Lamont give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is not giving way.

Johann Lamont: In response to criticism, the Scottish Government has not opened up its thinking to what is possible in education.

John Swinney: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Johann Lamont has made a very serious allegation about the behaviour of Government ministers, suggesting that we would somehow go after teachers for what they said in their responses. I want to give Johann Lamont the opportunity to withdraw that allegation or to substantiate it with evidence. It is a very serious allegation about the conduct of ministers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is a point of debate, not a point of order. You have put your comments on the record. Please continue, Ms Lamont.

Johann Lamont: I am happy to withdraw those comments, if that is how they have been interpreted. I made the simple point that we are accused of talking down teaching at the same time as, when teachers raise their voices in this report, it is suggested that their motives are that they have other axes to grind. That is the fact of the matter.

The Scottish Government has not opened up its thinking to what is possible in education policy. It has settled for lines to take. No matter how well the cabinet secretary, the First Minister and the back benchers parrot them, lines are all that they

are. They are things to do, but they do not add up to the serious, thoughtful and focused approach that is required.

What does the Scottish Government need to do? It needs to stop settling for debating points. It needs to understand how threadbare the support for additional support needs is in our schools. It needs to listen to Enable, the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers and others. It needs to recognise the challenges in numeracy and literacy and address the questions around the curriculum for excellence, in particular the needs of national 4 students who, in my view, have been shown a lack of respect as young people. It also needs to understand fully the causes and consequences of barriers to learning.

In the end, the issue is about resources. Local authorities cannot be condemned for making cuts when, over the past period, the Government has consistently targeted local government for those cuts. I hope that Jenny Gilruth recognises the irony in what she said about cuts in Fife.

We need to have a conversation across the chamber about how we can properly invest in education, use those resources effectively and focus on the needs of young people, because education is the means by which they can achieve their potential.

15:49

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Since I was elected to this Parliament, it has become clear to me—I think that this is recognised by everybody—that the early years of life are the most important ones for learning. That is when the foundations of our future are laid and when we begin moving down the path that will take us through childhood and our teenage years and, ultimately, to adulthood.

It is good that the Scottish Government states that it is committed to improving and increasing high-quality and flexible early learning and childcare that is accessible and affordable for all children and families. However, education experts repeatedly stress the importance of maintaining a registered teacher workforce in all pre-school settings, and the added value that those specialists can give to nursery establishments. Indeed, the First Minister made a firm commitment recently to make that a top priority of the Government as it is a way to close the attainment gap, for which the most effective work has to be done in the earliest years. Despite that, the numbers of early learning and childcare teachers are down since 2007. In 2007 there were 1,672, but there has been a 41 per cent decrease; that is a significant decrease in nursery teacher numbers, which affects all our communities.

I urge the Scottish Government to end the birthday discrimination rule, which means that some children end up not getting the full care that they are entitled to; in fact, some are getting as many as 400 fewer hours of childcare. We have debated the matter before. For several years, the Scottish Conservatives have urged the Scottish Government to address that discrimination, and our plea again to the Government is for it to do something now. It is wrong that a child loses out on hundreds of hours of nursery education purely because he or she was born in the wrong month.

The discrimination also has a financial impact on families, who are missing out on hundreds of pounds-worth of free entitlement. That is set to climb further when the free entitlement is increased from 600 to 1,140 hours per year by 2020. That is not a complex thing to sort out, but it should be done with urgency. I urge the cabinet secretary and his colleagues to revisit the issue.

The other issue that affects many children is the lack of flexibility. In 2016, the fair funding for our kids campaign revealed that two thirds of nursery places are for half days only, which means that they are completely unsuitable for working parents. The campaign reported that 65 per cent of all nursery places in Scotland and 89 per cent of all council nursery places for three to five-year-olds were for half days only.

According to new research by the Family and Childcare Trust, childcare prices in Scotland have risen by an inflation busting 4.5 per cent in the past year, and only one in four councils in Scotland is confident that there is enough childcare in its area for every parent who works full time. The gaps are even bigger for parents who do not work regular office hours—shift workers and so on—for whom only one in nine councils said that there was enough care available. Unlike the situation in England, councils in Scotland do not have a duty to make sure that there is enough childcare in the local area. We need to revisit that urgently.

Lots of councils award partnership funding for only a year at a time, so there have been cases in which a child has had to move five times to different nurseries between the ages of three and five, because of a change in funding and a change in relationship. Again, that is distressing for children and parents alike.

Finally, I turn to additional support needs. A report by Enable Scotland, which was published at the end of 2016, revealed that inclusive education is still far from a reality for many young people. That includes not just education, but their friends and peers, what happens outwith the classroom and their opportunity to undertake activities for the whole school day. I welcome the fact that the number of pupils identified with lots of different

conditions has increased, because there has been a change in the definitions.

However, we need to revisit the issue of mainstreaming as against those pupils who go to special schools. Mainstreaming should be for the majority of children, but I fear that we have moved too far away from looking at children who need the extra help that they can get in special schools. Too often in recent years when I have spoken to parents and visited different schools, I have heard horror stories of bullying and a lack of achievement because a child has been moved out of a specialist school and mainstreamed.

We need to start the debate afresh. We must take the principle—it is one that I know the Government agrees with—that we look at every child. However, we must ensure that the funding follows the child, so that they get the proper education that they deserve, and so that the families feel that they are being supported, too.

15:55

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I declare an interest as a board member of the Scottish Schools Education Research Centre.

Rarely have I felt as despondent about a debate as I do today about Labour's motion. I say to the diminished group on my right that if parents, pupils and teachers believed a word of Labour's negativity, I would not be here as the constituency MSP for Motherwell and Wishaw, because I would not be here without their support. The Labour Party strongly needs to reflect on that and on how wrong its representation of Scottish education has been this afternoon.

In February 2015, the Government moved to address falling teachers numbers, because the councils could not maintain the numbers. North Lanarkshire Council, as part of its 2015-16 budget, was planning to cut 126 teaching posts. When the Government stepped in to prevent that, the Labour council leader at the time, Jim McCabe, said:

"the gun being held to our head by the Scottish Government over teacher numbers is unacceptable."

That is the reality of Labour councils when it comes to teacher numbers.

Despite the bleating, North Lanarkshire Council took the Scottish Government money to maintain the teacher numbers, but it was so utterly inept that it could not count the teachers properly and had to hand back £713,000 that could have been used for the education of people in my constituency and elsewhere in North Lanarkshire.

Iain Gray talked about his area, and I will focus on mine. Not only is North Lanarkshire Council unable to count its teachers; it is unable to monitor its contracts. A press report has mentioned an on-

going investigation into a potential £20 million overspend on contracts. Despite that, Labour members come to the chamber today blaming our Government for cuts. They should hang their heads in shame.

Through the pupil equity fund, £2,067,600 is going directly to the headteachers in my area. I will be keen to see how they use that money. Berryhill primary school in Craigneuk is receiving the most funding—£140,400—because it is in one of the most deprived areas in Scotland. It is the only school in the area because, a few years ago, the Labour council closed St Matthew's primary against the will of the local people. It is this Government that is supporting Berryhill primary school.

What else has the Labour council done? A few months ago, it closed Craigneuk library. That is cultural vandalism against one of the poorest areas in our country. I say again that Labour members should hang their heads in shame.

At Mavisbank school, which is a complex additional support needs school, the council is cutting instructors and early learning practitioners, who will be replaced by classroom assistants who cannot give the young people the one-to-one support that they need. Despite that, Labour complains to us about the support for additional needs students.

The Opposition will not talk about the £1.4 million of educational maintenance allowance that the Government allocated last year to North Lanarkshire Council. That money keeps our young people in education—

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Clare Adamson: I am sorry, but I am not taking any interventions.

Neither will the Opposition talk about the £2.8 million of European funding that the council received in last year's budget. Goodness knows where that money will come from after Brexit.

Labour talks about the Government failing our young people. The students of New College Lanarkshire whom I welcomed to the Parliament only a few weeks ago because they had won gold, silver and bronze awards at the WorldSkills challenge were certainly not failed by the Scottish Government. Their achievements covered areas from music and technical make-up artistry to engineering. They will go on to be among the 93 per cent of young people who go on to positive destinations. We should all be welcoming the fact that that is the highest level ever of young people going on to positive destinations.

Is it not good that we now count those figures accurately? When Labour was in charge, it was

happy to give money to schools to tackle the number of children who were not in education, employment or training even though it had no mechanism to follow the progress of those children. When she was this Government's education secretary, Angela Constance implemented information sharing with the colleges to allow that to happen, so we now have accurate figures on what works.

What about the £729 million of private finance initiative costs that North Lanarkshire Council will incur for its PFI schools? Last year, it spent £21.3 million of its budget on financing PFI charges. The schools that are built in our area under this Government will remain in council control at the end of the contracts.

I want to talk about Thornlie primary, which gets pupil equity funding and which recently gave evidence to a parliamentary committee, and St Aidan's high school, another school that gets pupil equity funding, which was a finalist in the *TES* awards only a few years ago. Let us get this right. I will work with anyone who is serious about improving education in Scotland.

16:01

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): It should come as no surprise to the Deputy First Minister that there is only one Scott on the dux board at Anderson high school in Lerwick. He is right—that person is not me, but my sister. Every time I go to Inverness royal academy to see how my son is doing in his highers, I see Mr Gray's name at the top of the dux board. Greatness is vested in many, just not in me.

At this morning's meeting of the Education and Skills Committee, John Swinney accused me of brandishing a paper in a previous debate. I must confess that he got the better of me, so I thought, "What am I going to do today?" Today's edition of *The Herald* gives me another opportunity to brandish a paper, because it includes a league table. There has not been much discussion of that in the debate.

I want to make some serious points that relate to the thoughtful coverage of education in Scotland in today's *Herald*. The league table demonstrates a straightforward fact—that children from poorer backgrounds trail behind kids from well-off families. The attainment gap is wide and shows few signs of closing. In the top 50 Scottish schools that have been identified using Scottish Government data, seven of the top 10 schools have either no pupils or fewer than five pupils from deprived backgrounds. In fairness, most Scottish schools have a much greater social mix, but the tables reflect the fact that deprivation has an extremely significant impact on exam

performance. Schools that serve middle-class areas do better.

So where should we go now? There has been political consensus around curriculum for excellence, but politics has delivered cuts to school budgets over many years. As teachers in Shetland said to me at the weekend, the number of classroom assistant numbers is down, there is less learning support and class sizes have increased. Since 2011, Scotland has implemented a new approach to teaching. At the same time, the money that is available to our schools has been cut. It is important to recognise that, on top of that, the exam system has changed, so it is no wonder that the implementation of CFE has been so challenging.

The results are worrying. They have been well rehearsed, and I will not repeat them. What is to be the response to that? The Deputy First Minister is reading the responses to his review of who does what. He has introduced a direct but as yet limited funding stream to headteachers that is based on the take-up of free school meals but, in effect, that means that the majority of funding for schools still arrives via local government.

I want to suggest that what education needs more than anything is a change in the culture of conformity. Education needs cultural change. Culture, as many people argue, trumps structure. The very core of curriculum for excellence is to open out teaching, to foster an engaged and enhanced profession, to provide a broad landscape for schools and to encourage innovation, yet, more often than not, the opposite is what we find.

If Scotland is to hold on to curriculum for excellence, make it work and deliver success for pupils and young people, we must be honest about what has happened since 2011 and learn from it. Curriculum for excellence was implemented by a Government board that, as James Dornan's committee discovered, took no collective responsibility for what was happening; listened, but did not act on teacher workload pressures; and acquiesced while 20,000 pages of ever-changing guidance flooded the inboxes of every teacher in the country. It is not the curriculum for excellence management board, stuffed as it is with the educational good and great, that has finally begun to limit the endless centrally produced teacher guidance; it is John Swinney who, since last year, has been addressing that point, and I give him credit for that.

The governance review should start at the top, with the Deputy First Minister's own department and agencies. I suggest that he separate school inspection from policy advice to ministers, as that, logically, should be in Mr Swinney's office. Having an overall strategic plan is Mr Swinney's

responsibility—and rightly so. The philosophy behind curriculum of excellence is putting trust in teachers, so let us prove that by trusting teacher judgment and trusting teachers to deliver the very strategic plan that the Government wants to introduce.

Mr Swinney needs to be clear about his national improvement plan, which should deliver results in areas where Scotland faces real attainment challenges. However, it should also recognise that the top 50 schools as set out in today's *Herald* do not need lots more guidance—they are already delivering for pupils. One size does not fit all; indeed, that philosophy has failed across the whole public sector. Education Scotland has not worked, and the SQA cannot be an arm of Government, a regulator of exams and a monopoly service provider at the same time. Change needs to happen, and cultural reform must, above all, be about schools.

Today's *Herald* features the Vale of Leven academy which, although it serves high-deprivation areas and therefore has a real social mix of pupils, has improved with regard to the attainment challenge, with the higher pass rate rising from 67 to 71 per cent in just four years. Many of the reasons for that have been detailed today, and I want to say a big "Well done" to headteacher Paul Darroch and his staff.

Scottish education needs innovation at the school level and an end to conformity. Real school leadership must be supported and good practice shared. Yes, school clusters should be put in place, with primary schools linked to secondary schools, and schools being close to colleges, to business and to work. The northern alliance is leading on that work in the north of the country—and there is more to come in that respect.

Instead of imposing everything from the top, we need to look at giving schools much more flexibility within curriculum for excellence and allowing them to find many more different ways of doing things. In that respect, I am thinking of Jim McColl's technical school in Glasgow, and there could also be a focus on engineering, plumbing and many other areas.

Let me finish with this: the future has to be better. In a world of alternative facts, young people need the skills to sort out truth from lies. We need them to know that ignorance is not bliss; that experts matter and can make the difference; and that tolerance of others is important and valued. A moral compass and an open mind have never been more vital in the world in which we now live.

16:07

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Educators and others who work

in schools and colleges across Scotland will be angry—and rightly so—at the wording of today's Labour motion and Labour members' apparent keenness to use our schools as a tool to attack the SNP with. As the cabinet secretary has acknowledged, there are clearly improvements to be made in our education system, but Labour's constant attacks on teachers and classroom assistants are shameful and its continued failure to recognise the good work that is being done in our schools is having the same demoralising effect on our teachers that its continued attacks on our doctors and nurses are having in the national health service.

Let us look at the facts, which others have already pointed out. The percentage of pupils who have achieved at least one qualification at higher level or equivalent has significantly increased since 2007. At that point, 42 per cent of pupils were achieving that, and the figure now stands at over 60 per cent. I should say to Johann Lamont, who I see has left the chamber, that I resent her earlier accusation in response to my intervention that the question that I asked was planted and that I was somehow unable to come up with my own.

It is clear that, since the SNP took office in 2007, improvements have been made that have had a positive impact on education in Scotland. It is great to see the hard work of our fantastic teachers paying off, and it shows just how talented our youngsters are. The commitment to continually improving standards in our schools and ensuring that our young people have opportunities to go on to work, education or training is reflected in the percentages of our young people who are reaching positive destinations, as others have mentioned.

In North Lanarkshire, the percentage of school leavers in a positive destination rose from below 88 per cent in 2011-12 to over 92 per cent last year. I am confident in saying that schools across North Lanarkshire, including in my Coatbridge and Chryston constituency, are reaping the benefits of the Scottish Government's commitment to education. We can now see excellent progress in aiding our young people to have the best possible chances in life. I am delighted to see that 66 per cent of school leavers in North Lanarkshire now go on to further or higher education and 22 per cent go into employment.

In Coatbridge and Chryston, the statistics are even better. Ninety-one per cent of high school leavers achieve a positive destination. That is something to take pride in as we continue to work to increase the number of young people who achieve positive destinations.

Last week, I had the pleasure of leading a debate on apprenticeships. The SNP's extra investment in and focus on apprenticeships over

the past decade have ensured that our young people are equipped with the necessary skills to allow skill gaps to be met and our industries to flourish and with the skills that they need to be at the forefront of our economy and jobs market. Colleges and universities are not for everyone. That is why it is important to offer opportunities such as apprenticeships to young people, so that they have the skills to take them forward in life.

We should celebrate the fact that Scotland has the second-lowest youth unemployment in the European Union. That demonstrates that we are taking positive steps in the right direction by investing in modern apprenticeships. During the debate last week, I highlighted the need for more black and minority ethnic young people and young women to be offered apprenticeships. That is worth highlighting again, given that today is international women's day and we had an excellent debate about that in the Parliament yesterday.

Improving literacy is a key priority nationally, and it should be a key aim in North Lanarkshire. We know that improving literacy will help to close the attainment gap and improve the life chances of our young people.

I recently had the privilege of attending Coatbridge high school, which is my old high school, for its literacy festival. I accompanied the Deputy First Minister there. That was a two-day event that was organised by the school's literacy group and which allowed every pupil and department in the school to benefit from a wide array of workshops and interactive activities. The festival offered young people the opportunity to experience an exciting range of speakers from across the expressive arts and allowed students to experience the rich diversity of the literacy world in their own school. That festival is innovative and it happens locally to benefit pupils. There was no doom and gloom when I went to that school. Teachers got on with it and wanted to find ways to help pupils to excel.

As the cabinet secretary has said, we recognise that there are challenges—that is obvious—but the SNP is committed to closing the attainment gap. In North Lanarkshire, which is my local authority area, schools will benefit from almost £9 million as part of the Scottish Government's drive to improve standards in schools. Clare Adamson mentioned that. Broken down, that means that 120 primary schools and 23 secondary schools across North Lanarkshire will receive additional support and funding, which will be for the teachers and school leaders to decide how best to utilise to close the poverty-related attainment gap. That means £1.25 million for primary schools and almost half a million pounds for secondary schools in Coatbridge and Chryston. Almost half of the pupils

in two of the secondary schools in my constituency—Coatbridge high school and St Andrew's high school—are at Scottish index of multiple deprivation level 1, so that money will be very welcome.

The funding means that children from the poorest backgrounds will receive additional support to stop them having their chances limited by circumstances that are outside their control. As I have said already, part of my constituency is among the top 10 most deprived areas in the country. I am determined to help to change that. Closing the poverty-related attainment gap is vital, and the £120 million pupil equity fund will play a central role in making that goal achievable. That fund gives assurances to parents, teachers, school leaders and pupils that standards will be driven up and that the intergenerational cycle of deprivation will be tackled.

I see that I am running out of time, Presiding Officer. I had quite a lot more to say about nurture groups and play as ways of helping young people to learn, for instance, but, given that I do not have much time left, I will go straight to my conclusion.

There is a lot to be proud of in our education system, but there is undoubtedly more to be done, and the Government is up for the challenge. I am disappointed by Labour's motion. The generations of people from Coatbridge, Monklands and across the central belt who voted for Labour while I was growing up would be shocked to learn that that is what Labour uses its valuable debate time for as the third party now in the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): You must close, please.

Fulton MacGregor: I urge Labour to start backing our teachers and young people. Instead of constantly seeking to use our teachers and classroom assistants as a tool to criticise the SNP, Labour should start being constructive and should work with the Government.

16:14

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I am pleased to speak in this debate and to support what has been said by Liz Smith and other colleagues. It is a matter of deep regret and alarm that 10 years of SNP Government has seen a decline in education standards in Scotland, as evidenced by the PISA survey, and a sense of drift and malaise that has knocked the confidence of a system that used to be regarded as a world leader. That position is in stark contrast to the significant attainment improvements in education over the past decade that have been seen in other parts of the United Kingdom. We should all, across the Parliament, be concerned about that.

As a Lothian MSP, I am acutely aware of the concerns of so many parents in my constituency about education standards and the reduction in teacher and support staff numbers. At portfolio questions earlier today, I highlighted the decrease in the number of support staff working in secondary schools in Edinburgh by almost a fifth since 2010, one of the greatest falls in Scotland. I am told that that we have the SNP councillors running the City of Edinburgh Council to blame for that, which is something that I will make sure that we do for the council elections in May.

However, other written answers that I have received from the Government indicate that there are many other worrying staff declines across a range of indicators. The number of teachers working in Edinburgh who have additional support needs for learning as their main subject declined from 166 in 2007 to 120 in 2016. Data also shows that the number of additional support needs staff in Edinburgh's primary schools has fallen from 63 in 2007 to just 27 and that the number of such staff in Edinburgh's secondary schools has declined from 70 to 44. Over the same period, West Lothian Council has seen a similar decline in the number of additional support for learning teachers, falling from 92 to 62. The number of centrally employed teachers with additional support needs for learning as their main subject in both Edinburgh and West Lothian has also declined.

Further, as Monica Lennon said earlier, across Scotland as a whole, the number of additional support needs teachers fell from over 3,400 in 2009 to 2,896 in 2016. At the same time, there has been an overall increase of 44 per cent since 2012 in the number of pupils with additional support needs, with one in four Scottish pupils now requiring additional support.

The Scottish Government makes much of its commitment to reducing the attainment gap—something that we would all welcome—but it is difficult to see how that is going to be achieved on the ground if the numbers of school support staff and additional support for learning teachers in our schools continue to be cut back so severely. The support for learning staff play a critical role in supporting pupils who might be struggling at school, and their absence piles the pressure on mainstream teachers. That is something that ministers need to address with Scottish councils.

The inspection regime is also vitally important in assessing how our schools are performing and what improvements and requirements are needed at school level. Again, it is genuinely concerning that the number of school inspections has fallen significantly since 2012 at primary school and preschool level as well as at secondary school level. However, it is specifically the severe fall in

the number of preschool inspections that is important to consider because it is critical that we get early years education right. I believe that ministers need to look objectively at how they will reverse that trend in school inspections.

There is a specific school building issue that is of concern locally to parents in Edinburgh. Liberton high school is one of the last schools in Edinburgh in need of upgrade or replacement. It is a great school that has a strong and effective parent council that wants to see refurbishment and investment to ensure that the building offers the best learning environment for the children and is truly fit for purpose. We need to look at how that matter is taken forward over the next five years of this Parliament. In the spirit of consensus, I hope that the cabinet secretary will agree to meet me, the parent council and the City of Edinburgh Council to look at how we can take forward what is a vital investment for our young people in the south of the city.

This debate is vitally important. Education is fundamental to individual success across Scotland, the success of our society and the success of our economy. The SNP's stewardship of our education system for the past decade has, indeed, let down parents, teachers and pupils. The Government's review of governance is a great opportunity to change things for the better and ministers must not let that opportunity pass. The proposed new education bill can and must deliver for schools to ensure that we empower them and that there is a relentless focus on standards and attainment so that Scotland can regain its place as a world leader in education.

Fulton MacGregor's comments earlier raised an issue for me, which I have also noted in the health debates that I take part in regularly in the chamber. In this debate, an important point that we need to consider across our parties is that our Scottish education system depends not on the SNP but on the teachers and support staff who deliver education day in and day out. It is time that SNP ministers started to understand that.

16:20

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): A few weeks ago, as a member of the Education and Skills Committee, I joined a group of teachers from a range of primary schools, in this place, to discuss the issues that they face, freely and confidentially. In the group there was a mix of new and very experienced teachers, teachers in promoted posts and at least one recently qualified teacher in his probationary year.

What struck me most about the meeting were the absolute dedication and passion that those teachers had for the attainment and welfare of

their pupils. Many of the teachers taught in schools in areas of extreme poverty and deprivation. Over the two hours of our meeting, it became very apparent that that single factor was the main hurdle they faced when working tremendously hard to get our children to achieve and learn.

We had a very wide discussion of the challenges faced in certain schools and the associated expansion of the role of the teacher to include social worker. One teacher told us that, as the deputy head, she is often the person who gets the children out of bed, clothes and feeds them and takes them to school. She is actually up early, chapping doors to get kids up and into school.

The teachers all said that the majority of the issues that children had that impeded their learning and put considerable strain on the teaching staff were things that happened outwith school and that stemmed from their early years. Among a number of the teachers, there was huge support for the 1,140 hours of free childcare as being a good way to target developmental issues at an early stage. Everyone present recognised the value of that in potentially alleviating some of the issues that those children face.

I come from a family of teachers, and the teachers' words reminded me very much of my brother-in-law, who trained as a primary teacher, worked initially in a deprived area of Aberdeen city and later went on to work in a specialised school for children with extreme behavioural issues. He is now deployed back into primaries in the city as a behavioural expert.

When he was a primary teacher, I remember that his school had a real problem with actually getting kids to the gates in the mornings, and many of the kids who did make it were making their own way there. A very high proportion of those children would also have their breakfast at school, as there was no breakfast at home.

One of the teachers started going in early to play football with the kids before school, as an incentive to get more of them to come in. It worked. Those were children who often had no leisure interaction with any family members, and a game of footie before they went into the breakfast club was an incentive—something that they looked forward to and that made the difference between their staying at home and going to school.

After the meeting, I was left in no doubt about three things. The first was that the Scottish Government's increase in childcare provision is a hugely important step in tackling educational and developmental issues stemming from poverty and deprivation. The renewed focus on tackling neglect is also hugely important.

Secondly, I found that giving headteachers the autonomy to spend the extra funding in their schools, through the attainment fund, to target the specific issues that their pupils and teachers face is absolutely the right thing to do—whether that be on ASL, extra classroom assistants or something as fundamental as having a fully funded breakfast club. Schools have differing needs and headteachers know what those needs are.

The third—and possibly the most important—thing was this. Tackling poverty is a fundamental priority of the Scottish Government, and we should all be asking for more welfare powers to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, because tackling poverty is not a priority of the UK Government.

Miles Briggs: Will the member take an intervention?

Gillian Martin: I have actually had my time cut, so I am not going to take any interventions, if the member does not mind. I usually do, so I am sorry.

The UK Government's benefits and sanctions regime keeps people in poverty, drives people into poverty and will perpetuate the circle of poverty. That cannot stand. Children cannot attain when they are hungry and neglected, and schools cannot undo the effect of endemic poverty.

As for teacher numbers, I am lucky to represent part of a local authority area that has a great administration that put together a budget that protected teacher numbers. I give credit where it is due: alongside the SNP co-leader, Richard Thomson, sits the Labour co-leader, Alison Evison. We can work together. When they worked together and put forward their budget, the Tory and Lib Dem Opposition put forward an alternative budget, which would have cut nearly £8 million from the education budget.

Mr Gray would not take an intervention from me, so I will put what I wanted to say to him in my speech. You quoted an awful lot of people in your speech, Mr Gray and I have a quote for you. It comes from one of your party's members, Liz Cameron, the executive member for children, young people and lifelong learning in Glasgow City Council. In the *Evening Times* last night, she was talking about the achievements of Glasgow City Council pupils. She said:

"Over the last 10 years more and more young people are choosing to stay on at school. As a result they leave with more qualifications and skills and on to positive destinations. The increase in our staying on rates for S5/S6 has risen from 45 per cent in 2006 to almost 70 per cent of pupils and it's clearly reaping the benefits for Glasgow's young people."

Who do we give the credit to for that?

Iain Gray: Glasgow City Council.

Gillian Martin: Exactly. Do we give it to Glasgow City Council, or do we start working together?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Martin, you must close.

Gillian Martin: It does not matter who does it, as long as someone does it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let me say at this point that all members should remember to speak through the chair and not to each other.

16:26

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I see it as my job, as an elected member on the Opposition benches, to speak truth, based on the evidence that is before me. If John Swinney thinks that we should be celebrating instead, if Jenny Gilruth thinks that we are being miserable, and if Clare Adamson and Fulton MacGregor think that we are being negative, so be it. I will continue to analyse the evidence that the Scottish Government publishes and I will continue to speak truth to the Government about my constituents' concerns.

According to its own report card, the Scottish Government's funding of education in Dundee is falling and its record on education is not good enough. I stress that that is to measure the SNP by its own standards, its targets, its manifesto commitments and its pledge to the people of Dundee.

Dundee's schools have suffered cuts that are more than the average in Scotland. For example, the SNP made a manifesto commitment to class sizes of 18 for children in primary 1 to 3. Across Scotland, the SNP has managed to get just 12.7 per cent of P1 to P3 pupils into classes of such a size, but in Dundee only 2.6 per cent of children of that age learn in a classroom that has fewer than 18 pupils—that is 122 pupils out of 4,500. Members may call me negative and say that I should be celebrating, but by anyone's estimates that is a broken promise and a huge failure of Government policy.

On school spending, Dundee City Council is ranked 30th out of 32 local authorities. Only two councils in Scotland spend less than Dundee spends on primary school education. With one in four children growing up in poverty in our city, we should expect the converse—that is, that more is spent where it is needed, and Kez Dugdale made the case for doing that. In 2010, Dundee spent more than £5,000 per primary school pupil on education; seven years later, under the SNP Government, every primary school pupil in Dundee has nearly £900 less spent on them—the amount that is spent is £4,151 per Dundee pupil,

which is only £99 more than the lowest spend in Scotland.

In his opening speech, John Swinney said that school spending went up in Scotland last year. I say to Mr Swinney that it went up in some areas but it did not go up in Dundee. Why does the Scottish Government continue to preside over a system that allows the poorest local authorities to cut education spending while more prosperous councils maintain spending? Why will the Government not look to progressive taxation, as the Labour leader outlined?

When we learned a few weeks ago that the number of additional support needs teachers had fallen by 14 per cent in Scotland, it came as no surprise to me to find that cuts to additional support teachers in Dundee schools totalled 28 per cent—double the proportion.

I refute entirely the Government's well-worn argument, over these past few weeks, that additional support teachers are no longer as necessary now that additional support has been mainstreamed into classroom teachers' jobs—it always was and always will be. However, ASN teachers gave additional support to the children who needed it, and that support is now much more difficult to come by, as Monica Lennon told the chamber. I spoke to one ASN teacher who had gone back into classroom teaching because she was being asked to cover classrooms due to teacher shortages in her school so often that she was not able to carry out ASN teaching. She figured that she would be better with a class of her own. The Government has undermined ASN staff and has stripped out their resources.

We have all heard today the shocking figure that, under this Government, 4,000 teachers have been stripped out of Scotland's schools. In Dundee, since 2010, 114 teachers have gone—a drop of 7.5 per cent. The Government's own figures on reading and counting were published just before Christmas. If parents can have any expectation of their children's time at school it is that they should at least be able to read and count. However, we find that less than half of pupils in Dundee are achieving the expected levels of numeracy by primary 7, although the national average is 68 per cent. Only just more than half of them—51 per cent—are achieving the expected levels of writing by primary 7. If Mr Swinney tells me that that is something to celebrate, I will get really angry. The Government cannot disassociate its cuts in spending over so many years and the lower spend per pupil in Dundee from those results.

The attainment gap is writ large over the map of our city. Only 20 to 30 per cent of pupils at Menzieshill's Gowriehill primary school hit their numeracy targets. However, if we take the number

73 bus down to Broughty Ferry, we find that 90 per cent of pupils there hit their numeracy targets, and the Ferry has the only Dundee secondary school that is featured in *The Herald's* list of top 50 state schools by exam results, which was published today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, Ms Marra.

Jenny Marra: I will, Presiding Officer.

What is the SNP's answer to that? It is to close Menzieshill high school and swallow it up into a now-overcrowded bigger school.

The results for Dundee tell a great story about the attainment gap and this Government's priority—and it should be dealing with it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final speaker in the open debate is Joan McAlpine. I can allow you only five minutes, Ms McAlpine.

16:32

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): The Scottish local government financial statistics for 2015-16, which were published last week, bear quoting again because they show that, year on year, councils spent 2.7 per cent more on education in cash terms and 1.9 per cent more in real terms. Labour's assertion is therefore simply not true. There is also a contradiction at the heart of Labour's argument in the debate. Labour members claim that the SNP is responsible for education in all our schools and they blame the Government for the perceived failings that they have outlined. However, at the same time, they ignore the fact that it is councils that are responsible for schools.

Jenny Marra: I remind the member of the remarks of the SNP councillors in Dundee. They said that the real problem in education is not who runs the school budgets; it is the fact that the budgets are being cut.

Joan McAlpine: Maybe the member did not hear what I said at the start of my speech. The budgets are clearly not being cut, as councils are spending more on education.

Daniel Johnson: Will the member give way?

Joan McAlpine: No. I have just taken an intervention and I have only five minutes. Sorry.

Labour members cannot say on the one hand that the SNP is taking power away from councils in education, and on the other hand that councils do not have responsibility for education. That just does not add up.

We have heard a lot of examples of Labour councils failing to maintain teacher numbers. In Dumfries and Galloway, in my region, senior

Labour figures on the council regularly complained that they were not being allowed to cut teacher numbers by Mr Swinney when he was the finance secretary. Unfortunately, they pressed ahead with cutting the number of additional support needs professionals. That was entirely the Labour council's decision. I and others—parents, in particular—spoke up about that, but the council insisted that it was doing it for sound educational reasons. That is another local authority decision that I am not surprised that Labour would like to distance itself from. Interestingly, last November, when the Scottish public was asked by YouGov who should run schools, only 21 per cent said that they felt that it should be councils. That is probably to do with the track record of many Labour local authorities around the country cutting teacher numbers.

Liz Smith, in what I thought was a more constructive speech than those made by many others in her party, said that curriculum for excellence should be assessed. I left it too late to intervene in her speech, but the point that I wanted to raise with her is that the introduction of standardised assessment is surely a way to do that. Another failure at the heart of Labour's argument is that pupils are currently being assessed using a myriad of methods that cannot be compared. Every single party in the Parliament supported curriculum for excellence and, if we want to see how it is working, we need a standardised picture across the country.

It is interesting that Mr Gray and his colleagues have so many negative things to say about league tables, which of course will not happen in Scotland, but are keen to quote from the OECD's PISA league tables. I acknowledge that the cabinet secretary has said that he is paying attention to the PISA slippage and is acting on comprehensive advice from the OECD to tackle some of the issues in education, but it is worth saying that we should not take the PISA tables at face value. Finland, which has been praised by all parties in the Parliament, has slipped in the PISA rankings, and the UK has slipped in some categories. There is a big debate in the United States about its performance, and a similar debate in Australia. It is probably worth taking that into account. Not everybody thinks that the PISA rankings are the only way that we should judge the success of our education system.

I think that the way that we should judge the success of our education system is through outcomes. One outcome that is really important is that Scotland has the second-lowest youth unemployment level in the whole of Europe, which is a reflection of what the Government has done on education. We also have record levels of advanced higher passes and the second-highest level of higher passes on record. Of course, we

also have a record number of apprenticeships, showing that there are opportunities for people of all abilities. That is to do with the hard work of our pupils and teachers, and it is also to do with the Government's policies.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches. We are very tight for time.

16:38

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):

I thank Iain Gray and the Labour Party for bringing the debate to the chamber, although I am sorry to say that it has been thoroughly depressing. Of course, I am in no way talking about the members who contributed; I am talking about the issues, concerns and simple facts of Scottish education today. At one time, Scottish education could have been debated with hope and optimism as a shining beacon—an example to the world. As Scots, we take enormous pride in our great discoveries and innovations, such as James Watt's steam engine, Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, John Logie Baird's television and Alexander Fleming's penicillin. However, where are the future leaders and innovators going to come from when today, as we have heard from members across the chamber, we have an unfolding crisis of confidence in Scotland's education system?

Teachers have lost confidence in the ability of Scotland's education agencies to deliver, and standards in reading, maths and science are falling well behind those in other nations of the United Kingdom and in Estonia and Poland. Conservative members are unequivocal that teachers are not to blame for that and that the blame lies with the SNP Government, which, for 10 years, has been asleep at the wheel and whose politics of lethargy have left us with a school system that quite simply is not working. As my colleague Liz Smith rightly pointed out, the curriculum for excellence has been implemented and delivered poorly. Scotland's schools can ill afford more feet dragging from this lethargic Government.

We need urgent and radical reform—the real reform that Liz Smith set out in her opening speech and which the Scottish Conservatives are absolutely committed to.

In his opening speech, Iain Gray waved an SNP press release that denounced English schools, which is symptomatic of the SNP approach. Whether in health or education, the SNP simply wants to wash its hands of serious issues by talking about England or blaming Brexit. It is a Government that is devoid of leadership and responsibility.

In his opening speech, Mr Swinney attacked the tone of the Labour motion, yet the tone of his speech was defensive and angry. He stated that he “refutes” the motion, but I remind him that the motion opens with the phrase:

“notes the evidence submitted to the Education and Skills Committee”.

I am not surprised that he wishes to refute that, as it chimes with the nothing-to-see-here response that we have had from him to date.

Johann Lamont rightly stated that the committee has received “an overwhelmingly heartfelt response” from teachers—that is what she said, and it is true. Teachers have highlighted where the challenges are; the challenges have been laid bare and should not be refuted.

Monica Lennon rightly articulated the challenges that councils face to ensure proper support for pupils with ASN; she also highlighted the lack of resources, which is a really serious issue. I do not know what voices are in Jenny Gilruth's head, but the voices that I hear are those of teachers and parents who have given overwhelming evidence to the committee. We should all hear their voices loud and clear. Ms Gilruth railed against EU procurement rules; she must be one of those six SNP bashful Brexiteers.

Bill Bowman spoke of the lack of confidence in the SQA and Education Scotland, and the importance of rebuilding the trust and confidence of teachers and parents. James Dornan said that education is the responsibility of councils, not the Scottish Government, and asked why we are not blaming Westminster—if he had mentioned Brexit, he would have had a full house.

Ross Greer mentioned support for TIE, which is very important. I am on record as giving my support to TIE, and I am delighted that a majority in the Parliament support that campaign. As I said to the cabinet secretary at the committee, we need to see urgency from the Government in delivering on that.

Jeremy Balfour highlighted the inherent unfairness in birthday discrimination, which we on the Conservative benches have long opposed. Tavish Scott was absolutely right to raise the serious issue that Scotland's poorest children are nearly three years behind children from affluent backgrounds, which is deeply worrying. We also support the call for a separation between giving ministerial advice and inspecting: Education Scotland cannot be judge and jury.

Miles Briggs spoke about the worrying staffing declines in Edinburgh. Gillian Martin talks about cuts, but I gently remind her that it is the SNP Government that has—shamefully—cut 150,000 part-time college places.

Jenny Marra is correct that the Government may not want to hear about the reality of education on the ground, and that it is our job to highlight that and to challenge the Government even when it wants to stick its fingers in its ears. The Scottish Government tells us that education is its defining mission. From the damning evidence that we have heard in today's debate, if this is how the Scottish Government deals with a defining mission, I dread to think about the areas of Government that do not gather the attention of Government ministers.

The Government's true mission has only ever been, and only ever will be, its transcending belief in independence—independence at all costs, even if the cost is potential and opportunity for the next generation. It is time for the Scottish Government to get back to the day job and to ensure that all Scotland's young people have the opportunity that they deserve to achieve their full potential. When the SNP does not, cannot or will not stand up for education in Scotland, the Scottish Conservatives will.

16:44

John Swinney: Ross Thomson has said that I follow the nothing-to-see-here approach to the debate on education. I do not think that that is in any way a fair characterisation of the approach that I have taken to my office since I became the education secretary last May, as I have come quite openly and honestly to Parliament and confronted the difficulties that we face. The colleague sitting next to him, Liz Smith, acknowledged that when I dealt with the PISA results in December.

In my view, the amendment in my name is a balanced assessment of Scottish education. It acknowledges that, despite the progress that has been made on improving attainment in Scotland, which can be seen in the undeniable statistics on the improvement in performance,

“there remain significant challenges in closing the attainment gap and raising standards for all”.

It also acknowledges

“the wider challenges that exist within Scottish education, including budget pressures, the wider impacts of poverty on educational opportunity”

and the need to look at the work that the EIS has done on poverty proofing and the impact of poverty on school education, which Ross Greer referred to. Tavish Scott made the point that poverty is an undeniably significant factor in education.

In my amendment, I acknowledged the challenges of teacher recruitment and teacher workload. As Tavish Scott recognised, I have done a number of things to tackle teacher workload in

the short period in which I have been education secretary.

It is not a fair characterisation to say that I am taking a nothing-to-see-here approach, because I am engaging directly with the issues and challenges that the teaching professions raise with me the length and breadth of the country in my regular and systemic discussions with them.

Iain Gray: The cabinet secretary listened to teachers on workload and unit assessments for national 5, and at the time, I was happy to welcome that. However, there has been evidence since then that the changes that the SQA made to replace those assessments will create as much, if not more, teacher workload. Does he intend to take further action on that?

John Swinney: I am actively addressing that issue, which is a good illustration of the challenges that I face. The professional associations' desire to remove unit assessments from national 5 has implications for borderline candidates between nat 4 and nat 5. There are very real challenges as a consequence of the professional associations' unanimous wish for national 5 assessments to be removed. I am trying to address that issue as effectively as I can.

Ross Greer asked me to address in my summing-up speech the issues that he raised in his unselected amendment. I have addressed already the issues of poverty and poverty proofing. I acknowledge the importance of addressing additional support for learning needs and of recognising young people's broader needs. We had a helpful discussion about that at the Education and Skills Committee this morning. Specifically, the Government is committed to working with local authorities and schools to have in place the resources and support to ensure that every child gets the support that they require. That is an essential part of the commitment in getting it right for every child. In their discussion with me this morning, committee members acknowledged the importance of ensuring that that support was focused on young people's needs.

Ross Greer raised in his amendment the implications for the LGBTI community in Scotland of two issues. The first is the need to ensure that the personal and social education that is delivered to young people through the health and wellbeing aspect of the curriculum takes full account of LGBTI issues. The second is that we should also address problems with the recording of incidents to ensure that we have a proper record of young people's experience, so that issues can be tackled and addressed. That is important, and we need to equip our teachers, through initial teacher education, with the knowledge of what can be done to address such circumstances. I happily give that response to Ross Greer.

Tavish Scott raised a number of issues about the reform of Scottish education. He made a substantial contribution to the debate with his point, on which I agree with him, that the culture of conformity needs to change and that we need an approach that develops and deploys flexibility in schools to address young people's needs. In essence, that is what the question that is posed at the heart of the governance review is about. The governance review is dispatched with by the Labour motion as something that we should not be doing, but I think that there is a need for us to look at governance issues and I would be interested to hear what other members have to say about that. I am a bit surprised that the Conservatives will potentially support the Labour motion, given that Liz Smith just nodded her head when I said that there is a need to address governance issues. I would like to hear the explanation for that.

Tavish Scott made the very important point that leadership needs to exist in our schools if they are to be able to deliver quality learning and teaching. I am absolutely in agreement with him about that.

It has not been a particularly great debate for Scottish education. In a sense, it was summed up by the comments that were made by my colleague Gillian Martin as she drew her speech to a close. She quoted the convener of Glasgow City Council's education committee, Baillie Liz Cameron, who is a Labour member. Liz Cameron made very positive remarks about improvements in Scottish education over the past 10 years, and Gillian Martin put those comments on the record. However, when Gillian Martin asked who was responsible for that Iain Gray shouted from a sedentary position that it was Glasgow City Council. It cannot be the case that Glasgow City Council is responsible for the great achievements in Scottish education that have been made while the SNP has been in government, and the SNP Government is responsible for all the failures.

That is why my amendment was drafted as it was. It is a balanced assessment that says that there are undeniable improvements and strengths in Scottish education. Nobody can deny that there has been a 30 per cent increase in the number of highers that have been achieved or that the number of advanced higher qualifications is the highest in history. However, there are also challenges, problems and issues that need to be addressed, and I am absolutely determined to address them.

16:51

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

Iain Gray opened the debate by stating that when it comes to education, the Government's track record does not begin in 2016, but exists within a context and a history. He was absolutely right,

because the Government has had a decade in charge of education. It has a track record; when we look at the numbers, that record is clear. In 2007, there were 55,000 teachers and now there are fewer than 51,000, which is a fall of 4,000 teachers. In 2007, there were 21,300 support staff and now there are fewer than 20,200, which is a fall of more than 1,000 staff. In 2007, the average primary class size was 22.8 pupils and now it is up to 23.5. Spending on our schools has gone from £5.1 billion to £4.8 billion. The Sutton Trust report clearly spells out that

"bright but poor pupils ... are substantially behind bright well-off pupils"

with a gap of 31 months—a gap that is growing. Alarming, Scotland's education system was ranked 10th, 11th and 11th in 2006 for science, maths and reading respectively, but their rankings have slipped to 19th, 24th and 23rd respectively, according to the OECD.

The Scottish Government says that education is its top priority and that it wants to be judged on its track record. However, its track record is clear and it is not good. John Swinney might be relatively new to his job, but his Government is not. The reforms that are needed fall at his door because resourcing and investment are the key reasons for the declines.

The way that John Swinney opened the debate for the SNP Government says much about his approach. He railed against the Labour motion and said that it is "miserable", but in so doing he failed to acknowledge the wider problems, the wider evidence or the other opinions and criticisms out there. He pointed to the attainment gap as being the only thing that is a challenge. That is the whole problem. His parliamentary liaison officer, Jenny Gilruth, did a better job of acknowledging some of the issues that are faced. She pointed to the lack of faith and confidence of teachers in the SQA and said that issues from the OECD report need to be addressed. We heard none of that from John Swinney.

As Jenny Marra so eloquently put it, the debate is about truth. We need to face up to truth and to the realities in the education system. Liz Smith put it very well: she said that we need to look at the evidence, which is clear. We cannot simply dismiss the evidence that the Education and Skills Committee has looked at. There have been well over 600 respondents who have said clear and unequivocal things. They might not be representative, but the criticisms that have been made make a case for investigation.

We cannot ignore the OECD PISA study, in which the OECD gave an independent and authoritative analysis that says a great deal. Let us start with some of the positive things that it says. It

clearly states that the quality of our teachers in Scotland is good. Just 8 per cent—much lower than in any other part of the country—said that staff are inadequately qualified, so the problem is not with the staff.

However, when headteachers were surveyed as part of the study, they made their criticisms clear. They said that they are hindered by lack of assistant staff, of teaching staff and of educational materials including textbooks and information technology. A substantial number of headteachers say that teaching is being hindered by lack of resources. That is not us saying that; it is headteachers. When the SNP accuses us of talking education down, and Fulton MacGregor accuses us of attacking teachers and pupils, perhaps they are suggesting that those headteachers attack schools and education when they point out the lack of resources. It is nonsense.

Reform is not new. The Government has presided over a decade of reform in our education system. The education system that we have is one of this Government's making. When we hear evidence that the reforms are not working, that there are issues and that the reforms lack the support and confidence of teaching staff, we have to listen to that. Johann Lamont was absolutely right that the evidence that has been heard by the Education and Skills Committee should be sounding alarm bells loud and clear. That evidence deserves a serious and thoughtful response, which has been completely lacking from the Government so far.

It is a great shame that James Dornan seems to have dialled down the volume when it comes to speaking up about the criticisms and concerns that our evidence made clear. In a previous debate, he did a good job of presenting those criticisms in a balanced way. As he said, they raised credible issues, but he now seems to be far happier to play those criticisms down and to criticise Labour councils.

James Dornan: I do not think that I said anything in my contribution to today's debate that went against what I said in my earlier speech. I was making the point that local authorities have to take responsibility for the things that they are responsible for. I would have said exactly the same thing if that had been appropriate in the earlier debate.

Daniel Johnson: Likewise, the Scottish Government needs to take responsibility for the things that it is responsible for, such as setting the budgets of local authorities up and down the country that run our schools—77 per cent of whose service spend goes straight to schools. If James Dornan wants responsibility to be taken, let

the Government take responsibility for that lack of funding.

We used to speak about breadth as a strength in the education system. It was one of our historical strengths when we compared ourselves to education systems in other parts of the country. However, there is serious evidence that there is no longer breadth and we are experiencing a narrowing in pupils' choices. We heard evidence from one school that the changes that the Scottish Government has brought in have restricted pupil choice and progression. We also see a narrowing in subject choices. The move to six subjects has seen a sharp decline in numbers of pupils taking modern languages, for example; the number of pupils who are sitting and passing key modern languages qualifications has fallen by almost half. That is also reflected in the recent Glasgow Caledonian University survey of secondary 6 pupils, who said that their subject choices had been restricted by timetabling and resource constraints.

Bill Bowman made a useful contribution in highlighting issues with the SQA. He talked about teacher confidence, lack of accuracy in exams, and the sheer volume of guidance. When teachers cannot trust or have confidence in the examination body, we have to ask ourselves just how serious are the issues that face our education system.

I come to the question of resources. Speaker after speaker for the SNP was quick to point to councils and to blame them for the issues that face our schools. Clare Adamson, James Dornan and Joan McAlpine all pointed the finger. Joan McAlpine was happy to point to the figures that the Accounts Commission referred to last year, but she was a bit more reluctant to point out the fact that that same report showed that there has been a £1 billion cut in resource funding to our councils. That is the reality of the situation.

Although the Government might be quick to accuse us of attacking schools and talking down education, what we are calling for is investment in our schools and local authorities, so that they can spend the money that our schools need.

Ross Greer made an important contribution, and he was right to say that we need to look at solutions. It is a great shame that the Green amendment was not accepted for debate today, because it raised some serious issues about additional support needs and the support that we need in our schools. It is a great shame that all the cabinet secretary could do was simply acknowledge those points, because what we really need is action, investment and a reversal of the situation in which we have 1,000 fewer support staff in our schools. We will deliver child-centred education in our schools through investment and

resources. Ross Greer and Monica Lennon were right to point that out.

There has been a failure in leadership in education. When John Swinney came to his current role, he wanted to hit the ground running, but he was running in the wrong direction. There can be no surer sign of that than the fact that he has so quickly slammed on the brakes on his own reforms. He has had two timetables for action, and they have slipped. He has launched a consultation, but has delayed the response. A proposed education bill is delayed, too.

We need to focus on fixing the problems that have been created by John Swinney and his colleagues. The three previous SNP education ministers who sit with Mr Swinney in the Cabinet have botched the reforms to curriculum for excellence and the exam system. However, the person in the Cabinet who is most culpable for the situation that schools find themselves in is John Swinney himself, because he is the one who set the previous 10 SNP Government budgets, and it is those decisions that cut the spending and the numbers of teachers and support staff in our schools.

Parliament should send a clear signal to the Government and should make clear our judgment of its record, because it is a record of failure in leadership, of mismanaged reform and of under-resourced education. It is a record that has failed our children, parents and teachers. As we vote this evening, we should be judging the Government on that record.

Business Motions

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-04485, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 14 March 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Inclusive Tourism, Promoting Accessible Tourism and Changing Lives Through the Visitor Economy

followed by Cross-party Selection Panel Motion: Appointment of the new Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 15 March 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Health and Sport

followed by Committee Debate

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 16 March 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee: Report on The Climate Change Plan - The Third Report on Policies and Proposals 2017-2032

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Farriers (Registration) Bill – UK Legislation

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 21 March 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 22 March 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Communities, Social Security and
Equalities

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 23 March 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-04486, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable at stage 1 for the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 2 June 2017.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-04487, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable at stage 1 for the Contract (Third Party Rights) (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Contract (Third Party Rights) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 2 June 2017.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of six Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motions S5M-04334, S5M-04488, S5M-04489, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments; motion S5M-04490, on the designation of a lead committee; motion S5M-04491, on Justice Committee meetings; and motion S5M-04492, on referral of an SSI.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Older and Disabled Persons (Scotland) Amendment Order 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Act 2008 (Scottish Land Court) Order 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Fiscal Commission (Modification of Functions) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Seat Belts on School Transport (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Justice Committee can meet, if necessary, at 1.00pm on a Thursday, between 9 and 30 March 2017 (inclusive), for the purpose of considering a draft report on its inquiry into the role and purpose of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and that any meeting held under this Rule is concluded before the commencement of a meeting of the Parliament that afternoon.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2017 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-04456.2, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04456, in the name of Iain Gray, on the Scottish Government and education: 10 years of letting down teachers, parents and pupils, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-04456, in the name of Iain Gray, on the Scottish Government and education: 10 years of letting down teachers, parents and pupils, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)

Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the evidence submitted to the Education and Skills Committee that many teachers have lost confidence in Education Scotland and the SQA; notes Scottish Government figures, which show falling numbers of teachers and support staff; is disappointed in the results of the OECD's PISA worldwide survey, which show a decline in reading, maths and science scores in Scotland in both absolute and relative terms; notes a number of significant responses to the Scottish Government review of the governance of schools, which question its thrust and direction, and believes that its stewardship of education is failing teachers, parents and pupils.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on Parliamentary Bureau motions S5M-04334 and S5M-04488 to S5M-04492. As no member has objected to a single question being put, the question is, that motions S5M-04334 and S5M-04488 to S5M-04492, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Older and Disabled Persons (Scotland) Amendment Order 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Act 2008 (Scottish Land Court) Order 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Fiscal Commission (Modification of Functions) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Seat Belts on School Transport (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Justice Committee can meet, if necessary, at 1.00pm on a Thursday, between 9 and 30 March 2017 (inclusive), for the purpose of considering a draft report on its inquiry into the role and purpose of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and that any meeting held under this Rule is concluded before the commencement of a meeting of the Parliament that afternoon.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2017 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.

Marie Curie Great Daffodil Appeal

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-03214, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on Marie Curie's great daffodil appeal. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes Marie Curie's Great Daffodil Appeal, which is now in its 31st year and runs throughout March 2017; understands that Marie Curie provides care and support for over 8,000 people and their families every year in Scotland in their own homes, in 31 local authorities and in Marie Curie hospices in Edinburgh and Glasgow; highlights the vital contribution that volunteers make to provide this care; acknowledges that in 2015-16, 1,863 people across Scotland volunteered for Marie Curie in their community fundraising groups, the Helper service, shops and offices; recognises the dedication and hard work of fundraising volunteers that means the annual Great Daffodil Appeal has so far raised over £80 million pounds since 1986 to enable and support the work of the charity; applauds what it sees as the substantial contribution made by over 80 local Marie Curie fundraising groups to the Great Daffodil Appeal every year to support Marie Curie services across Scotland; further recognises that trained volunteers from the Marie Curie Helper service, currently available in Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Lothian, Grampian and Argyll and Bute, provide one-to-one emotional support, companionship and information for people living with a terminal illness and their families; considers that terminal illness can be a lonely and isolating experience and that the Helper service can help tackle social isolation, loneliness and associated mental health issues; recognises the role of volunteers in Marie Curie's 37 shops in Scotland who it considers provide excellent customer service and are involved in a wide range of activities to support the running of each shop; acknowledges that volunteering or joining a fundraising group can be very rewarding and every volunteer's gift of time and skills helps Marie Curie to make a real difference to the lives of people living with a terminal illness, and their families, as well as raising vital local funds; applauds the work of staff and volunteers across Marie Curie who work toward its vision of a better life for people and their families living with a terminal illness, and notes calls to encourage as many people as possible to support the campaign.

17:08

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): I am delighted to host yet again what has become an annual debate about the fantastic work that Marie Curie carries out. The debate is focused generally on the great daffodil appeal. This is the 31st year of the appeal, and in that time more than £80 million has been raised.

I thank all my colleagues who are here and all those who signed the motion. I do not think that there is anyone in the Parliament who does not recognise, personally and professionally, the importance of the care and support that the Marie Curie organisation gives to more than 8,000

people and their families every year in Scotland in their own homes.

That point is important. The debate that we had a couple of years ago in the middle of the daffodil appeal was about the right of people to choose where they receive their palliative care. That was very much led by Marie Curie and other agencies. I believe that that has led to a much wider discussion of palliative care and to a commitment from the Parliament and the Government to look at proper palliative care strategies.

My colleagues will cover a lot of that, so I will use my time to celebrate the work of the Marie Curie volunteers. Across Scotland, there are more than 1,850 volunteers, as well as 80 groups, the helper service and 37 shops. A lot of volunteers are in the public gallery today, we have a host of beautiful golden daffodils around our Parliament and a couple of guys are here, too. It is okay for me to say that because it is international women's day and we are celebrating women. Indeed, it is a fine day to celebrate Marie Curie's volunteers.

The Marie Curie charity gives much support to those who have a terminal illness and to those who support people who have a terminal illness. People do not realise the range of work that Marie Curie professionals and volunteers are involved in. They deal with issues that affect people who end up in difficult situations in their lives—with the practical, day-to-day matters that must be addressed to give comfort, ease of mind and as much of a sense of wellbeing as can be given at such a difficult time.

I have jotted down a couple of aspects and, as I have said, my colleagues will no doubt cover some of them. Social security is a major issue for those who face having to leave work or taking a drop in income at a time of terminal illness. Marie Curie and other charities have been working hard on that policy area and feeding into our Government's consultation on social security. I strongly believe in the Scottish Government's approach—I think that it has been generally welcomed across the Parliament—that the system that we are responsible for should have dignity, fairness and respect at its heart. A lot of that work has been informed by organisations such as Marie Curie putting forward their views.

I know that my colleague George Adam intends to talk a bit more about social security, because I overheard him talking to someone else about the issue when we were getting a drink of water. I will therefore not labour the topic, because that will be his theme.

Mental health is another issue. A new mental health strategy is in development, and I know that Marie Curie has given evidence and spoken to people about that. I cannot begin to imagine the

absolute strain on a person's mental health and wellbeing from providing protracted palliative care for someone who they love very much. I have experienced an element of that with family over the years, but not to the depth that must come when the person who is affected is a lifelong partner, a child or a parent to whom someone has been very close. I certainly cannot begin to imagine how difficult it must be to be the person who is told that they have a terminal illness.

Marie Curie's promotion of mental health and wellbeing is extremely important for many people. I hope that other members will talk more about that; I certainly want to talk more about the issue with Marie Curie.

Marie Curie helps in those areas and in others, too. I do not have the time to go into its work on health and social care joint integration boards and the information that it has been providing in that regard. Its work on the need for quick assessments and on the right to a fast track to finance to help to make the journey as stress free as possible for people is hugely important.

Marie Curie produces a lot of information. Its stall in Parliament this week includes fascinating books—they are more than just leaflets—about how people can cope and about the practicalities that help people to cope with a terminal illness. That is great work.

The professional staff are great and the helpline is great, but the volunteers do absolutely fantastic work. I do not have time to go into the helper service at any great length. I know that Elaine Jorgensen, who will be one of the speakers at tonight's reception, will tell us about the fantastic work that the service does. At the moment, it does that work only in some areas of Scotland, but I hope that it will be expanded.

The helper service goes way beyond anything that volunteers have previously done. It is on the way to matching the service that is provided by many in a professional capacity. The volunteers concerned choose—I imagine that most do so because of personal experience—to give up their own time to help people. Often they do not know those people; all that they know is that those people need a helping hand. We are very lucky if we can go through life and never need a helping hand.

I again welcome our Marie Curie volunteers—we are delighted to host you in your Parliament. We can talk more at the reception. They should wear their daffodils with pride every year, because they deserve to. [*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I, too, welcome the many people who are in the public gallery. I politely ask them to refrain from applauding; I

understand why they want to, but it is not permitted in the Scottish Parliament.

Eleven members would like to speak in the debate. Because of that, I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 of standing orders to extend the debate by 30 minutes. I invite Ms Fabiani to move the motion.

Linda Fabiani: I have always wanted to do this, Presiding Officer.

I move,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.

Motion agreed to.

17:16

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank Linda Fabiani for securing this important debate.

Marie Curie nurses give people with a terminal illness choice and dignity. To put it simply, Marie Curie is a fantastic charity that makes it possible for people who are faced with a terminal illness to have the choice to die peacefully, in their own homes, surrounded by the people they love. We simply cannot put a price on the work that Marie Curie nurses do, as Linda Fabiani outlined.

Currently in the United Kingdom, there are nearly 2,200 Marie Curie nurses caring for people with terminal illnesses in their own homes. None of us knows whether or when we will need the support of Marie Curie nurses, but we should all be eternally grateful that, if we do, they will be there.

The great daffodil appeal is Marie Curie's biggest annual fundraising campaign. From wearing a daffodil pin to organising large gala dinners or small bake sales, there are countless ways for people to get involved. There are Marie Curie fundraising groups in my constituency in Bishopbriggs, Kirkintilloch, Lenzie and Bearsden that are doing great work, and they are just some of the 85 groups in Scotland that have raised more than £4 million.

The Marie Curie Memorial Foundation was established in 1948, and the first Marie Curie home for cancer patients opened in 1952 in Cupar, Fife. Today, nine hospices across the UK offer round-the-clock care and support in a welcoming environment for the people who stay there and those who come in for day care. Marie Curie is the largest provider of hospice beds outside the national health service. The funds that the great daffodil appeal generates ensure that that role can continue and develop. Marie Curie is also one of the UK's leading funders of palliative care research.

Each year, 11,000 people in Scotland who need palliative care are not accessing it—in other words, one in four of the people who need palliative care are missing out. That is why I welcome the Scottish Government's "Strategic Framework for Action on Palliative and End of Life Care 2016-2021", which sets out the vision that everyone who needs palliative care should have access to it by 2021. The Government has also committed to doubling the number of palliative care services in the community through its recently published "Health and Social Care Delivery Plan".

On international women's day, it seems fitting that we remember the remarkable woman who made all this possible. Marie Curie was born into a poor family in Poland in 1867 as one of five children. She had an insatiable appetite for learning and, through sheer determination, she entered university at the Sorbonne in Paris, where she read physics and mathematics. Her discovery of radium and polonium, for which she and her husband, Pierre Curie, won the Nobel prize for physics, has saved millions of lives throughout the world. She was the first woman to win a Nobel prize, the first person to win one twice and the only person to win one for two different sciences. What a legacy to leave to the world.

With our increasingly ageing population, we must ensure that our terminally ill are treated with respect and dignity and can die peacefully where they choose. I therefore urge everyone to get involved in the great daffodil appeal in any way they can, because every daffodil counts. As the great Marie Curie herself said,

"One never notices what has been done; one can only see what remains to be done."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that speeches must be of four minutes.

17:20

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank and commend Linda Fabiani for lodging the motion and giving all parliamentarians the opportunity not only to highlight Marie Curie's excellent work but to talk about the importance of the great daffodil appeal and the various people it helps.

I also pay tribute to everyone who works or volunteers for Marie Curie. They have helped this campaign, which has been run for 31 years and counting, to raise, as the motion states, more than £80 million since 1986. That is a remarkable achievement and testament to the dedication of those involved in this charity and the vital work that it carries out to support people with terminal illness.

I find it poignant that we are having this debate on international women's day, given that Marie

Curie herself was truly an international woman of great stature. She was indomitable. As Rona Mackay has noted, she was a woman of many firsts: the first to develop her theories; the first woman to become a professor at the University of Paris; and most notably, the first woman to win a Nobel prize. Indeed, she did so twice in her life.

Of course, Marie Curie's legacy has continued through the work of the Marie Curie charity, which was set up in 1948. As the motion notes, Marie Curie provides expert support to around 8,000 people and their families every year in Scotland and operates across all but one local authority. However, around 11,000 people with a terminal condition will not, for a variety of reasons, receive any end-of-life support; one of the main reasons is, as Marie Curie highlights, the planning of social care. As we know, delayed discharge is an ongoing concern in Scotland's hospitals and although I am not seeking to make an overtly political point in such a debate, we must note that it is incredibly distressing for those with a terminal condition not to be supported through their end-of-life journey either in their community or in their own home—if that is their choice—and, indeed, to be prevented from doing so.

As the Marie Curie report "Dying to care: A report into social care at the end of life" acknowledges, communication between the national health service and social care services through health and social care partnerships needs to be better in this new world of integration. In my Highlands and Islands region, Marie Curie carries out work that is vital in supporting the NHS and, importantly, allowing its recipients to remain at home while receiving care. At this point, I particularly welcome representatives from fundraising groups from Orkney, Moray, Thurso and the Isle of Bute, who are in the gallery today, and the many nursing staff from my region, some of whom are also here.

In the Highlands and Islands, around 8,800 people die each year from a terminal condition; moreover, 6,500 have a palliative care need, and it is deeply worrying that around a quarter of Scots with such a need will not receive access to that care. As a party, we are supportive of the general aims of the strategic framework that has already been mentioned, but although such measures should be achievable in urban Scotland, the greater challenge will be achieving them in rural and remote Scotland, where, as we know, specialist care services are limited and often difficult to access.

I also commend the helper service, which, thanks to £320,000 from the Big Lottery Fund and investment from Marie Curie, was launched in the Highlands and Islands last year and covers Argyll and Bute. The new helper service manager, Alison

Craig from Argyll and Bute, is here today, too, and I take this chance to wish her luck in her new job. The service is a vital lifeline for many people, providing companionship and emotional support as well as practical help for those struggling to get by with their respective conditions.

Finally, very few charity campaigns have such a high profile or such a recognisable public image as the great daffodil appeal. Rather like world AIDS day, with its red ribbon, the yellow daffodil is a powerful emblem of what is a fantastic, long-running campaign, and I am sure that we all wish it every luck in the future.

17:24

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): As Linda Fabiani has pointed out, this is one of the many debates that we have every year in Parliament. It is one that I always look forward to and enjoy taking part in for a number of reasons, and I thank Linda Fabiani for bringing it to the chamber again.

One reason is that I feel a personal closeness to the charity. That is because of the fundraisers, such as the people from my Paisley constituency who are here tonight. They do a power of work in fundraising and have raised over £100,000 for Marie Curie over five years. This is always a big day for them, of course, as members would be able to tell by looking at their social media feeds today—there is nothing wrong with having a wee bottle of prosecco on a journey over to Edinburgh; that is a case of team Paisley on tour.

The fundraisers deserve the day out because of all the work and the fundraising that they have done for Marie Curie. This is one of the days on which they get the opportunity to have a day out. Jayne Cumming, Julie McGuire and Lynn Wilson are attending the debate. They make Marie Curie very real for me. I think that, if a person is going to work for a group or with an organisation, they have to feel part of it. Those people make Marie Curie very real because of their personal stories and their hard work.

Over the past three years, I have walked in fire. I know that many think that I can walk on water, but this was fire. Last year, we managed to raise £20,000 at the event that was based at the Paisley 2021 stadium—I was going to say St Mirren park—and we had a very good night. That is always a great event, because there are always many positive people at it. Some of them are probably brought together by something negative that has happened in their life. People get a lot of strength and support from that.

I have another, very personal reason for feeling a closeness to the charity. I am going to talk about palliative care. My mother had cancer, and she ended up in the Accord hospice in Paisley. When

we were going through the process, the hospital said to me that she had missed a window of opportunity to go and get palliative care and that she might end up dying in the hospital. My answer was not, “Do you know who I am? I’m going to make sure she goes to the hospice.” It was, “I’m going to physically pick my mother up and take her to the Accord hospice if I have to carry her all the way myself.”

We talk about individuals’ very personal stories. Marie Curie tells us that, every year in Scotland, 11,000 people who need palliative care are not getting access to it. It is good news that the Scottish Government’s strategic framework on palliative and end-of-life care promises that everyone who needs palliative care will get access to it by 2021, because we have to ensure that we look after those people. It is a very difficult and extremely emotional time in a person’s life, and not getting access to such care is the last thing they need. I saw the difference that it made to my mother to have her last hours and days in a hospice. I will try not to greet halfway through this debate.

As a member of the Social Security Committee, I am interested in what Marie Curie and other charities have to say about personal independence payments and Department for Work and Pensions assessments. The process is too long for people who have a terminal illness. We constantly hear stories about people who have died before they have been assessed. I am glad that that benefit is one of the 15 per cent of benefits that will come to the Scottish Government. I know that the Minister for Social Security is already on record as saying that the Government will address that matter and ensure that it is dealt with. When a person is at such a stage with a family and they need time to ensure that everything is okay, the last thing that they want to worry about is going through that uncaring process.

I want everybody to have a great night. The volunteers deserve that. This is their night, and they can have as much prosecco as they want to. They deserve that for the work that they have done. I hope that everyone enjoys themselves, but I will not be able to spend any time with the volunteers tonight, unfortunately, as I have other constituency business. I wish them all the very best for the future.

17:28

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to the register of members’ interests, which states that I was employed by Parkinson’s UK when I was elected to Parliament, although that employment has ceased.

I echo the comments of other members in thanking Linda Fabiani, who is, I know, a long-standing supporter of Marie Curie, for securing the debate. As she and others have commented, Marie Curie's fantastic work makes a difference in all our communities at a deeply difficult and emotional time for families. In my South Scotland region, around 1,000 people are supported by that work—for example, by the compassionate care that many receive from the dozens of wonderful Marie Curie nurses in the region.

Much of that work is possible only because of the annual great daffodil appeal, which has been raising both funds and awareness for over 30 years. However, it is also because of a group of people that Linda Fabiani rightly paid particular tribute to: the army of volunteers who support Marie Curie, whether through fundraising or helping in one of the Marie Curie shops or with the more recently established Marie Curie helper service.

Prior to being elected to Parliament, I had the privilege of working for Parkinson's UK in supporting and co-ordinating the volunteers, and I saw at first hand the difference that they made to people living with Parkinson's. It is the same with Marie Curie's helper service volunteers, including the 20 in Dumfries and Galloway, some of whom are in the public gallery this evening—I will refrain from speculating whether they had prosecco on the train on the way here. However, whether it is providing a friendly ear for someone living with a terminal illness or allowing families and carers to take a few hours' break while the volunteer provides care, the work of those helper service volunteers and, indeed, all Marie Curie's volunteers is simply invaluable. I am sure that I speak on behalf of the whole chamber in simply saying thank you to those volunteers.

As well as paying tribute to the work of Marie Curie, particularly its volunteers, the debate is a chance to discuss issues to do with end-of-life and palliative care. It is over a year since the Health and Sport Committee published its thorough and far-reaching report "We need to talk about palliative care", which was followed by the publication of the Scottish Government's "Strategic Framework for Action on Palliative and End of Life Care", with its vision of everyone in Scotland who needs such care having access to it by 2021. There will not be a member in the chamber who does not share that vision, but we all know that more still needs to be done over the next five years to turn it into a reality.

I had the privilege of holding my first members' business debate in the chamber recently on Marie Curie's excellent report "Enough for everyone: Challenging inequities in palliative care", which highlighted that one in four people who die in

Scotland misses out on vital palliative care. As Rona Mackay, Donald Cameron and George Adam said, that amounts to 11,000 people a year in Scotland. Although this is not an exhaustive list, the report also showed that those aged over 85, those from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, those who live alone and those who live in areas of deprivation were those least likely to receive palliative care. If we are to meet the 2021 vision, we need to break down the barriers to care for those groups. The report highlighted a number of recommendations and common themes that can help us to do just that, so I will focus on them in my final minute or so.

First, there is a need for more research and data. I am proud of the fact that the University of Glasgow's end-of-life studies group is based at the Crichton campus in my home town of Dumfries. The group was founded in 2014 by the eminent sociologist, Professor David Clark, who many members will know as the author of the Health and Sport Committee's report on palliative care. The group has done far-reaching research work, but a lot more needs to be done to tackle the gap in research and data on palliative care, in contrast with the position for other health issues, not least the lack of an evidence base for the Government to show progress towards the 2021 vision.

There is also a need to improve the indicators that are used by health and social care partnerships to ensure that we fully measure the inequities in care that I mentioned earlier. Although it was encouraging to read of the Government's commitment in the recently published health and social care delivery plan to double palliative and end-of-life provision in the community, I hope that the minister will be able to say something in her summing up about how that will be achieved.

Finally, talking about palliative care and dying does not come naturally to many, despite the inevitability of death, so I hope that the minister will also say more this evening about how the Government intends to deliver the commitment in the framework to support greater public discussion on death, dying and care at the end of life. As Professor David Clark rightfully concluded—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you must close.

Colin Smyth: I have a final comment, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It must be a final final comment.

Colin Smyth: Professor Clark rightly said that our palliative care in the UK and Scotland is "world class", but we need to ensure that that world-class care is there for everyone who needs it.

17:33

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Marie Curie undertakes highly important work in my constituency and across Scotland, offering expert care, guidance and support to those living with a terminal illness to help them get the most from the time they have left. There is no doubt that Marie Curie's staff do a tremendous job, and I thank my friend Linda Fabiani for bringing the debate to the chamber so that we can acknowledge that.

Carrying out that work has a substantial cost, though, so I will use my speech to acknowledge the very considerable fundraising efforts made by Angus South residents to aid the Marie Curie cause. The local Marie Curie group in Carnoustie alone has raised £25,000 for the charity over the past two years, which has seen mountains climbed, cans shaken, tablet and cakes made, miles run and people abseiling off the University of Dundee's Tower building, all in order to help this fantastic cause.

Linda Fabiani: Did you do that?

Graeme Dey: I do not think so.

Additionally, four doctors and two receptionists from Carnoustie Medical Group's Parkview primary care centre raised £3,026 for Marie Curie last May by running distances of 5km and 10km at Monikie country park.

On the other side of my constituency, in the Sidlaws, we find someone else who has certainly gone the distance, and more, for Marie Curie. Last year, Judith Strachan, along with some friends, undertook a sponsored trek in Peru, through the harsh and diverse Andean mountains, to reach the 15th century Inca citadel of Machu Picchu. All told, the four ladies involved raised £16,000—enough to provide 800 hours' worth of free high-quality care.

Even that effort has been surpassed by Petra McMillan, who is a Marie Curie patron for Dundee and Angus and who was a constituent of mine until very recently. All told, since 2009, Petra, her family and friends, and others in the DD postcode, via the Carnoustie and Dundee fundraising groups, have raised a quarter of a million pounds for Marie Curie. Petra began her fundraising efforts after her mum, who had received care from Marie Curie nurses, passed away. In the latest challenge, Petra and her husband completed a gruelling cycle of 250 miles from Nicaragua to Costa Rica. She has also climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and cycled from Vietnam to Cambodia in aid of Marie Curie. Add to that the efforts that she has undertaken in Scotland, including climbing Ben Nevis, walking the west Highland way and running a marathon and a handful of half marathons for the charity, and we can see the commitment that she has to the cause.

The only Marie Curie shop in the north-east of Scotland is located in my constituency, in Arbroath. Although people may bemoan the presence and number of charity shops on our high streets, it should be acknowledged that any money that is raised for Marie Curie stays within a 25-mile radius of where it originates. That resonates with people when it comes to donating to or supporting the charity. Across Tayside, 263 patients were seen in over 2,153 visits during 2015-16. That is 2,153 sessions involving nurses working day and night in people's homes, providing hands-on care and vital emotional support.

However, I was even more struck by another couple of statistics that have been revealed by Marie Curie, which are that 2,500 parents die every year in Scotland, leaving 4,100 bereaved children, and there are currently 24,000 bereaved children in our country. Learning about the terminal diagnosis of a dear loved one, witnessing the progressive nature of an illness and treatment, and then grieving are hard enough for adults to cope with, let alone children and young people. According to Marie Curie, many of those children and young people are missing out on post-bereavement support. If that is the case on any kind of scale, it needs to be addressed. Marie Curie called for the introduction of a national co-ordinator for childhood bereavement services to review and advise on steps to improve such services, and the Scottish Government committed to that in its programme for government for 2016-17. I very much welcome that and, as Marie Curie does, look forward not only to the appointment of the co-ordinator later this year but to seeing what action is taken thereafter.

To conclude, let me reiterate my thanks to Linda Fabiani for bringing the debate to the chamber, to Marie Curie for the work it does and to the fundraisers—not just in Angus South but across Scotland—whose efforts make all this possible.

17:38

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, thank and congratulate Linda Fabiani—not just for bringing this now annual debate to the chamber, but for managing to have it coincide with international women's day and securing a hat trick by moving her first motion to extend a debate.

I spoke in a debate on this subject in 2015. Since then, Marie Curie has clearly gone from strength to strength. Every colleague who has spoken has mentioned the phenomenal fundraising effort since 1986. However, what is important about that £80 million is what it enables the staff to do. Linda Fabiani very helpfully reminded us of some of the work that is done in the area of mental health, which is perhaps an overlooked aspect of this debate.

I want to join others, too, in putting on the record my thanks to the staff and volunteers for all that they do—nationally, regionally and locally—for the terminally ill and for their families. I have a personal experience of that in the death of my father-in-law six years ago. The support that we got from Marie Curie was phenomenal. He was a cancer patient, but Marie Curie's work goes well beyond treatment and care for cancer patients.

I note the work that Marie Curie is developing as regards the helper service. While that is a little constrained at the moment, I look forward to seeing it rolled out more widely, including, perhaps ultimately, to my Orkney constituency. In keeping with others, I will maybe concentrate some of my remarks on what is happening locally in the islands.

The service is relatively new in Orkney, and I am pleased that its coverage has been expanded since I spoke in last year's debate. It has been built up from a pilot project that Dr Andy Trevett and his colleagues started in the Stromness and Dounby practices. Patient numbers are still relatively small, but the impact has been significant and the feedback from patients and families continues to be hugely positive.

Support from the wider community for the effort bears testimony to that. Linda Lennie, who has taken over as local chair of the volunteer group in Orkney, sent me an email earlier this week, in which she said:

"there is a growing awareness of the work the 4 nurses do and this is having a knock on effect with the donations we are receiving. The generosity of spirit of the Orcadian public never ceases to amaze me".

I am delighted that Linda and local secretary Sarah Duncan are in the gallery—they can probably claim to have travelled further than most people to be here this evening. As someone who sat in Kirkwall airport for going on for six hours this morning, I also congratulate Linda and Sarah on having the foresight to come down yesterday rather than this morning, as was initially planned. For the record, I point out that no prosecco is available on Loganair flights. [*Laughter.*]

Discussions are going on with NHS Orkney about rolling out the programme more widely. I encourage the parties to reach a conclusion as quickly as possible. More can be done. As Marie Curie points out, one in four of the people who need palliative care is currently missing out. I suspect that the figure in Orkney is slightly higher, because of the relative newness of the service.

Such a figure runs counter to the Scottish Government's palliative care strategy, which I very much welcome, and it is out of step with what I think is our collective commitment to care being delivered in communities far more routinely. There

is a lot more work to be done as we celebrate the work that Marie Curie does.

I again thank all the staff and volunteers for the remarkable work that they do, not just in Orkney but throughout the country, to give people the dignity in death that they deserve. I very much look forward to raising a glass of prosecco—it might even be George Adam's glass of prosecco—to the entire volunteer group later this evening.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I hope that there is a big enough supply, even if they are mean on the Loganair flights.

17:42

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing this evening's debate, in which I am pleased to take part. I am a new MSP, and I do not think that I have seen so many people in the public gallery for a members' business debate. It is fantastic to see, and people are very much welcome to this, their Scottish Parliament.

I join Linda Fabiani in encouraging people across Scotland to support the great daffodil appeal and in paying warm tribute to everyone who is involved with Marie Curie and its work to provide world-class palliative care services.

As a Lothian MSP, I am very much aware of the importance of Marie Curie's services to many of my constituents. My family has used a hospice, so I understand the value of the service to families and their loved ones at some of the most difficult times.

I visited Marie Curie's Edinburgh hospice at Fairmilehead a few months ago and saw at first hand the good work that is undertaken there and the dedication of the local Marie Curie nurses, other hospice staff and the volunteers, 114 of whom support the work of the hospice.

The Edinburgh hospice serves south Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian and had 425 admissions in 2015-16. The difference that the service makes to people living with a terminal illness as they near the end of their life, and the love and support that Marie Curie shows their families, cannot be overstated. It means that 95 per cent of patients who are supported by Marie Curie in Lothian are able to die in the place of their choosing. The hospice also provides an excellent day service for patients who are not admitted.

Marie Curie's work in my region is not restricted to the hospice but takes place in the community and in patients' homes. In 2015-16, 325 patients were cared for in the community in West Lothian and 564 were cared for in south Edinburgh and Midlothian. During that year, 3,653 community team patient visits were made locally, and more

than 400 people benefited from Marie Curie's patient and family support team bereavement support sessions.

Like other members, I highlight Marie Curie's helper service, which I became aware of only recently. It provides people with a link to someone to whom they can chat over a coffee, or who can help them to run an errand or simply be there when they need someone to talk to—we should not underestimate the importance of that.

As Linda Fabiani said, although a lot of work is going on it remains a real concern that one in four Scots is still missing out on the palliative care that they need. There are particular challenges around how we ensure that people aged over 85, those who live alone and those from the black and minority ethnic communities in Scotland are given access to palliative care as well. As Marie Curie has said, we have to see clear progress, and evidence to show the number of people who are not accessing palliative care is required if we are to work to reduce that number.

As my party's spokesman on mental health, I think that it is important to highlight the lack of research in Scotland and across the UK into whether people with severe mental health issues who require palliative care are receiving the support that they need. We still have a lot of work to do on that.

As the Presiding Officer will perhaps acknowledge, I recently undertook a fundraising exercise for the Children's Hospice Association Scotland in which I had my legs waxed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I enjoyed that.

Miles Briggs: I did not know that you took particular delight in your involvement in that, Presiding Officer.

However, one of my constituents undertook a far more important exercise. Luke Robertson, who is in the public gallery this evening, raised over £75,000 for Marie Curie through an expedition that he undertook last year when he became the youngest Brit—in fact, the first Scot—to complete an unassisted and unsupported expedition to the South Pole. He spent a gruelling 39 days skiing across 730 miles of ice and snow in Antarctica. My leg waxing was nothing compared to that.

I welcome the debate and hope that the Marie Curie daffodil appeal in 2017 goes on to break records for the amount that is raised. On behalf of the people whom I represent in the Lothian region who have used the service or whose loved ones have used it, I say a huge thank you to those at Marie Curie for the service and support that they provide and I wish them the very best for the future.

17:46

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I begin, as other members have done, by sincerely congratulating my friend and colleague Linda Fabiani on securing this debate on such an important subject as the Marie Curie daffodil appeal. I do not know whether Linda knows this, but her motion is one of the longest motions that has ever been lodged in the Parliament. It is 351 words long—all of them well crafted—and tells the story of Marie Curie well. I have just realised that that made me sound a bit like Stewart Stevenson, and I am getting a bit worried. [*Laughter.*]

Linda Fabiani told her story and I would like to tell a story of my own about meeting some of the staff and volunteers of Marie Curie in my constituency office in Stirling recently. James, Jennifer, Elizabeth and Joyce came to speak to me about the fabulous and vital work that they are doing across Stirling, the Forth valley and, indeed, the whole of Scotland. The discussion was set up by Susan Lowes, who does a wonderful job for the organisation, and the group told me about the care that is available to residents in the Stirling area who are living with a terminal illness and the support that is available to their families.

As we know, Marie Curie provides care and support for people with a range of terminal illnesses including dementia, heart failure, cancer, motor neurone disease and frailty. Increasingly, it is providing care and support for people with multiple health conditions. I heard about how local Marie Curie nurses work night and day, providing hands-on care and emotional support and enabling patients to be cared for and to die at home when that is their choice and it is appropriate for them to do so. Everyone knows that the death of a loved one is extremely difficult, particularly when they have been suffering from a terminal illness over a long period of time. The nurses at Marie Curie do absolutely everything that they can to make the last few weeks, days and hours as comfortable as is humanly possible not just for the patient but for their family and friends. In 2015-16 across NHS Forth Valley, 200 people were supported with 1,424 nursing visits.

When I met the representatives from Marie Curie a few weeks ago, just as the group was leaving, one of my staff members came in to speak to them and I discovered that one of them was a nurse who had looked after the mother of my team member in the days before she passed away—in fact, she had been there the night before she died. It was a very emotional moment for everyone in my office. It was the first time that the two had met each other since the home visit had been made by the nurse. I do not imagine that it was a one-off experience, though, as Marie Curie nurses are welcomed into people's homes at

some of the most difficult times in people's lives. However, they enter with respect for the patient and family, providing care, kindness and much-needed support to all. In those few moments, which I will never forget, I saw just how much it meant to my staff member and the nurse.

Of course, in order to continue, the charity is dependent on the generous donations that it receives from fundraising. As others have said, Marie Curie is supported by over 85 local community fundraising groups in Scotland that help to raise about £4 million each year, enabling the charity to provide many of its caring services. I put on record my full support for the charity's fundraising group in Stirling, which works hard to ensure that Marie Curie can continue caring for people in the local area. I know that that small group in Stirling alone has raised £27,000, which is remarkable.

Later this year, my office staff and I will take part in the blooming great tea party to raise money for the cause. I am told by Susan Lowes from Marie Curie that the blooming great tea party is all about the right ingredients—nice cuppas, naughty cakes, bad jokes and good conversation. I am sure that I can provide at least some of those, but I am not promising to provide any of the prosecco that we have heard about. It is all about having a blooming great time while raising money for a blooming great cause.

On behalf of everyone in Scotland, I thank all the wonderful staff and volunteers at Marie Curie. I encourage all my colleagues to sign up to hold a tea party for such a fabulous cause.

17:51

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): People might start talking about me and Linda Fabiani, because on occasion when I have been speaking I have noticed her nodding vigorously—some of her colleagues might not be too happy to hear that—and I noticed myself nodding vigorously back as she opened the debate today. I sincerely and genuinely thank her for bringing this really important debate to the chamber.

As we have heard from every speaker today, we want to send one unified message, regardless of political parties, to each and every member of staff and volunteer across Marie Curie. It is a sincere thank you—thank you for caring for our loved ones at the most difficult periods in their lives. It is also important to recognise that, as Jill, a palliative care nurse in the Glasgow hospice, reminded me this afternoon, Marie Curie staff do not just care for the person who is dying; they care for the family at that most difficult time of need.

A part that is sometimes missed is that Marie Curie also advocates. We sometimes think that

Marie Curie only looks after people in the most difficult period but, all year round, it advocates to parliamentarians in this place and other places about what more we as decision makers can do to support some of the most vulnerable people in our communities and how we can put palliative care on the agenda. To each and every one of the hundreds of staff and thousands of volunteers, I say thank you from the bottom of our hearts for every single thing that you do. I am sure that we have all been touched by Marie Curie and its fantastic staff or, if not, that we will be at some point in our lives.

Marie Curie has helped to move the discussion away from purely being about good health to being about how people die with dignity and get the support that they need, how we put patients at the centre of care and how we prioritise them and ask them where they wish to spend their final days and moments in this world, with their family members. It is about asking them what is important to them. Quite often, it is easy for us as parliamentarians simply to think about medicating or operating and people being in hospital. We need to ask patients what matters to them, whether that is preparing a will, preparing their children for the experience or, as I said, where they want to spend those final days. I again thank Marie Curie for applying that “What matters to you?” test for each and every individual patient.

At our party conference the weekend before last, I had the pleasure of meeting an individual named Richard Fairbairns. He is nicknamed Pops, so with his permission I will call him that. He talked powerfully about how important it is that those who work in our NHS have the time to care for individuals and how it makes an absolute difference to people if we have an adequate workforce to care, to give information, to provide a care plan and to partner with the family members. He talked about how we need to ensure that we represent people in urban and rural areas. He is from Mull, so he spoke about how we involve island communities in the important issues around palliative care.

In closing, I put on the record sincere thanks to every staff member and volunteer at Marie Curie. I thank them for everything that they have done; I am sure that there are hundreds of thousands of people across the UK who look to Marie Curie with pride and sincere thanks.

17:55

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I thank Linda Fabiani for securing the debate to welcome the great daffodil appeal, which is Marie Curie's biggest annual fundraising event. I welcome all the volunteers to Parliament—especially the representatives from the Kirkcaldy constituency.

Each year, the daffodil appeal raises more than £4 million in Scotland to help the 200 Marie Curie nurses who work across Scotland to care for and support people with terminal illnesses, and to provide emotional support for families, friends and the wider community.

The charity has made immense contributions to Scotland since it was founded in 1948—the same year as the NHS was established—and it provides the largest number of hospice beds outside the NHS. From 2015 to 2016, 1,863 well-trained volunteers were involved in fundraising in their communities and their local shops. Marie Curie does not only offer nurses who provide hands-on care and hospices that offer a friendly environment; it also helps people who are affected by terminal illnesses to get the information and support that they need, through the research that it carries out to improve care and support. Those services all come from the amazing work of volunteers and fundraisers, especially through the daffodil appeal, which has raised more than £80 million since 1986, and has contributed to giving people better-quality lives.

Those achievements would not have been possible without the help of the thousands of volunteers who make fundamental contributions to the provision of good-quality care. Marie Curie's survival and success are dependent on the dedication and hard work of those volunteers, who dedicate their time and special skills to helping people who are in need.

Volunteering allows us to get involved with new things, environments and experiences; to create better environments for others; to create healthier communities; to meet a wide variety of people from all walks of life; to create networks and connections; to gain valuable insights and a sense of accomplishment; and to build potential future career options. In those ways, volunteering is a two-way street—volunteers and patients both benefit. The economic value of volunteering saves billions of pounds that can be used to ensure that the services that Marie Curie and its volunteers provide are the best that they can be, and can provide one-to-one emotional support, tackle social isolation and provide companionship.

In my constituency, trained volunteers provide a unique one-to-one service. In 2014, Marie Curie partnered with NHS Fife to deliver tailored care and support at home for terminally ill people, and for their families. In 2015-16, 21 Marie Curie nurses cared for 318 patients in a total of 4,255 visits, and that vital support allowed 94 per cent of those patients to die with dignity in the place of their choice. The scheme works alongside other services and initiatives in Fife to meet the individual needs of patients and families. It is a great example of a partnership approach to

providing health and emotional support services at what can be an extremely difficult time not only for patients, but for their families and the wider community.

I am extremely proud of the contributions that the Kirkcaldy funding group has made since its inception in 2014 by raising vital funds of more than £11,000. It spreads awareness, has participated in the town's beach highland games and organises many events and activities in the community. Last year's event was a fashion show that was organised by the group, which was extremely successful and raised £1,000 for the charity.

Volunteers are a vital part of the Marie Curie Fife service; they offer companionship and emotional support, provide practical help including aiding patients with small tasks, spend time with patients to allow breaks for their families and carers, and help people and their families to find further support and services that are accessible and available locally. Without volunteers, Marie Curie would not be able to deliver that range of services and support.

In conclusion, I again thank Linda Fabiani for securing the debate. I encourage everyone to give a small donation during March, and to wear a daffodil pin to raise awareness of and to promote the great daffodil appeal.

17:59

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I, too, warmly thank Linda Fabiani for lodging her motion and securing the debate.

The work of supporting and helping people who are suffering from terminal illnesses is what Marie Curie Scotland does best. Last year, 11 Marie Curie nurses in the NHS Ayrshire and Arran area helped 86 patients in 354 visits, and provided a 24/7 planned nursing service.

Beyond the direct help that it offers to patients and their families, Marie Curie also helps to relieve pressure on the NHS. It is an essential partner in taking care of terminally ill patients. The charity also works to build a fairer and healthier Scotland by delivering services, support and information.

Marie Curie raises funds in numerous ways—most famously, through its daffodil appeal. When I first wore a daffodil some 30 years ago, people kept asking me whether it was St David's day. I am pleased to say that no one asks me that now.

Marie Curie has a network of shops. Back in 2015, I volunteered for a day in one of them in Saltcoats, in my constituency. I commend the work of all 1,863 Marie Curie volunteers across Scotland—people who do not just put in a day, but

give of their time week in and week out, year after year.

Marie Curie addresses human vulnerability and the right to die with dignity, where the person wants to die, surrounded by loved ones. That is an elementary right, and 94 per cent of patients who were supported by Marie Curie in Ayrshire who passed away last year did so in the place of their choice.

Marie Curie offers a large range of services for thousands of people who are living with terminal illnesses, and their families: from home nursing care to Marie Curie hospices, and from medical care for patients to psychological support for carers.

Marie Curie supports individuals not only from life to death, but after death, by helping families in their grief and with administrative formalities, which can be daunting. Marie Curie's great daffodil appeal is an occasion not only to raise money for services and research, but to raise public awareness about terminal illness—a matter that is little discussed in public.

Research investment is vital. Only 0.16 per cent of charitable and Government research funding in the United Kingdom is spent on end-of-life care. A fifth of that is invested by Marie Curie.

It is estimated that about 40,000 of the 54,000 people who die each year in Scotland need palliative care. Unfortunately, as a result of inequalities combined with lack of information and appropriate infrastructure, about 11,000 people are deprived of that elementary service. We need to improve palliative care by promoting innovation in the field—especially because we know that one in eight people will be 75 or older by 2031.

With that in mind, the Scottish Government's "Strategic Framework for Action on Palliative and End of Life Care" aims to improve the system, with the goal of offering palliative care to anyone who needs it by 2021. The objectives that are outlined in the strategy are not only quantitative, but qualitative. The key is to bring to more people the care that is required in coping with a terminal illness.

In recent months, I have heard the concerns of constituents who are taking care of terminally ill relatives and are confronted with intolerable administrative delays when accessing the benefits to which they are entitled. Marie Curie highlights such difficulties and recommends the development of a fast-track system for people who are terminally ill. The personal independence payment is a step towards that. It allows the terminally ill person or his or her representative to fill in fewer forms than they normally would, and the Department for Work and Pensions will fast-track the application. However, the PIP can be useless

in instances when a DS1500 report cannot be attached to the application. That report must be completed by a general practitioner or consultant who confirmed the terminal illness, but sometimes such a diagnosis cannot be delivered by the core medical team and the patient finds himself or herself in circumstances where they cannot access help. I believe that the current system needs to be improved to help all patients, regardless of their diagnosis, and I support the Marie Curie report's recommendation for developing a fast-track process within the DWP.

More generally, the spirit of speeding up the administrative process for people who are dying and their families should be extended to every level of administration, from communities to national level.

Scottish ministers and the Scottish Parliament must make the best possible effort to help families who are confronted with such issues; we must listen to them and ensure that they are helped by the appropriate services.

I commend the work of Marie Curie Scotland, especially in my Cunninghame North constituency, and I once again thank Linda Fabiani for bringing the debate to the chamber.

18:04

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): I, too, would like to thank Linda Fabiani for bringing her motion to the chamber. Linda is absolutely right: we have been offered a chance to celebrate the fabulous great daffodil appeal, which is now in its 31st year, and to celebrate what volunteers do. It is wonderful to see some of the volunteers here tonight—I think that Linda described them as a beautiful host of golden daffodils, and she was right to do so.

I also give special thanks to the people around Scotland whose generosity over the years has helped to make the Marie Curie great daffodil appeal such an extraordinary success. Local efforts have been discussed by many members, including David Torrance, Liam McKerr—sorry, Liam McArthur. I apologise; I am getting my Liams mixed up—if Liam McArthur could put his hand on his hip, he would remind me of Liam Kerr. [*Laughter.*] Kenneth Gibson, Miles Briggs, George Adam, Graeme Dey and a whole host of members talked about how important local efforts are to making the appeal such a success.

Donald Cameron and Rona Mackay are right to acknowledge women such as Marie Curie on international women's day. Through history, so many inspiring women and their work have been forgotten, but Marie Curie's dedication, intelligence, strength and commitment—and the

charity in her name—have ensured an enduring legacy.

I am sure that we all agree that the work that is done by Marie Curie in Scotland is invaluable. Its expertise in the field of palliative and end-of-life care is renowned and it fulfils a vital role in supporting not only those who are nearing the end of their lives but the multitude of families and friends who surround them. I had an opportunity at the beginning of this year to hear more about the work of Marie Curie in my constituency. The sheer breadth of the work that is being undertaken is truly phenomenal.

The skilled care that Marie Curie provides is more important than ever. The demand for such services is only going to increase due to the well-understood changes in our population. More people in Scotland are living longer—that is a good thing—and, as we grow older, more of us grow frail and have multiple long-term conditions involving specific palliative care needs. We all want a fairer, healthier Scotland and the Marie Curie great daffodil appeal presents a timely opportunity for us to reflect on the challenges that we face, which we are taking concrete steps to address.

We are committed to understanding the needs of our different communities. We want to remove discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights and build good relations by breaking down barriers that might hinder people and prevent them from accessing the care, services and supports that they need. That point was made by Colin Smyth and I pay tribute to him for his long-standing commitment on that agenda.

Scotland is already a world leader in the field of palliative and end-of-life care and I am proud of the progress that we have made over the past few years. We have increased the numbers of specialist staff, improved access to services and, through our programme of health and social care integration, put services under the control of our local communities. Through that work, people are enjoying greater choice and control over their care and, as a result, pressure on NHS acute care units has been reduced, families and carers are better supported and, most importantly, the people who could benefit from palliative and end-of-life care are increasingly receiving it. However, there is no complacency and we understand that there is far more to do.

Liam McArthur: What the minister said about acute care is right. One of the concerns that are mentioned in Orkney and across a number of health boards is a frustration that the finance is not moving further into the primary sector to allow more care to take place in the community. Does the Government have a focus on that?

Aileen Campbell: We all agree that there is a need to shift the resource to primary care and to have preventative efforts in place, but I recognise that that is a big shift and a big challenge. It is a challenge for rural and remote communities as well, including the one that Liam McArthur represents. The Government is keenly aware of that and is working hard to build momentum on that.

The Scottish Government is committed to working with organisations such as Marie Curie to take forward our shared aim of ensuring that everyone in Scotland who would benefit from palliative and end-of-life care has access to it by 2021. That is an ambitious goal, but we are absolutely right to be ambitious in this area.

In December 2015, in response to a World Health Assembly resolution that required all Governments to recognise palliative care and to make provision for it in their national health policies, we published our strategic framework for palliative and end-of-life care. The framework set out a number of commitments that were designed to improve the quality and availability of palliative and end-of-life care in Scotland and we committed £3.5 million over four years towards realising that vision.

However, to achieve the vision, it is essential that we create the right conditions nationally to support local communities in their planning and delivery of palliative and end-of-life care services—that echoes the point that Liam McArthur made—to ensure that the unique needs of individuals are met, and that ethos is at the heart of health and social care integration. Integration authorities are working with local communities and are building on the expertise of organisations such as Marie Curie to commission services that are designed to meet the palliative and end-of-life care needs of their local community. By commissioning services in that way, improvements will be driven through meaningful, collaborative partnerships with the palliative and end-of-life care community and, importantly, with the extraordinarily passionate and committed individuals who work tirelessly to improve support for end-of-life care for so many.

As set out in our strategic framework we have asked Healthcare Improvement Scotland to test and implement improvements in the access to and delivery of palliative and end-of-life care. That work includes developing better ways to identify all those who might benefit from palliative and end-of-life care, and especially the frail elderly.

Many members raised the issue of data. Data is vital. Without it, we will not know whether people are getting the palliative and end-of-life care that they need, local communities cannot commission the services that are necessary to support

people's care, and care plans will remain hard to share. The data challenge is recognised in our framework, which includes a commitment to support improvements in the collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of data and evidence relating to the needs, provision, activity, indicators and outcomes in respect of palliative and end-of-life care. A working group is tasked with clarifying the data requirements to ensure that they are valuable to individuals who are receiving care and to integration authorities.

Working with the NHS Information Services Division, the data group is also investigating a number of areas in which data collection and use can be improved. Additionally, our mental health strategy, which is due to be published shortly, and the Marie Curie report "Enough for everyone: Challenging inequities in palliative care", which was published last autumn, will be helpful in informing that work and assisting in making sure that the needs of those who have mental health conditions are considered in the implementation of the strategic framework. That point was sensitively and correctly raised by Linda Fabiani in recognising the mental health needs of carers and those who are being cared for.

I turn briefly to the values and skills that people need from our health and social care staff. Colin Smyth and Kenneth Gibson also recognised how hard we, as a nation, find it to discuss death and dying, but the skill at having such difficult conversations is critical for anticipatory care planning conversations. Having those conversations, and sharing what matters to the person at the end of their life can make all the difference to how and where they die. That also ties to the point that Anas Sarwar raised. Although he did not say it explicitly, I think that he was also saying that it resonates strongly with the realistic medicine approach that has been set out by the chief medical officer.

Something else that is relevant to the community empowerment approach to palliative care is that, last week, I was privileged to be at the launch of compassionate Inverclyde, which embodies the ethos of whole communities coming together to support each other with compassion at points of grief, loss and change. It builds on the skills and assets of a community and opens up the discussion about death and dying.

Finally, I would like to say a bit about palliative care research. As part of the programme of work that is set out in our strategic framework, we have established a research forum, which focuses on the research that is associated with the strategic aims of the framework. It also helps to bring that research to bear on shaping the commissioning, improvement and education of palliative care in Scotland. We have also recently provided funding

to the forum to support Marie Curie and colleagues in the University of Edinburgh, including Professor Scott Murray. I certainly recommend that Colin Smyth and Linda Fabiani, who have a real interest in the area, listen to Professor Scott Murray, who has a way of communicating with a great deal of passion.

We are funding a systematic review of more than 400 relevant research studies that were undertaken in Scotland, which will help us to develop a clearer picture of research and data gaps and to support improvement. In acknowledgement of the collaborative nature of work in the field, in May we will jointly sponsor a seminar with Marie Curie that will provide a forum to explore other areas of research that will help us to move forward with the framework's action plan.

This has been an incredibly informed and instructive debate that has rightly acknowledged the progress that has been made on palliative care, while recognising the remaining challenges. Across Parliament, we are united in our need to approach palliative care through a public health lens, and we are also united in our appreciation of the work and dedication of the volunteers and Marie Curie workers across Scotland. Whether it be holding a hand, or embracing someone in the most difficult of times, it costs nothing, but the support that it offers to an individual or a family is priceless. We have a special opportunity tonight to come together as a Parliament and simply say thank you to everyone who is involved with Marie Curie, and they should know that we say that on behalf of everyone across the country.

Meeting closed at 18:14.

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