OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 25 April 2018

Session 5

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Wednesday 25 April 2018

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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE
12th Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)
*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)
*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
*Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP)
*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
*Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)
*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Andrea Bradley (Educational Institute of Scotland)
Stella Gibson (The Spark)
Finlay Laverty (Prince's Trust Scotland)
John Loughton (Dare2Lead)
Eileen Prior (Connect)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 25 April 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:30]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (James Dornan): Good morning. I welcome everyone to the 12th meeting in 2018 of the Education and Skills Committee. I remind everyone present to please turn their mobile phones and other devices on to silent for the duration of the meeting.

The first item of business is a decision on whether to take agenda item 4 in private. Is everyone content to do that?

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): No, I am not entirely content to take agenda item 4 in private. Given the seriousness of one of the matters that will be discussed, I would have thought that it merited its own agenda item. On the basis of the facts that we already know, if the committee does not reach a consensus today, I request that, in the interests of full transparency, we return to the discussion in public session at our next meeting, so that all members can formally put their views on the record.

The Convener: Mr Mundell, you have already put your views on the public record. I think that agenda item 4 should be taken in private, as is the normal practice. Does anyone else have an issue with that?

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): If we do not get satisfaction in private session, the issue needs to be discussed—

The Convener: If we will be dealing with something in private session, the discussions should take place in private session and decisions should be made at that point.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I would like to clarify that we are not deciding not to discuss the issue in public at some point in the future.

The Convener: I clarify that we are asking whether an issue that is to be discussed in private session can be heard in private session. We will not debate the matter in public until we have decided whether to debate it in private. Do we agree or do we not agree to take the agenda item in private? The discussions in private should take place in private.

Johann Lamont: With respect, convener, I am asking a process question—

The Convener: The process will be the same process by which any other item has ever been taken in private.

Johann Lamont: In agreeing to take the item in private, will members still be afforded the opportunity to have a discussion about the issue in public at a later stage?

The Convener: Have we ever done otherwise?

Johann Lamont: That is confirmation that we will be able to have that opportunity. That is fine.

The Convener: I do not really understand the point of the question, except to try to get it on the record.

In that case, is everyone content to take agenda item 4 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Attainment and Achievement of School-aged Children Experiencing Poverty

10:33

The Convener: The next item of business is an evidence session as part of our inquiry on the attainment and achievement of school-aged children experiencing poverty. This is the second evidence session in the inquiry and, this week, we will focus on secondary school-aged children. I welcome to the meeting Andrea Bradley, assistant secretary at the Educational Institute of Scotland; Stella Gibson, chief executive of the Spark; Finlay Laverty, senior head of partnerships at Prince's Trust Scotland; John Loughton, chief executive of Dare2Lead; and Eileen Prior, chief executive of Connect. I say to the panel at the outset that, if you would like to respond to a question, please indicate to me or the clerks and I will call you to speak.

For the benefit of those who are watching, I should explain that the committee has just come from an informal meeting on the topic with parents, young people, teachers and other professionals. I thank the panel for bringing along such interesting people to share their experiences with us. I also thank all those who attended the session, some of whom are watching the formal session in the public gallery.

We heard a lot last week about the costs of the school day. Should access to all aspects of the curriculum be free for everyone, or should any additional costs be subsidised or met only for families on low incomes?

Andrea Bradley (Educational Institute of Scotland): The EIS is absolutely committed to the principle of comprehensive education that is free at the point of use for all children and young people, so we think that all aspects of the curriculum should be open and accessible to all children and young people, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Eileen Prior (Connect): I absolutely agree.

The Convener: Is the issue a lack of clarity on what is core and what is non-core? Last week, it was claimed that what should be core costs were having to be met by pupils. Is that because there is no clear definition of what the core aspects of the curriculum for excellence should be?

Eileen Prior: It is absolutely clear what is core. If a young person, or their family, is asked to pay for course materials, such as photocopied workbooks, that is core. If a young person needs materials for a practical class, that is core. If they cannot take part in that curriculum area unless they have those materials, that is core.

The Convener: Other types of examples were given at last week's meeting, and it was such examples that I was referring to, but I completely accept what you say.

Andrea Bradley: I concur with Eileen Prior. Last week, an example was given of a cost being attached to children's access to home economics lessons. We know from members' feedback that costs are increasingly being attached to children's participation in, for example, art and craft and design. The issue is not so much that there is a lack of clarity about what is core provision and what is not; it is that year-on-year cuts are being made to school budgets, which are passed on to departmental budgets. That has resulted in a squeeze on what practical equipment and so on faculty heads and principal teachers can purchase. Some of those costs have found their way to families, rather than being met by core funding.

All things that are essential to children and young people's participation in day-to-day learning have to be met by school funds. The problem at the moment is that school funding levels are not adequate to provide for all the practical materials that would allow for the richness of experience that we want for our children and young people through curriculum for excellence.

The Convener: I think that I saw figures last week that showed that education spending had gone up by 10 per cent.

Andrea Bradley: That is not what departmental and faculty heads are finding in the budgets that they manage. There have been year-on-year decreases in per capita budgets. Practical subjects that have large expenses to meet—I am thinking of art and craft and design, for some lessons in which paints or wood are required—are hit particularly hard.

Faculty heads and principal teachers who have responsibility for managing departmental budgets are telling us that they are having to make year-on-year savings in relation to the equipment that they purchase for lessons. We also know that, in some schools, charging policies are in place to enable kids to participate. That is unacceptable.

The Convener: We might come back to that issue later on.

Liz Smith: I will take you into the field of extracurricular activity. Over a long period, the committee has had evidence that such activity can boost attainment considerably, particularly among youngsters who perhaps do not have other opportunities. The evidence seems to be that the cuts are most substantial in extracurricular

activities, whether that is in music tuition, sport, the Duke of Edinburgh scheme or outdoor education. Will you advise us on what we can do, particularly given the climate of budget cuts that you have just indicated exists, to address the issue with extracurricular activities, which raise attainment?

Andrea Bradley: You mentioned instrumental music tuition, which is an issue of grave concern for the EIS. We know that about two thirds of local authorities have charging policies in place for that. Therefore, straight off the bat, there is an inequity whereby there are cost barriers to young people's participation. We know about the emotional, social and cognitive benefits of such experiences; we also know about the intrinsic enjoyment that comes from simply being able to participate in music and play a musical instrument.

We are unhappy that charging regimes are in place, and we believe that that must be looked at as a matter of urgency in order that all children and young people across Scotland—again, regardless of the socioeconomic background from which they come—have equal access to that aspect of the curriculum so that they can garner all its benefits, which have been shown by so much international research.

Liz Smith: Can I pursue that point? Quite rightly, in my opinion, you mentioned the core curriculum, as Mrs Prior did. As you said, there are considerable issues there, so it is highly unlikely that we are going to find an awful lot of money to make sure that the extracurricular dimension is funded as well. If that money does not come from local authorities, where else might it come from to avoid parents having to pay?

Andrea Bradley: It could possibly come from national Government. If Scotland as a society places value on music as a cultural benefit, there needs to be an honest conversation between local and national Government about how that is going to be funded, and how it is going to be funded equitably.

There is an issue about whether it should be treated as a core aspect of the curriculum or as extracurricular. We are of the view that it must increasingly become part of our core provision rather than being an add-on or an optional extra for families that can afford it. More needs to be done to scrutinise the benefits of young people's participation in music tuition and the connections with health and wellbeing, wider achievement and attainment. If we value it—there is lots of evidence to suggest that we should—we need to think about how we can meaningfully and sustainably fund it for more children and young people in Scotland.

Liz Smith: I have a question for Mr Laverty and Mr Loughton. In terms of trying to improve the motivation and confidence of young people, their ability to engage and certainly their attainment, do you feel that we should be putting more priority on this extracurricular facility?

Finlay Laverty (Prince's Trust Scotland): Yes. Our experience over many years has been that there is a significant group of young people in education who perhaps require some alternative. We have youth work-led methods of engaging with that group of young people, and we are currently working with 125 schools and about 2,000 young people.

The slightly different or alternative approach that those young people need can be provided through professional youth work—the voluntary sector does that quite extensively—or through developing the skills and abilities of the existing teaching resource, which we have found to be a particularly efficient way of doing things. That involves working with teachers to develop how they engage with young people so that they can engage with the group in a softer way, perhaps. It is about understanding their behaviours, which are often quite challenging, in a different way and helping them to re-engage in education and think about the different choices that they have moving forward.

That alternative provision can be extremely useful, and it can target those young people who are more likely to leave school without a positive destination. We have experience of that from our partnership work with local authorities and schools over 15 years.

John Loughton (Dare2Lead): Thank you for the question. To use a non-jargony piece of language, I think it is a no-brainer. I was a young person who benefited from such services, and it was the people in youth work or non-school provision who caught me, captured my imagination and told me that I could be more than the collective sum of the lack of aspiration that everyone had for me because of my postcode, my surname and what my mum and dad did—or did not do, as it happened.

I do not like the term "alternative education". It is education, and often it is educating and capturing the imaginations of a cohort of young people who are at the greatest risk of negative behaviours that will affect themselves and their families, and who might otherwise go on to be the custodians of some of the social ills that create the greatest burdens on the national health service, our criminal justice system and our social work provision.

10:45

In my view, a young person who causes trouble is a troubled young person: they have been raised

in that way. Youth work, as a sector, works with around 400,000 young people per year—it might be a bit higher, because there is a lot of informality—which is a huge number. Nationally, it does not have parity of esteem. We still suppose that, as far as possible, young people should stay at school. Where that is appropriate, I support it. Youth work in schools is very important. For a lot of young people, the ability to have a relationship with them that is based on respect and not just on rules and a top-down power dynamic, and the ability to say, "We need to support you on your achievement journey as much as your attainment journey," and to go where that needs to go, as opposed to prescribing an outcome that is set at the start of S1, are important.

As the late Barbara Bush said, the first teachers we ever have are our mums and dads and our first classroom is the home. As we all do—even on this committee—we see a crossover from what happens outside the room, before we turn up for work or put on our student or MSP hats. That affects how we feel—we are creatures of emotion. Youth work is able to meet young people where they are at and to provide a service that fits them, which often helps them to re-engage with school.

Last year, I set up a social enterprise in north Edinburgh called Scran Academy. School refusers and heavy non-attenders come along to the work that we do, which is based in the community. We work with chefs from industry and we put young people through qualifications such as Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland certificates and national 3s and 4s. They feel a sense of achievement for the first time, because we respect them and work with them. That is a common tale in the communities that have the biggest challenges, and it was also true for me. There are a lot of people who work very hard on a shoestring to try to do that for what we call our hardest-to-reach young people, but sometimes they are just complicated.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I have a supplementary question on peripatetic specialist teachers. Music has been mentioned, and there are also specialists in physical education. I come from a rural area, and I have found that such decisions are often made at local council education committee level. Andrea Bradley has spoken about central Government funding going into education. However, we have an extremely patchy situation. For example, in Aberdeenshire, visiting specialists are being cut by the current administration. In fact, the convener of the education committee referred to the work of PE specialists as being "kicking a ball about" rather than, as you have described the work of specialists in relation to music tuition, providing enriching, free access for people who would not ordinarily have it. Is there a case for taking decisions about spending on extra provision—which is so important—away from there? Andrea Bradley, you asked about central Government funding. Are you, in effect, asking for ring fencing of education spend?

Andrea Bradley: That is the position of the EIS in relation to how education should be funded. We would be in favour of reinstating ring-fenced funding to local authorities for the provision of education. That would extend to all aspects of what kids experience in their education, whether it be PE, instrumental music engagement or whatever. On everything that we parcel up as education, we would want to see the funding for it delivered in that way.

Gillian Martin: We might have national priorities, but if the view is different at local level, that impacts on kids at that level.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): My question is for John Loughton and Finlay Laverty. You have both been talking about narrowing not the attainment gap, but the achievement gap, and I take that point. The questions for our committee—in this world of political measurement, in which we are all judged on the outcomes that we do or do not achieve—are how we can best measure that achievement gap and how we can show progress.

John Loughton: We measure what we value—or what we think we understand. There is the phrase "soft skills". In my experience as a youth worker, a practitioner and a neurolinguistic programming coach, such skills are not "soft" any more. We understand the competences around confidence, communication skills, a positive attitude and what drives attitudes, and we can start to measure them. The Confederation of British Industry is crying out for that. It talks about it not being a lack of technical skills or prowess that makes young people—or, indeed, any of us—unable to be effective in their jobs. Sometimes, the right approach is to turn up with a willingness to work and an attitude of self-belief and confidence to get out there and make it work.

We can start to measure that through a mixture of user self-evaluation and feedback from the professionals who are wrapped around them. There must be an understanding that the issue is as much about knowledge and aptitudes as it is about anything else, and that there must be a confidence in attitude, too. I know that, 15 years ago, I felt like nobody expected anything of me, so I started to live down to that expectation and felt a lack of confidence.

Often, longer-term and flexible interventions can support young people to build positive relationships. We ask young people why they come to the things that we run but do not go to

school, and they tell us that it is because we understand them, respect them and listen to them, and treat them like adults. The issue is not about bad teaching, per se; it is about a different dynamic. It is through the soft skills—the ones that enable you to get a kid to take down his hood for the first time and have a conversation—that you get the big wins. You have to understand the baby steps that you have to take to get there.

Often, chief executives or other leaders will sit in committees saying that they were not the kid who did well at school, and you learn that they are where they are because of a positive adult relationship or a spark of self-belief that was brought about through another intervention. It can be important when an adult has a rapport with a young person whose biography might well include a series of failed adult relationships that were well meaning but ill placed. I know that young people do stuff with us because of who we are and how we treat them as much as because of the things that we ask them to do.

Community youth work and interventions offer a lot in terms of value for money to the public purse. There are hard outcomes that are achieved as result of what are still sometimes called soft skills.

Finlay Laverty: I support much of what John Loughton has said. Life skills—"soft skills", or whatever you want to call them—are vital, and they do not naturally fall out of the qualifications framework. We do an annual survey of the wellbeing of young people called the youth index. This year, the numbers that we got on confidence, motivation and working in teams were at their lowest levels in eight years.

The question how we can put something in place that sets a metric is interesting. Does something happen if we do not measure it? I am not sure that it does. Clearly, the issue is important. All of our corporate partners are saying that skills are important and that academic achievement is okay, but that what is really important are values, the ability to work in a team and the ability to be resilient when faced with challenges and problems. We should be listening to what those employers have to say and thinking about how we can best address that. Perhaps we can do that by setting some metrics for schools and headteachers to follow.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): The convener asked about costs, and we have heard a weight of evidence about the impact of the cost of the school day. We have also just heard about curriculum materials. I would like to hear your opinions about the other stuff. I suppose that the issue touches on youth work and activity aspects, too, because even if those are being provided for free, there are barriers and things that get in the way. Could you give us your reflections on the impact of those aspects and what work can be done? Legislation says that education should be free. What do we have to do in policy terms to ensure that that is actually the case?

Eileen Prior: When we asked parents their views, we heard that the cost of the school day is a big issue—the cost of uniforms, travel and so on. Cost is a huge barrier.

The circumstances of some parents have changed and they are no longer able to afford things such as school trips. Earlier, we talked about the fact that there seems to be a competition in schools to see how exotic they can make their school trips, and how inaccessible such trips are for many families. Cost becomes a massive barrier, whereby we are restricting the experiences of young people.

My view is that, when we talk about the attainment gap, we are often talking about the experience gap. If, because of their home circumstances, a young person is not able to go on a school trip, go to orchestra practice, go to a show or, in some cases, take part in a club, their experience is restricted. That is a fundamental issue, and schools can do many things to address it. They do not have to run exotic school trips or require children to wear highly individualised school uniforms with braiding that changes every year. Schools need to address those issues, because every school in Scotland includes children whose families are living in poverty. That poverty may not be visible or recognised, but that is the truth. It is not only families in the schemes who are living in poverty. We have to address the wider issues, but there are things that schools and parent groups can do to support struggling families.

Andrea Bradley: In the earlier informal session, we were talking about how other countries ensure that, as part of their rhetoric about committing to social justice principles, each aspect of policy aligns and articulates well with other aspects. We are talking about how we can mitigate the impact of poverty in education, but we also need to look at what happens externally. As the EIS has been saying for well over a decade, the drivers for poverty lie far beyond the school gates; that has been a long-standing campaign issue for us.

As the committee will know, we are a trade union as well as a professional association; we therefore have concerns about poverty as it exists in society, beyond the experiences of children. We need to look at the cost of housing, taxation, social security, earnings and so on. We need to guard against becoming overly fixated on what schools can do, because schools cannot unilaterally mitigate the impact of poverty on young people's educational experiences.

That said, Eileen Prior is perfectly correct to say that schools can do and are doing—and are increasingly having to do—things to accommodate the growing financial difficulties in which many families now find themselves. For example, schools can ensure that their uniform policy is as universally acceptable as possible to families. Things such as braiding or school-logo polo shirts are unnecessary fripperies that cost families money and bring about stigma for families that are unable to afford them. We need to talk to local authorities and headteachers about putting in place a policy that makes school uniform universally affordable. We need to talk about clothing grants, because the thresholds for entitlement to such grants and the amounts of money that are paid out continue to be hugely variable. In some local authorities, the grant is £20, whereas in other local authorities it is £120. The poverty truth commission has indicated that the average cost of school uniform is £129.50 per year, so clothing grants in some areas are falling far short of the minimum requirements.

With regard to charity and fundraising events and school trips, the EIS issued advice to its members two or three years ago to say that all aspects of school policy should be equality checked to ensure that there are not too many fundraising asks and that there are more diverse opportunities for children and their families to participate in fundraising drives. Fundraising should not always be about families bringing in money, or the same families being asked to contribute four or five times in the course of a session. Parents, families and other members of the school community can contribute to fundraising efforts in other ways.

We also issued advice on out-of-school learning, because there can be costs attached to homework. In response to our recent survey, 45 or 46 per cent of our members said that, in their experience, the incidence of children being unable to participate in homework activities that are linked to information and communications technology is increasing because families cannot afford broadband or do not have the hardware to allow kids to participate in that way. Schools and local authorities need to think about and shape their policy around all those issues, and they need to ensure that all aspects of school policy and ethos are as inclusive as possible.

Ruth Maguire: Does anyone else wish to come in? I should say that we are very clear that the issue of poverty is not just about schools. However, as the education committee, we will home in on that aspect.

In evidence last week, we heard that what happens in the classroom is important in helping improve the attainment gap. I am interested to hear from the witnesses on that.

11:00

Finlay Laverty: There is a well-documented relationship between poverty and attainment. Along with a range of other charities in the sector, the Prince's Trust is trying to support the focus on the 5 or 10 per cent of young people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and trying to give them a different perspective on what is possible, in a way that allows them to think about what they can achieve and how to get there. Sometimes it is about using a different path or way of engaging with those young people in the class or in the school, and sometimes it is about taking them out of the classroom and giving them a fun and exciting experience that can change their whole thinking about what education is and what it can do for them.

Putting the focus on poverty and disadvantage is what the third sector does best. It supports the partnership with teachers and schools to get the most out of what young people are able to achieve. There are amazing talents there; we just need to find a different way to unlock them. We have some answers, but not all of them.

The Convener: Not every member of the panel needs to respond to every question. If you want to respond, please indicate that you do.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): I will target my question at Andrea Bradbury, because of her powerful answer to a previous question. The EIS submission says that family income is

"the most influential factor in children's in-school attainment and wider achievement; therefore, closing the poverty-related attainment gap requires an honest commitment to addressing the structural inequalities that emerge from policy decisions in those areas that are beyond the locus of the education system but which must be equally and fully aligned to social justice principles."

It goes on to say that

"59% of respondents"

to an EIS survey

"indicated that they had seen an increase in the number of children attending their schools who are experiencing poverty."

It is clear that the EIS has carried out a lot of valuable research on the issues. The rest of the briefing note covers important areas of education and calls for more resources in each of those areas. Is it the case that the burden of many factors that are external to education and which cause poverty to rise dramatically, is—according to the EIS statistics—falling on our classrooms, teaching staff and the education budget?

Andrea Bradley: Absolutely. While we have seen significantly increased incidences of poverty and all the educational challenges that that brings, we have also seen reductions in many of the resources that are available to education.

Let us think about teacher numbers and our aspirations for our children and young people, and the resourcing that we have, and compare the situation with Finland. It performs very well in international comparisons on equity and excellence, but it has significantly healthier teacher to pupil ratios than we do. The average class size in Finland is about 19, while ours is currently about 23.5. We know that, in addition to that bald statistic, there is a huge range including classes of up to 33, even in broad general education, where we are delivering non-practical subjects.

There is something to be said about teacher numbers, which have reduced by about 3,500 since 2007. There has been a small recovery in numbers recently, but that has only been because of the injection of the pupil equity funding. As we discussed in the informal session, that funding is relatively short term: it is not guaranteed and sustainable long-term funding, which is an issue.

We also talked about additional support needs. We have seen significant cuts in the number of teachers who specialise in additional support needs provision. We know that there is a huge correlation between socioeconomic disadvantage and additional support needs. Although there is legislation in place that—as is right—promises a lot for children who have additional support needs and their families, we do not have in place the resources to deliver on those promises.

I have talked about class sizes. There are benefits of smaller class sizes for kids with additional support needs and kids with emotional or social difficulties—for example, in introducing creative pedagogies that are less about rote learning and rigid forms of assessment, and allow for more metacognition, collaborative learning and learning that is enjoyable for the young people—as some of our colleagues from partner organisations have described.

Smaller class sizes are required in order to deliver such experiences, day on day. Those are the kinds of investment of resource that are required if we want to bring about outcomes that are more strongly aligned to high quality and equitability.

Richard Lochhead: The bottom line is that the call on resources for education is largely being driven by having to cope with the impact of poverty, which is driven by factors outwith the classroom. Can you tell us anything about the statistic that 59 per cent of respondents indicated an increase in the number of children attending their schools who are experiencing poverty? What are the factors behind that?

Andrea Bradley: Yes. That was related to things such as the kids' appearance at school: where the school policy is to wear uniform, they were perhaps not able to sustain wearing it every day. Kids were not able to participate in school trips, did not bring in homework or turned up for PE lessons without the requisite kit. When kids were given bits of what could be quite nice things to do out of school, such as making a castle or a card, they might not have had materials at home such as glue, glitter and the kinds of things that our children probably had readily at their disposal. Some kids come into school and tell teachers that they are hungry; some steal food or items of equipment from one another at times; and some appear visibly unwell—pale and complaining of headaches—or have unexplained absences from school.

All those factors were combining to suggest to our teachers that there was an increased incidence of poverty. They thought that those things were attributable to the income circumstances of families in their school communities.

The Convener: I have a couple of questions for Stella Gibson. There was talk earlier on about confidence and the stress that is being put on pupils. Do you have any comment on the lack of confidence that some pupils have when they go into school, and on the amount of stress that poverty seems to be leading them into, which makes it much more difficult for them to become confident?

Stella Gibson (The Spark): I was wondering earlier, when we were talking in our small group about parents and their engagement with the school, what those parents' experiences of school life were. That experience might roll into them becoming parents themselves and going back to the same school that they attended. If the parents do not engage well with the school, I wonder how that impacts on their children. That is an aside; I was thinking about it when we were talking earlier.

We provide counselling in high schools and primary schools. I know that this session is about senior schools, but we also do a lot of work in primary schools. It about trying to support children and young people with the difficulties that they may be experiencing in their home lives. They may be experiencing trauma and coming to school with high levels of anxiety, aggression and stress from their home life. John Loughton spoke earlier about how people learn from their home life: we learn everything that we know about relationships from home. The Spark supports emotional health and wellbeing in school. No amount of extra-

curricular activity or focus on literacy will work if the child is not ready to learn—that is where we provide our services.

The Convener: Are you seeing an upsurge in the need for your services and, if so, what is driving that?

Stella Gibson: We are now working across eight local authorities. Every week, we get inquiries about counselling from new schools. The upsurge is being driven by the ability to put counsellors in schools, which comes from schools having pupil equity funding to do that.

The Convener: Is that driving the requests?

Stella Gibson: That is driving the requests. When we speak to headteachers—in a group environment, for example—we can see them counting or thinking through the number of pupils that they already have who would benefit from counselling. The number of pupils is more than we will be able to support in a school year. Headteachers make the list in their heads as they talk to us.

The Convener: Are the requests driven by that? Is the need for counselling greater that it was before, or are you not in a position to say that because you can work only with what you get?

Stella Gibson: I do not think that I am in a position to say that, because schools were not in a position to put counselling in place. If we look at the waiting lists for child and adolescent mental health services, we can see that there is a massive demand for services. However, those services are for children with high-tariff issues. There is a raft of other children who would benefit from support, and counselling very much counts as early intervention. When we start in schools, although we talk to headteachers and deputy heads about trying to mix and match who they refer to us, we find that they refer to us all the children with high-tariff issues, who need much longer-term counselling. We talk about a six to eight-week block of counselling, but we have children who started with us in August who are still in counselling. That means that the early intervention for children who are not at that level is not happening.

As we finish our first year with pupil equity funding and move into our next year, we are seeing schools that might have one day of counselling now requesting two. One of my schools has four days of counselling and it is looking to increase that to five days. Now that we are in schools, schools can see the benefit of the counselling. We provide them with full evaluations so that they have information that they can report back when they are applying for pupil equity funding. That service will only grow.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I am interested in your thoughts on the existing or historical financial assistance that is available, such as school clothing grants, which Andrea Bradley mentioned; education maintenance allowance, which is set nationally; and free school meals. How has that assistance worked in practice? For the committee to understand how we move forward, there needs to be an honest evaluation of what is in place. What has been successful? Where have there been issues with uptake? Where have there been inconsistencies between local authorities? I start off with a broad question: what difference are the existing financial assistance packages making at present?

Eileen Prior: The assistance is extremely variable. One of the questions that we asked parents was about free school meals. Did they know how to claim? Were they helped to claim? There is massive variability. That information is available in the paper that I submitted to the committee.

Many of the online systems that local authorities are now adopting are a massive barrier to families. We know that some local authorities have a transaction charge—someone who needs to buy meals for their child weekly will pay four times the amount that someone who is able to pay monthly will pay. The reason why someone buys weekly is that they do not have the money to buy for a month, yet they are penalised for that fact. Simply getting access to those online systems is a massive problem for some parents.

Clearly, there are stigma issues around claiming for school uniforms, school meals or whatever it is. As we said earlier, nutrition in schools is a massive issue, particularly in the secondary sector. We know that most youngsters bail out of school at lunchtime, go down the street and buy rubbish, which does not prepare them for an afternoon's learning. We worry—and parents tell us that they worry—about the quality of what is available in schools, too. It is back to getting the basics right. If we do not feed our children well, if they are not ready to learn because they have not had a good night's sleep and if they are not clothed comfortably and appropriately for the weather, how can we expect schools to do what they can do?

11:15

We must look at and get right the fundamentals before we start putting in place sticking plasters and additional things. Of course we will have kids who have behavioural issues if they are hyped up on Red Bull and sausage rolls. What else can we expect? We must get it sorted; there must be proper nutrition. We have to support families—99 per cent of them want the best for their children—

because, in some cases, they are living under extreme stress and difficulties. Those stresses and difficulties are communicated to youngsters and they come into school anxious and worried about their home circumstances. It is no wonder that kids are not able to participate fully and learn in school.

Andrea Bradley: I echo that. In the survey that I referenced, our teachers said that kids were increasingly coming to school without money for snacks or the tuck shop and telling them that they were hungry. Teachers are buying food, bringing it to school and feeding some kids themselves.

The EIS's policy position is to support the universal provision of free school meals. We know that that has been of benefit to the primary 1s to P3s who access that provision. However, hunger knows no age barrier, so we want that provision to be extended to all children and young people of school age in order that they can have all the benefits that Eileen Prior has outlined.

Ross Greer: To pick up on the points that were made about stigma and the lack of uptake of entitlements—you mentioned charges in relation to online usage—the Social Security Committee took evidence on Glasgow City Council's success with automatic payments and automatic enrolment. Does anyone have any experience or thoughts on the outcomes of those approaches?

As no one wants to comment, I will move on. It is abundantly clear from all the evidence that we have received that—Andrea Bradley made this point—poverty starts outside schools, so that is where we must tackle it if we want to close the attainment gap. This committee is looking at how schools interact with the wider support network and it was mentioned in our informal meeting earlier that some schools are using PEF for home-school link workers, or whatever they are known as—the staff members have various job titles. How can we use schools and the existing support that is available through them and their staff, as well as other resources, to create a more effective link with the wider social security system and social services, so that we use the school as a hub or a base for that wider support package that we need to provide to tackle the poverty that children live in, rather than taking a sticking-plaster approach once they arrive in the classroom?

Andrea Bradley: Again, we know from the survey data that some schools are developing approaches that mean that either admin support staff or teachers are helping families to access their entitlements. That is good and laudable, but we know that local authorities are having to make cuts to the numbers of support staff and that the workload burdens for the remaining staff with administrative responsibilities is increasing. We have to do something about that.

Although it is good that, in some schools, teachers are able to provide that essential support to families to help them access their entitlements, we know that teachers' workload is also off the scale.

There should be additional human resource input so that all families can have such support. It should be universal and not simply in schools that have just about managed to provide somebody for an hour a week to give it.

Eileen Prior: In some cases, schools are bringing in family support staff—as you said, the role has different titles—who link not just with social security, but with youth work and the third sector locally. Therefore, it is about pooling community resources. Schools sit in their community; they are not islands. There is a strong case for that support, but I am concerned that it will be short lived. It is provided through PEF; if that is withdrawn, the role will go.

Ross Greer: I am interested in Finlay Laverty and John Loughton's experiences of working with young people who are in education but outside of classroom environments, as John described. What is your experience of interactions with the social security system, social services and local authorities? How amenable and open are they? Does that vary from local authority to local authority when it comes to working with you on issues such as making sure families receive the support to which they are entitled?

John Loughton: I see huge issues of underclimbing. Sometimes, people's lives are so chaotic and fractured. I have siblings who are younger than me who are homeless. They refuse to go into the drug dens that we call "homeless shelters". They are in their 20s like me—oh, I am 30 now. Well, they are of a similar age to me but their lives are so chaotically removed. They are my siblings, yet I have the audacity to sit and speak at a parliamentary table knowing that I have two brothers who are dealing with mental health issues. They have become the more obvious products from my mother's and father's roots. They are not even claiming benefits such as jobseekers allowance because they do not know where to start.

There is a fundamental dehumanisation that happens with what we call, sometimes ironically, the social security system, whether that is watching mum get her benefits, family allowance or child support, and going to the chemist for the prescription—that is the structure of the week. I see that with my brothers now—they are so disengaged. There are people who have helped them to take steps forward, but they were not at school from the age of 12 onwards.

I liken living in poverty to sitting on a chair that has had three of its legs removed: every part of you is tensed in order to keep balanced; the slightest movement, wind or meander and you will go. Yes, school should be the core hub, but if you are living in poverty you will not be able to think about playing with glitter to create a nice piece of poetry or whatever. When you are surviving, how can you think about thriving, culture or creativity? Why would you think of yourself in the asset model, rather than thinking about the deficits that everyone knows you for? There is something about how we inject a sense of humanity and dignity into social security.

There is one simple—perhaps not simple, but, to me, obvious—way to do that. The people who receive services look and sound nothing like the people running them, and there is a big class and social norms difference, down to accents and backgrounds. There is a barrier to overcome because those people feel different.

I talk about youth work and I get very annoyed when the terms "school" and "education" are used interchangeably, as they are very different. School is one critical hub of education. There is an exciting opportunity for Scotland to take stock of where we are in reality. We ask teachers who are overworked, stressed and under many pressures to fight poverty; instil financial literacy and budget skills; understand the pressures of mum and dad; help young people understand their benefits rights post school and think about their future career options; and overcome their mental health problems—probably the largest presenting need that I see at our services—as well as chronic lack of self-confidence and huge issues around anger management. That is a bit like asking the optician to fix your toothache.

We have had two national youth work strategies in Scotland and the third is coming up. I have not been involved in the internal conversation, and I would like this committee to think about how to apply pressure for a truly innovative national youth work strategy—perhaps it will be third time lucky. We need to truly recognise the myriad menu of pathways for young people because, for the bottom 20th percentile, sending them to the classroom, with its rules and focus on academic attainment, is a bit like sending them to the optician when they say that they have toothache.

How do we recognise what should be called not "alternative" education but "non-school" education pathways, which many of us run? Alongside school, there is an opportunity to recognise youth work as being for re-engagement and employability, and not just about going to have a custard cream after school, having a game of pool or collecting badges. It should be about accredited achievement as well as formal attainment.

There is an opportunity to see that one size fails most, but I do not see that happening. I see a lot of places that are called "supportive learning", which, ironically, are very unsupportive and not much learning goes on. They are in the dark corridors at the top of schools—I say that from an experience in the past two weeks. It broke my heart, because I work with young people and I love them as much as I want to help them. I think that that is important—it was what I needed at that age. I hate to say it, but I compared that place to a cat and dog home where a puppy is desperate to get out of a cage. I sometimes see the issues that young people face, but they are in a rigid system that cannot help them and that sometimes exacerbates their problems—and it should not be for them to do. We need to recognise that there is a whole coalition of people ready to empower young people in whatever form they come in.

We talk about young people as if they are all the same, but we know that a classroom has a range of different issues and that a youth work service has a range of provision. Through the new youth work strategy, we need to recognise the alternative school down at Spartans and the work of Helm in Dundee. It would be good to see ownership from the committee. You should push it and say that it would be good to do something truly innovative that shows that we understand that, if school is not working, we can work with it much earlier to signpost young people effectively so that they can get the qualifications, confidence or job that they need to live their lives.

The Convener: Can we start to make the answers a bit briefer? We still have a lot to get through and we are running out of time.

Johann Lamont: That is a powerful argument for having diversity within our education and valuing young people where they are. Do you agree, Mr Loughton, that there are circumstances in which the inflexibility of school and the expectations of young people mean that we need services that are not school? How do we hold on to a commitment to compulsory education up to 16, value that and, to be frank, not allow some schools to say that a child is in too hard a box for them so there must be some provision for that child somewhere else? How do we integrate what you described powerfully with an entitlement for young people to have their needs met in the school system?

John Loughton: We have to recognise that we do not have universal compulsory education. It does not exist. We have lots of young people outside school. They just do not turn up or they are put on part-time timetables that they do not engage with anyway. I am sorry to be soft, but the first answer is to recognise, measure and truly understand the impact of non-school education.

In Fet-Lor Youth Club, we run a kitchen called Scran Academy. It is a social enterprise. They run a business—

The Convener: Yes, you have told us already. Keep your answers shorter, please.

John Loughton: We get the young people qualifications. It is not schools alone that provide qualifications; non-school environments can do that.

A big audit is needed to understand what makes youth work and informal learning approaches effective—it is relationships, exciting stuff and outward bound activities—and think about how we dovetail that into the classroom. However, we also need to recognise that, sometimes, the classroom might not be the best place for a young person to be. I do not know whether we have that yet.

Johann Lamont: I accept that completely—

The Convener: No, I am sorry, that was a supplementary question. Finlay Laverty wants to come in.

Finlay Laverty: I will make a point that, perhaps, also answers a question that Ross Greer asked. The system works best and is most effective where there is more of a team approach—although it is not consistent or universal—with a group of youth work professionals who are able to mentor and educate the educators a wee bit. They can bring the teachers into the hybrid space—that might be the wrong term—and give them the skills that allow them to be youth workers. Those teachers can be supported by professional youth workers with pupil support teams' help. That creates a team that is much more effective and much more rounded.

I support what John Loughton said about there coming a point when we need to do some of that outside the classroom. It is way more effective if we do that, because we get a complete burst of personal and soft skills development. That is much more intensive if it can be done as a group and the group can learn from one another.

Gillian Martin: Following on from Ross Greer's questions and the powerful answers to them, I will ask the witnesses' opinion on the later stages—the senior phase—of school and what happens as young people prepare to leave school.

In the informal briefing that we had, some members of the Scottish Youth Parliament mentioned a couple of things about the cost of moving on from school and accessing what should be opportunities for young people. Examples that they gave included fees for the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service or for remarking their exams, and financial barriers to accessing interviews to get into college or apprenticeships. Can the witnesses give me an overview of where we are and whether those are real issues?

Andrea Bradley: Fees for remarking should be met by local authorities, not individual families, so that should not be a barrier to families that experience financial difficulties. The policy is that local authorities pick up the tab for any costs that are incurred by re-marking.

The point about access to interviews is a good one, and employers need to think about that. Employers who are conscious of the needs of their prospective employees will cover the cost of transport to interviews. Perhaps there has to be a conversation between the Scottish Government, employers and representatives of employers about the needs of some young people—although it should actually be a universal provision—who struggle to meet things such as the cost of travel; employers should take responsibility for that.

11:30

Gillian Martin: My question about fees was actually about fees for accessing university education. Is that an issue that you have heard about?

Andrea Bradley: Our members have not fed information to us specifically on that, but that, again, is an area of expense that I consider should be covered by the local authority.

Gillian Martin: I will move on to the EMA. Is that sufficient? John Loughton was just talking about his area, which is giving qualifications to young people who are outside mainstream schooling. Do young people qualify for EMA if they are not in school?

John Loughton: It depends partly on what level of engagement they have with formal education. Some are full-time, some are part-time and some do not go to school at all. I do not know the exact cut-off criteria for EMA.

Gillian Martin: Okay. That is all I wanted to ask.

The Convener: Thank you for your brevity.

Tavish Scott: I want to go back to the use of PEF and the attainment challenge funding in relation to changing teaching methods, and I suppose that my question is for the EIS. Andrea Bradley mentioned PEF being used for filling teaching posts. I would be grateful if she can give any numbers or provide any evidence on that, because we are all struggling a bit to know how PEF is being used. Stella Gibson gave examples of schools that she is involved with that are using PEF to make counselling services available. We are trying to understand what is actually happening with the PEF money. What is working and what is not being so successful, in terms of

tackling poverty, given that that is what this inquiry is about?

Andrea Bradley: The EIS has gathered some data, but it is a pretty varied picture. In some schools, staff are being employed and deployed to focus specifically on literacy and numeracy initiatives; some people are working on health and wellbeing initiatives; home-school link workers have been reinstated, to keep alive that vital connection between what is going on in the school and what is going on in the home; and there have been initiatives around making sure that every kid in the class is able to go to the theatre or on a residential trip once in the academic year. The picture is very varied.

Tavish Scott: On the point about employing staff, which you have already mentioned, are they all employed on one-year contracts on the basis that the local authority—

Andrea Bradley: Yes. I think that about 500 teachers have been employed directly through PEF. Those will probably be one-year or, at a maximum, two-year contracts, so they are short term.

Tavish Scott: Is it a similar picture for the counselling services that Stella Gibson's organisation has been providing?

Stella Gibson: Yes—we have annual contracts for counselling, and schools are starting to indicate what they want to do for next year.

One of the interesting challenges for us has been the procurement process in some local authorities. Some local authorities have been quite relaxed about allowing the schools to choose what service they want to put in place, which has been fantastic. The schools are able to choose the provider, and if they choose to provide counselling it is up to them where they go with that.

However, other local authorities have said that schools can spend only up to a certain amount of money—£50,000, for example—on getting a given organisation to provide counselling. Once the school reaches the £50,000 mark, it has to pick another provider—

Tavish Scott: Why?

Stella Gibson: Because of procurement rules in that local authority. In one instance, when a school approached us and we agreed to put a counsellor in place, the local authority told the school that it was not allowed to do that.

Tavish Scott: The process sounds incredibly bureaucratic, and that costs money.

Stella Gibson: Absolutely. There are other issues around procurement, as well. We have seen situations in which a school has gone through procurement for what was supposed to be a school counselling service, but the job adverts suggested that the workers did not even need to be counsellors or have counselling qualifications.

Tavish Scott: Is the principle of giving headteachers responsibility to use the money appropriately—for counselling, in your case—being held back by rules and regulations that have been set either in Edinburgh or in a local town hall?

Stella Gibson: Yes—that is definitely an issue for us.

Eileen Prior: We experienced exactly the same situation with a headteacher who wanted to put in a kitchen to do work on nutrition. A year later, they are still waiting because of the procurement process.

Tavish Scott: It slows things down, or things do not happen at all.

Eileen Prior: It is mad—it is absolutely bonkers.

Stella Gibson: The situation is interesting, because we are now going into year 2. In the first year, some areas were a wee bit more relaxed about procurement, because they needed to spend their PEF money and get it out of the door, and the schools wanted counselling services. We have been told that we will be going through procurement next year, so, although we could be working in a school this year and picking up new children in the new school year, we might not win the contract.

Tavish Scott: Is that the experience of the Prince's Trust?

Finlay Laverty: We have the same battle scars. We currently operate in approximately 125 schools. Historically, local government funding for that work has followed on from the concordat. Eight or 10 years ago, we were funded directly by the Scottish Government, but we are now in the hands of more than 300 headmasters, so the procurement experience is hugely patchy. An unintended consequence may be that, for a transition period at least, some organisations—especially national organisations—will be faced with losing rather than gaining ground on things that are clearly working.

Tavish Scott: Does Education Scotland, as the principal Government quango that is responsible for pushing out good advice and so on, play a role in trying to sort those problems out? No? Who knows?

Finlay Laverty: It may do. We have opened the conversation with others. As always, there will be a solution if we can have sensible conversations about how we can make what we do more visible to every headteacher. The issue is procurement,

and how we make it work efficiently for everyone rather than creating a bureaucratic nightmare.

Tavish Scott: So, if it is Government policy to provide direct funding to headteachers through PEF for the range of services that your organisation offers to schools, the principle is that the headteacher must be able to make the call and get on with it.

Andrea Bradley: There are important checks and balances in the procurement process. Although any bureaucracy that is attached to procurement has to be proportionate, we should not suggest that we simply forget about procurement. We are talking about the need for a sensible well-founded rationale for the spending of public money, and there must be checks and balances with regard to the qualifications of the people who are brought in to deliver particular services for our children and young people. We also want to ensure, if we are committed to social justice principles, that organisations that work with schools pay their employees fair wages and have in place health and safety mechanisms. Procurement is important from a safeguarding perspective.

Tavish Scott: Presumably, you would argue that those responsibilities, which we entirely accept, are a heavy burden on headteachers, who already have far too many burdens to bear. If those things are left to headteachers, when do they get done?

Andrea Bradley: Absolutely. Our headteachers are very anxious about the additional bureaucracy that is attached to PEF spending, attainment challenge spending and so on. Of course, they welcome the additional funding for schools, as colleagues mentioned earlier, but it brings a hefty additional workload for them.

Tavish Scott: I have one final question. The point about achievement is really important. Do any of the witnesses believe that there is an argument for some sort of position in that regard? Could we have a principal teacher of achievement in schools, just as there is a principal teacher of history? Is that already happening through pupil support? Is there a better way in which we could do that through our school system?

Eileen Prior: In general, I do not think that I am a naive person, but curriculum for excellence was supposed to open up the curriculum and provide diverse opportunities and pathways. We have heard from Finlay Laverty and John Loughton about their approaches. As a parent, that is what I thought curriculum for excellence was going to offer my child in secondary school. There is a point about the intractability of our education system and its ability to really embrace curriculum for excellence and do the things that we—including me as a naive parent—thought were part of the package.

The opportunities should not be separate and different. They should be open to pupils in every school. On how we can ensure that that is the case, there could perhaps be teachers of opportunity, but we need our secondary schools in particular to look at curriculum for excellence and what it offers and do it, and not just to do what they have always done but call it something else.

The Convener: Oliver Mundell has a supplementary question before I bring in Mary Fee.

Oliver Mundell: On pupil equity funding, has there been sufficient support and training to help teachers to navigate the bureaucracy around procurement and to understand how the money can be used and how best value can be delivered for young people?

Andrea Bradley: We have not yet had universal experiences of professional learning for teachers around the impact of poverty and what actually makes a difference. It is almost as if the cart has been put before the horse. Money has been distributed to schools to be spent on initiatives that are supposed to reduce the impact of poverty, but the ground work has not been done to equip schools and headteachers to make those decisions. We know that Education Scotland is trying to provide some advice around that. Evidence has been gathered from other parts of the world on the kinds of interventions that might work, although some academics think that some of that data is a bit spurious or that its validity is questionable.

There was a rush to provide schools with pupil equity funding and a rush for schools to come up with plans that outlined how they were going to spend it. At about this time in the previous session, there was a lot of pressure on headteachers to come up with something. Of course we want there to be additional funding for schools, but the EIS is not convinced that this is the means by which to provide that.

Regardless of how the funding is delivered—whether it is given directly to schools or provided through local authorities—there has to be enhanced and universal professional learning for teachers on the nature, causes and consequences of poverty as they manifest themselves in the classroom. The EIS is going to be working closely with the Scottish Government on that agenda in the coming years.

Stella Gibson: From our perspective, the most successful local authorities in relation to pupil equity funding and the ease of working with schools have been those that put together a preferred list of options for their headteachers. In

those cases, the local authorities have gone through the procurement process informally and recommended only quality services. That is where we have seen the greatest impact.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I want to ask about wider achievement and the impact on attainment. I suppose my question is directed more to John Loughton and Finlay Laverty. I was particularly struck by John Loughton's evidence about the personal interventions that he experienced, the benefits of that for him and the work that his organisation does to help and encourage young people. We know that education and learning are not just about what goes on in schools; they are about lots of different things. Similarly, I was struck by the evidence from the Prince's Trust about the work that it does in schools.

If we accept that all the additional support and additional education that young people get has an impact on and benefits their attainment, what can be done at the national and local levels to make sure that that is fully delivered and that young people can take full advantage of all those things?

11:45

John Loughton: That is a big question, which chimes with Tavish Scott's question about the role of broader achievement alongside attainment. Sometimes, they are the same thing—you can recognise great achievement within attainment. I was just sitting there asking myself, what is the purpose of achievement and attainment? It sounds obvious, but there is a question of self-development and personal social growth in one form or another.

I do not know whether I would go as far as having a principal teacher of achievement, as it were. I think that there are other ways of doing that. Ultimately, the custodian of achievement, alongside attainment, in a school should be the headteacher. I asked one headteacher who we have worked with whether there was anything that they would like me to say today, and they wanted me to raise the fact that the issues of the bespoke curriculum, creative partnerships, recognising what schools are good at and understanding how they need to work with others are what makes them able to place achievement and attainment at the heart of our young people.

For a long time, I have thought about the idea of having a good-quality community or youth worker in every school. You want a mixture of in-school and with-school approaches to youth work, with broader non-rules-based pedagogies. There must be an ability to be innovative and try things out with smaller, intensive one-to-one mentoring opportunities such as the ones that the Prince's Trust does so well—Fin Laverty can speak about that.

The new national youth work strategy gives us an opportunity to be creative in relation to how Government works with the sector and to ensure that Government puts in place the helpful pedestals that local service providers can use to attain parity of esteem for non-school education actors.

Mary Fee: Are you confident that, if that were done at a national level, it would filter down sufficiently to the local level to ensure that it was delivered there?

John Loughton: You always have to be confident; the alternative is not worth thinking about, in a sense. If it is done in an intelligent, secure and smart way—if it is a multi-year approach and there is funding to enable the sector to use research to understand what metrics and measurements work—it will be successful. Groups in the youth work sector might sound good, but we face challenges, too. We need to understand issues of scale, we need to understand when we are not working effectively and we need to understand how to ensure that we are as compliant, ethical and capable as we would want others to be. If the approach is innovative and is supported financially, there is a real opportunity, as long as the sector owns it.

Mary Fee: The issue of financing is key, I suppose.

John Loughton: Yes.

Finlay Laverty: Employers say that people's life skills, soft skills and values are important to them. Currently, we do not have a metric—or I am not aware of one—that considers how well or otherwise schools are delivering those soft skills. Organisations such as ours consider and measure issues such as confidence, working with others, setting and achieving goals, managing feelings, reliability and attendance. Those are the steps that young people who will be successful with us will take.

Some form of metric that helps us to understand how we are doing as a nation in developing soft skills and life skills could be incredibly useful as we develop our workforce for the future, because those skills build in resilience to that workforce and the kind of attributes that business is looking for. We can graft on the skills and the academic side—they are important, obviously—but without the core building blocks and a spine, we are working from a position of disadvantage. There is something that we could do differently that would have significant results.

Mary Fee: Are you talking about some kind of matrix that would show achievement and skill in all its forms?

Finlay Laverty: Yes, I think so. We would have to be clever about how we do that, though.

Andrea Bradley: I should just say that curriculum for excellence's experiences and outcomes have those soft skills embedded in them, and teachers are assessing those things all the time. We have talked about measures, but we need to be careful that we do not look all the time for quantitative measures. Teachers make qualitative judgments every day—every half hour—about how children are doing in relation to those soft-skill areas. It is true that those judgments are not easily countable or shorthanded but, either in verbal feedback to kids, in discussions with parents or in written profiles, which are intrinsic to good formative assessment, teachers are involved in those kind of judgments all the time. That helps kids to determine what the next steps in their learning should be, not only in terms of what they need to learn in maths or in relation to joining sentences together in a paragraph in English but in terms of what they need to do to build their confidence in accessing all aspects of the curriculum.

Let us not conduct this discussion in a way that suggests that schools and teachers are not already doing those things, because they are; however, some areas of skills do not lend themselves easily to simple quantitative measurement, and that is not a bad thing.

Mary Fee: If they do not lend themselves easily to such measurement, how do we enable that to be done?

Andrea Bradley: Do you mean how do we come up with simple quantitative measures? Do we want that? Do we want to reduce—

Mary Fee: When you say that some areas do not lend themselves easily to measurement, should something else be done? Should some other measure be taken to allow teachers to make those assessments?

Andrea Bradley: Teachers do that in words every day. I was an English teacher. If the kids did a presentation to the class, for example, I would talk about their confidence in making the presentation and how that had developed from their previous presentation. Their confidence would manifest itself in their tone of voice, ability to look at the audience, use of gestures, facial expressions and so on. Therefore, I would comment on their confidence, but I would articulate that in a way that allowed the kids to visualise those comments. Teachers do such things relative to their subjects all the time. They talk about the levels of confidence shown and the contribution made, thereby showing the kids the little steps that they need to take to move their confidence on from one learning activity to another.

Teachers do not provide a number out of 10 or a grade from A to D; they use words to coach kids. Basically, they use a coaching approach, which encourages the skills of metacognition, so that kids can understand what they are doing when they take part in a learning activity, the skills that they are demonstrating, their level of skill and what they need to move to the next level or to strengthen or solidify those skills. As I say, it is all done in words; it is in a conversation. Sometimes, it is written down in words, but numbers are not provided. Indeed, it should not be numbers, because we know from lots of research evidence that simply providing kids with a number out of 10 or a grade from A to D does not encourage their learning.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): It has been good to hear from John Loughton and Finlay Laverty, because I am a great believer that—I think that John will agree with me on this—the real world in which many of the young people who we are talking about live is beyond the school gates. How we engage with them and their families is the way forward. Is it not the case that we need to look at different approaches?

I will use a constituency-based example. Ferguslie Park is one of the areas of greatest deprivation in Scotland. The local professional football club, St Mirren FC, which is based there, does a lot of work in the community. The former chair, Stewart Gilmour, asked the local authority and third sector partners when they were going to second staff into the club to carry out some of the required work. John Loughton mentioned Spartans—I think I know what that is. Should we be using its approach as a way to engage with young men and women? As John rightly said, some kids are not going to school anyway, so we need to find or design a way that works for them to get the qualifications that they need.

John Loughton: I have worked at the coalface and at the macro policy level, including nationally, and chaired the Scottish Youth Parliament. You can connect yourself to a policy aspiration or you can work as you see it. Sometimes, there is a disconnect between the two. Spartans Community Football Academy is a community football club, but it is much more than that. It provides education outwith the school—but with the school—for non-attenders.

I always find it weird using the term "youth workers", because we talk about a certain cohort as a profession when we use it. However, in many ways, we are all youth workers, because we all work with young people. You can cut it that way,

too. Teachers, for example, are youth workers. They work with young people and they do not just provide exam-based services.

On recognising progress without taking hard metrics, there are a whole range of awards that are not part of the Scottish credit and qualifications framework. The Duke of Edinburgh award is perhaps one of the more obvious ones, but there are also the John Muir award and the youth achievement awards. Those recognise and capture achievement as well as attainment, which is important. The Duke of Edinburgh award is the second most cited UCAS entry after work experience. Therefore, we are, in some ways, capturing achievement.

Another thing that is really important—I am surprised that it has not come up yet—is asking young people. When I was, I think, 13, I was dragged out of Muirhouse as part of a deputation to the City of Edinburgh Council. I stood and spoke about methadone and needles on my stairs—pretty hard-edged stuff, which, for me, was normal. I remember saying, "Young people are the experts on young people, and we know our feelings more than anyone." I hope that this does not come across as mushy but, sometimes, in all industries, we are at risk of overlooking the role of empowering young people to self-evaluate rather than be coached, observed or told.

When young people have been given space, I have never seen them not fill it and blow people out of the water. Often, in political engagements, it is young people who capture the tone of things and get to the heart of what things are worth. In terms of the perception of how someone is doing and what they are achieving, a big element, alongside feedback, is that young people's voices are heard. Young people who are experiencing poverty are the experts on that, even if they do not realise it.

Finlay Laverty: To pick up on that point, one of the teachers at the informal session earlier made the point that the main difference in working with our sector is that young people get to choose what they do. On Andrea Bradley's point, teachers are not interested only in academic matters; they are very much interested in how they can engage young people in activities that inspire them.

George Adam's point was about football. A number of different things will inspire young people—it could be the arts, dance or music. We work closely with Albion Rovers, Rangers and Celtic to give young people a different and more inspiring setting in which they can consider different things.

George Adam: That is the thing, though. We all use the terrible term "hard-to-reach families and young people", but is it not just about playing in their space and doing something that they want to do? The perfect example that I use is that St Mirren held a cooking course for fathers in the local area. The fathers went to corporate hospitality to do it. They would not have gone to the local centre to do it; they did it because it was at St Mirren FC. Mum and dad would then sit down and have the meal with the kids. It is about soft skills that people and families forget about, and about trying to find a way to make that connection. No matter what a school or local authority does, it is always seen as the authority, as opposed to how someone who goes about in a St Mirren polo shirt might be seen.

Finlay Laverty: Yes—I was born in Ferguslie Park, almost 100 yards from the stadium. It is about young people, particularly the groups that we engage with, having points of reference that are entirely different from a school or institution. It is important that such children, who tend to be disconnected from, or not engaged with, education, get that lift and inspiration, and that we find a way for them to connect with what turns them on.

George Adam: It just shows you, Finlay—us Feegie boys get everywhere.

Finlay Laverty: We get everywhere. Ye cannae keep us doon, George. [*Laughter*.]

The Convener: I thank George for a record number of mentions of St Mirren in one question.

George Adam: I did not even mention that we won the championship.

Finlay Laverty: I appreciate the St Mirren mentions, too.

The Convener: You are not getting invited back. [*Laughter*.]

Johann Lamont: There are many different issues here. My presumption is that young people who live in poverty are disadvantaged. It is more difficult for them to engage with education, and things that are external to school are huge determinants—that makes sense to me. However, some young people might live in poverty but do not live in chaotic families. There is a danger of collating the two issues. There are very basic things that we can do when the issue is simply about a lack of income.

I do not know whether the witnesses have seen the evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that was presented to us last week. The evidence suggested that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are achieving more in some places than they are in others. The problem is not just external factors; something is happening within schools and local authorities that is compounding disadvantage. I agree that schools on their own—or education on its own—are not

the causes of poverty and are not solely responsible for its complications, but they have the opportunities to mitigate some of the problems. The argument from that evidence is that some schools are doing that better than others.

From the EIS's point of view, or that of others, what is the explanation for that evidence and what can we do about it? There is a false characterisation that suggests that education does not take responsibility for any of the problem, and that it is always somebody else's fault. I do not agree with that view, but people could put a spin on that evidence to suggest that it is about the quality of teaching and about what is happening in individual schools and local authorities.

12:00

Andrea Bradley: There are a number of factors, including the quality of teaching and policy responses to the school community. There is also an issue of resources. For the greatest part of my career—15 years or so—I taught in an area of high deprivation in a department that was absolutely committed to social justice principles. We taught children in mixed-ability classes until the curriculum demanded otherwise. Only at the end of fourth year were classes set according to attainment, in order to access highers, intermediates and so on. We took great care to configure our classes along mixed-ability lines, with balance in relation to gender, kids' attendance and their requirements for additional support needs. There were mixed-ability groupings within the classroom, as well.

Over time, we found that the achievement and attainment of the young people in our department compared very favourably with that of kids in other departments of the school and across the local authority. That was down to the efforts of a core of individuals who were prepared to negotiate and argue for additional resourcing, so that we had smaller class sizes for a time and were able to use co-operative teaching in order to accommodate a mixed-ability approach. That core worked in that way for well over a decade. When cuts began to be made, class sizes began to creep up and the additional teaching support that went into those classes diminished, year on year. However, we had a repertoire of skills that enabled us to keep that approach going, and the outcomes for those children, in terms of their experience, and their achievement and attainment in English, were still favourable.

That kind of approach needs to be scaled up across the country. We need to be talking about such approaches. That is why I talked earlier about the importance of teachers undertaking professional learning about the nature, causes and consequences of poverty and about the kinds of interventions that research shows make a difference for disadvantaged kids. Approaches such as mixed-ability classes, formative assessments and class sizes that allow for the kind of creativity and enjoyment of the experience that has already been outlined by my colleagues are all expensive, but we know—and lots of international evidence points to the fact—that they are the things that really will turn around Scotland's equity record in relation to children's attainment.

Johann Lamont: Just to be clear, does the EIS accept that kids living in poverty in one part of Scotland fare better than others? Is your explanation of that related to what happens in the classroom?

Andrea Bradley: It is about what happens in the classroom, and it is also about resourcing and the resource interventions that are made.

Johann Lamont: I cannot be making myself clear. Is the cause of the difference between how a child who is living in poverty in one school fares, as opposed to how one fares in another school, a matter of the quality of teaching?

Andrea Bradley: No; that is not what I said. There will be consistently better outcomes for children who are living in poverty where conscious policy and resource decisions have been taken to mitigate the impact of poverty.

Johann Lamont: I am trying to establish whether the EIS accepts the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's findings that suggest that children with broadly similar experiences will do better in some places than others. Do you accept that and, if you do, are you trying to understand why children do better in one area than another? I completely accept your argument about resources in general, and about the whole-school approach where it is all about the support staff as well as the teacher in the classroom. I accept all of that, but are you looking at whether other things are happening in the system that mean that a disadvantaged child in one area is doing better than a disadvantaged child in another?

Andrea Bradley: I have outlined that there are variables across local authorities. We have talked about things such as instrumental music tuition and the fact that some local authorities do not allow charging for home economics, and that there are different policies on school uniform between schools, never mind between local authorities. There is huge variability in what goes on at school level, so it is difficult to say what factors cause the outcomes that are particular to a given locale, and the EIS does not have the kind of microdata that would enable us to arrive at such conclusions. From research—and from what our members tells us and our own experience—we know that, when

we have the correct resource interventions to support a sound policy rationale, it leads to better outcomes for children who live in poverty.

Johann Lamont: Does the EIS suggest that such an approach be defined at a national level and be expected to be delivered at a local level? What are the consequences of a policy that is driving the decision down to a school level, where, presumably, the variables would be even greater? Which is your preference? You described a very interesting model in which you would engage at school and, indeed, departmental level. Should it be the case that our education system would direct such matters at national or local government level? How do we iron out the difficulties, and what are the consequences of pushing the decision down to schools?

Andrea Bradley: There has to be a national conversation about that and how we organise the delivery of education. I will mention Finland again. It delivers education to children in mixed-ability classes, who are taught in that way from when they start school until they leave. They sit their formal exit qualifications at the end of that process. Children with additional support needs are taught in mainstream classes but are given adequate support in order that they can access the curriculum and succeed according to their interests and abilities. We need to look at adopting a similar approach to that.

I have talked about such an approach from my personal experience. That department had been following that approach for a long time before I went there, and it had sustained positive outcomes for children who were in that category. Poverty was not a new thing in the area that I taught in—it has been a long-standing issue in that part of the country—but that department in the school judged, very early on, that there would have to be different approaches to teaching those children our subject than traditionally had been the case in that school. A lot of thought, collaboration, professional discussion and, as I have said, additional staffing resource went into making that happen. We worked very closely with the additional support needs department, the educational psychologist and other external providers of support, and that was what led to successful outcomes for those young people.

Earlier, some of my colleagues spoke about young people who do not engage with education. In the 20 years in which I was teaching, and in the majority of my years in that school, I came across very few children and young people who did not want to engage in education. When we put in such support, make the experience enjoyable, show them the achievements that they are making from day to day, and have enough staff to talk to them, nurture them and build positive relationships with them, their school experience is a much more positive one and leads to better outcomes. However, we cannot get away from the fact that that is about having resource in relation to the quality of initial teacher education provision, on-going professional learning and having teachers and other specialists on the ground who are able to give day-to-day support to the provision of quality education for all our children and young people.

The Convener: The committee has just come back from Finland, as you know, and we cannot get away from the fact that the Finnish education system is about not just that but the way in which it approaches a lot of other things. Much as I am a huge fan of what they are doing in Finland, it is hard to take something in isolation and say, “That is what we should do with the Scottish model”.

Andrea Bradley: Yes, but we have aspirations to be the best place in the world for our children to grow up in. That will not happen unless we start to look at the—

The Convener: We should always take best practice and put it into a Scottish context as much as we possibly can.

Andrea Bradley: Exactly.

The Convener: Okay. I thank all our witnesses for attending today. That brings us to the end of the public part of the meeting. We will now move into private session.

12:09

Meeting continued in private until 12:52.

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