OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

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Session 5

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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE
2nd Meeting 2021, Session 5

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)
*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
*Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)
*Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)
*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
*Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
*Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
*Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Andrea Bradley (Educational Institute of Scotland)
Cheryl Burnett (National Parent Forum of Scotland)
Laura-Ann Currie (Education Scotland)
Jennifer King (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)
Ken Muir (General Teaching Council for Scotland)
Eileen Prior (Connect)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Gary Cocker

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 20 January 2021

[The Convener opened the meeting at 08:30]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, and welcome to the second meeting in 2021 of the Education and Skills Committee. I ask everyone to turn their phones to silent for the duration of the meeting so that they do not interrupt it. We might be interrupted by a fire alarm in the Parliament building, but we will endeavour to keep going through that. I apologise to members who are in the Parliament.

We have received a late apology from Iain Gray, and there is no substitute for Mr Gray this morning.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take items 3 and 4 in private. Does any member object to taking those items in private?

As no one objects, that is agreed.

Additional Support for Learning Review

08:31

The Convener: Our main agenda item is evidence on the additional support for learning review, which is also known as the Morgan report. If members wish to ask a question, or if panel members wish to contribute, please put an R in the chat box, and we will endeavour to ensure that everyone gets in.

The committee will hear from two panels of witnesses today. On our first panel, we have Eileen Prior, executive director of Connect; Andrea Bradley, assistant secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland; Ken Muir, chief executive of the General Teaching Council for Scotland; and Cheryl Burnett, co-vice-chair of the National Parent Forum of Scotland.

We will move straight to questions from members.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Good morning. The review stated:

"Unfortunately, we cannot assume ... that all"

teachers

"are signed up to the principles of inclusion and the presumption of mainstreaming."

Surely that is because many teachers have experience of children with needs that do not come with adequate support. The result is presenteeism rather than participation, on occasion. There is a presumption that the teacher will just get on with it, regardless of the impact on the child or other pupils in the class. Is it not dishonest to pretend to parents that their ASN child will get an education without that support?

For example, if a teacher has asked a class to participate in a discursive essay about school uniforms, a severe ASN child might, with support, draw someone in a school uniform, leaving the teacher to teach the rest of the class but, without a classroom assistant, for example, to do that, how will such a person participate in the work of the class? Do the witnesses agree that, without support, children with ASN can in effect be excluded rather than included even while in the classroom?

Eileen Prior (Connect): Good morning, and thank you for the invitation to be here.

To be honest, that example involving a youngster being in effect entertained with a drawing while the teacher teaches was a little unfortunate. However, the point is well made that young people and children who have additional

support needs need support by definition, and many teachers find themselves in a situation in which there is a lack of support for them and the child in the classroom. It is simply presenteeism, which is not inclusion. Inclusion means that a young person is included, is part of the class and is engaged with the learning in the classroom, and that has to be properly resourced.

Ken Muir (General Teaching Council for Scotland): I thank Mr Gibson for that question. One of the issues that teachers currently face is the significant increase in the number of children who present with additional support needs. We have seen a sixfold increase in the past decade; when teachers were teaching their classes 10 years ago, the number of children who presented with additional support needs was significantly lower.

The key to the issue is, first, ensuring that the teacher education programmes allow students who come into the teaching profession to be more skilled in dealing with the demands of mainstreaming and, secondly, ensuring that we provide good-quality additional professional learning for teachers who are already in the system. Over the past few years, there have been significant improvements in the number of courses and initial teacher education programmes that are available to enable teachers to be more skilled.

However, one of the issues is the wide range of additional support needs that teachers are expected to deal with in their classes. Kenneth Gibson is right to say that individual teachers getting as much support as they can makes a significant difference to the quality of the experience of the children and young people concerned.

The Convener: Ms Burnett and Ms Bradley both want to come in. I will then come back to Mr Gibson.

Cheryl Burnett (National Parent Forum of Scotland): Good morning. In reply to Mr Gibson's question, it is a concern. When a child has been assessed for a need that has been identified, a plan should be in place that enables that child or young person to be supported and the right mitigations and measures to be put in place to ensure that all the needs of that child are met throughout their education. I understand completely the pressures on teachers, but we have to be realistic. That young child has to go through education and there is an expectation that, when a child is put through school, as well as being safe and secure, they will be educated.

I agree with Eileen Prior that the example of using a colouring sheet to divert the attention of a young person is a poor one, but there is a duty and responsibility on the school and on the parent to ensure that the child's needs are met. I would expect there to be a robust strategy in place, following assessment, which is followed through by the teacher. As we know, every teacher has an accurate record of what a child's needs are. If the issue is to do with training or a lack of understanding of what additional support needs are, Ken Muir is right that there has to be more robust initial teacher education. All of that was picked up in Angela Morgan's review.

We have a great action plan that we will implement over the next year. It is a work in progress, but we all have a duty and a responsibility here. The presumption of mainstreaming has opened the door to ensuring that every child gets the opportunity and the chance to learn. It is very challenging in a mainstream class of 30 that has one teacher and not enough adequate support. Resources are an issue, but it is not the legislation or the guidance that is at fault; the issue is how they are implemented and how they are understood in a school environment.

Andrea Bradley (Educational Institute of Scotland): From the perspective of our members, there is no questioning of the principle of the presumption to mainstream. The EIS is wholly supportive of that, as are our members. A significant number of contributions reasserting the commitment to the presumption to mainstream have been made to our annual conference for the past 10 years or so.

As others have said, the real issue that our members experience in relation to the implementation of the associated legislation relates to resources. It is very difficult for teachers to address the array of needs that they have in their classes. Those needs are increasingly complex, at a time when class sizes are rising. Therefore, in addition to having to address the array of needs that all learners have—even if they do not have a certified additional support need—teachers also have significantly greater numbers of young people with additional support needs in large classes.

We are almost setting teachers up to fail by asking them to attend to all those issues at once with lessening levels of specialist support. That has been happening over a period of more than 10 years; it is certainly what our members have reported since the onset of austerity. There has been increasing need and increasing expectation around what the curriculum should deliver for all our young people, including those with additional support needs. Although it is right that we have bold ambitions for the curriculum, those expectations have risen at a time when there has been diminishing resource, and that is the crux of it.

Kenneth Gibson: Thank you. I used the example that I gave because it is a real-life example; I did not just invent it. The issue is whether the people who are presumed to be able to go into mainstreaming are able to participate effectively in the work of the class on all occasions.

It was mentioned that teachers are becoming more skilled in dealing with ASN pupils. However, if we are talking about 32 per cent of the pupil body, there could be five or even 10 young people with a variety of different needs in a classroom. How is it possible for a teacher to effectively teach pupils with a wide disparity of abilities and needs within one class without support? We know that the number of additional support needs teachers has not kept up with the quintupling of ASN pupil numbers in the past decade.

How do teachers ensure that the 68 per cent of pupils without additional support needs, including the most able, do not miss out on their education because the teacher, understandably, has to devote a disproportionate amount of time to ASN pupils? Clearly, that is a particular issue in schools where the attainment gap is widest, because they are likely to have more ASN pupils. The teachers in some of those classrooms and schools have a real uphill struggle.

How do we resolve those matters? We cannot sweep them under the carpet. We need more support for our teachers and our schools. What practical measures can be taken to improve the situation, not just for the pupils—whether ASN or not—but for the teachers, to make it much easier for them to teach the class and all those within it more effectively?

Ken Muir: Although Angela Morgan's report shines a light on the issues that you have raised around additional support needs and additional support for learning, I think that the answer to your question lies in what she suggests in her report about the bigger asks of the education system. Is there a shared understanding of what the education system should be like in the future? What do we value in education?

One of the features of her report is that she talks about the system being designed for most, but that although children with additional support needs are increasing in number, they tend to be an add-on—they are additional. In my mind, the answer lies in looking at what we want from our education system and at the extent to which we have an education system that genuinely values difference and diversity. For the longer term, that is the direction of travel for finding a way of resolving the problem. I think that that will include attaching greater significance to supporting the kind of children we are talking about who have additional support needs and recognising what they can bring to the education system.

Andrea Bradley: To respond to that question, we need to look at the context in which we are operating. At the end of 2018, as part of our value education, value teachers campaign, the EIS ran a survey of members that received more than 12,000 responses. One question in it was whether members agreed or disagreed with the statement:

"The provision for children/young people with additional support needs is adequate in my school."

Seventy-eight per cent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. That indicated to us that there was a real issue in the minds of teachers about the level of provision for young people. In fact, that featured among the top three areas of concern at the time, alongside pay and workload. Of those three top areas of concern for our members, stress around additional support needs provision came out the highest.

With regard to what we do about the scenario that we are now in, we have to look at the wider context of teacher workload and the demands on teachers, and not just at additional support needs. The survey also showed that teachers were 62 times more likely to report that they were stressed some or most of the time if they had also reported that they were struggling with additional support needs provision in the school or thought that that provision was inadequate.

08:45

When it comes to how we respond to that, there are a number of things that we need to think about. We need to think about the—[*Inaudible*.] We have to do something about class sizes in the interests not only of addressing teacher workload but of improving the quality of the experience that all individual young people, including those with additional support needs, receive. If we reduce class sizes, there will be more time for teachers to devote to all the young people in the class, particularly those who have additional needs, so that is something to think about.

We also have to think about the fact that, over the past 10 years or so, there has been a significant erosion in the number of people who have specialist additional support needs qualifications. As we move to the assumption and assertion that all teachers are teachers of ASN, which is true to an extent, we are seeing an erosion of the specialism that we used to have in the system that would allow teachers to consult colleagues who had such qualifications and specialist knowledge in order that they could enhance their practice or, indeed, have additional support with them in the classroom to work with young people, either individually or in small

groups, so that those young people were not just present at school but fully included and participating in all the activities that were going on.

On the issue of inclusive pedagogy, there has been a bit of debate recently about whether we should take an approach that is based on inclusive pedagogy, which is the assumption that all teachers are teachers of ASN, or whether we should look at more specialist provision. We would argue that it is not a case of either/or—one should not preclude the other; it should be both.

All teachers should have a sound knowledge of inclusive pedagogy and they should experience that as part of their initial teacher education experience, but it must also be part of an on-going process of continuing professional learning—[*Interruption*.] It needs to be high quality, it needs to be funded and it needs to be made available to teachers on an equitable basis, because one of the things that we have had reported to us by members over the period of austerity is that the opportunities for professional learning around ASN have dwindled. That issue must be addressed if we are to move forward decisively to achieve the original ambitions of the ASN legislation, which, as I have said, the EIS fully supports. However, we have been concerned for some time now—certainly since the onset of austerity—about the lack of resources to ensure successful implementation of that legislation and all the values that surround it.

The Convener: Thank you, Ms Bradley. My apologies for the fire alarm announcement that interrupted you and the feedback that it caused.

Eileen Prior: My perspective on the issue is that we are looking at the micro when we should be looking at the macro. We are looking at the question of what happens in a classroom when what Angela Morgan made clear in her report, which I think is what we should be focusing on, is the fact that we need a systemic approach to change. The voices of young people and parents need to be heard much more clearly, and we have to adopt the practice that is set out in the legislation. The principles of the legislation are absolutely sound; what fails young people—and, frankly, the system—is the fact that we do not follow through on those principles.

Young people who have additional support needs do not always have poor educational attainment, but they are seen as a problem; the fact that they are part of a deficit model around additional support needs has been exemplified in the conversation so far this morning. Many of the children and young people we are talking about have great assets and great gifts, but we are not really focusing on those. We are focusing on how they are an issue; on how they are a problem for teachers; and on how they are a cost, frankly, within local authorities. They are seen as a drag on academic attainment. As long as those attitudes pertain, we will not make any progress. We need to move away from the micro and start talking about the macro and how we change the system, because that is what Angela Morgan's report was really all about.

Cheryl Burnett: I totally agree with Eileen Prior. We have to look at the bigger picture.

Angela Morgan's report is absolutely accurate. We need to ensure that provision is consistent across Scotland. The NPFS made a full journey across Scotland, speaking directly to parents to find out about their real experiences of the impact of having a child with additional support needs in education in Scotland. To be honest, it is quite a damning report, in one sense. We have reached 2021—at that point, it was 2020—and we are now seeing the impact and what education is like for a parent who is trying to move through the journey of ASN.

When we look at the whole package, for want of a better phrase, we need to ensure that there is consistency. A robust strategy must be put in place and parents' voices must be heard, because they are the foundation of children's learning. We understand our children's needs. It can be frustrating to try to get that across to a school if a teacher or other member of staff who is responsible for ensuring that our voices are heard and our children's needs are met does not actually understand what those needs are.

Everything needs to change. We need to work in partnership with the school and the local authority and ensure that our voices are heard, because we understand our children's needs. We must ensure that those needs are recognised in the additional support plans or child plans that are implemented. That is not even considered when a parent tries to apply for a co-ordinated support plan. We must ensure that teachers understand what they are and why they are needed, so that they are not just words on paper or a little yellow dot on the child's folder, which teachers may or may not have read at the start of term.

It is frustrating for parents if they say that their child has dyslexia, autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder but people do not understand the connotation of additional support needs or what they are. They can arise because a child has been bullied or because of bereavement. A member spoke earlier about a gifted child, and it can be the case that a child is beyond what is being taught in the class and needs to be pushed further.

We need to be aware that, in effect, every child in Scotland has additional support needs. How can we support teachers to make education

consistent, fair and equitable? It is a challenge, and the review and report have highlighted that. I can see a way forward, but we all have to work together, and parents are a huge part of that, along with children and young people.

Kenneth Gibson: We have heard some excellent and helpful answers. The number of children with ASN has rocketed from 37,000 to 208,000 over the past decade, and our Scottish Parliament information centre briefing states:

> "it is an open question as to the extent that this trend reflects changes in identification and recording practices in schools or increases in need."

I think that most people would assume that it is both. However, in practical terms, to go back to the macro question, how can the huge increase in ASN teachers and other support staff that is needed to deal with the situation be funded so that we can keep pace?

It is not just about the culture in the classroom; we also need additional resources. We need to look at it from a practical and pragmatic point of view, because we are trying to relieve some of the pressure on teachers and some of the stress that was talked about earlier, and to ensure that pupils, whether or not they have additional support needs, are catered for effectively, have all the learning opportunities that they can get, and can get the most benefit from them.

Ken Muir: It is important to understand that, although teachers have a critical role to play, because they are face to face with the children and young people in their classes, dealing with additional support needs goes beyond just education.

One thing that will support children and young people—and, importantly, their parents, carers and families—is better integration of the services that have an impact on the child's ability to learn in the classroom. It is true that teachers have a critical role and, as I said, they need on-going career-long professional learning, especially as they have had to deal with a significant increase in the proportion of young people who present with additional support needs. As I also said, we need to consider how we prepare teachers to come into the teaching profession.

However, we need to bear in mind that the solution to the problem lies not only in education. The integration of services such as social work services, care services and health services, working alongside practitioners, has to be part of the recipe for making progress.

Andrea Bradley: Ken Muir is right that the solution does not rest solely in education. In considering the significant increase that we have seen in the number of young people with additional support needs over the past decade, we must look at the impact of austerity. Significantly larger numbers of children and young people are living in poverty. When children who have spent the first few years of their lives in poverty begin early years education, they are already at an educational disadvantage in areas such as language acquisition and even physical development.

There is a strong correlation between the incidence of additional support needs and the incidence and experience of poverty, so it is absolutely right to say that the solution does not rest only in the education system. To address poverty, we must look at all sorts of aspects of our economy and public services, including employment and so on.

In as far as education can deliver the solution, we must consider additional investment. For some time, there has been debate between national and local government about whose responsibility it is to divert additional resource to additional support needs provision. From our point of view, we do not mind who provides the additional funding, but somebody has to do it. We think that there should be collaboration between national and local government to solve that conundrum.

While the debate continues about who will fund ASN provision or provide more funding for education in general, the young people who are most disadvantaged by the current set of circumstances continue to be disadvantaged, and that is unjust. A solution needs to be found quickly. We cannot have another decade of rising levels of child poverty and rising levels of additional support needs, with resources remaining static or dwindling even further.

Eileen Prior: From the tenor of the conversation, my sense is that we are very much talking about a deficit model. Ken Muir and Andrea Bradley make valid points. It is absolutely the case that the incidence of ASN is linked to poverty and wider social ills—there is no doubt about that—but if we constantly look at the situation as one in which there is a deficit or a problem to be addressed, our mindset will be that we must deal with the children concerned and that there is a hurdle that must be overcome. Angela Morgan has made it absolutely clear that, if we reset our approach so that we are welcoming of the young people and their families and we identify their gifts, skills and attributes and welcome them into our schools, that mindset shift alone will help to move things forward.

We work with parents—the committee knows that that is our sphere. Angela Morgan's report made it crystal clear that parents feel that their knowledge and their attempts to make a contribution are constantly rebuffed—in fact, they are more than rebuffed; they are actually

unwelcome. Even though parents who have brought a child into the world know that child better than anyone and have a lifelong investment in them, their knowledge and their attempts to make a contribution are ignored or are not welcome in the child's school.

09:00

My point is that we have to pool resources. Some of the poorest parts of the world have inclusive schools, because their attitude is that everyone is welcome and everyone who contributes has a role, and that includes families and community. I am not saying that resource is not an issue; it is always an issue. However, there is an issue about our attitude and mindset about young people with additional support needs. To me, there is a question about whether it is helpful to talk about ASN. As Kenneth Gibson said, additional support needs have mushroomed in the past years. If more children are in that deficit place, where does that put the education system? We have to think carefully about that. It is an attitude within the system and in schools and local authorities that has to change.

The Convener: Before we go to Mr Johnson, Ms Burnett wants to come in on that point.

Cheryl Burnett: The 2019 census was clear that 93 per cent of children in mainstream classes had an additional support need. It is frustrating for parents. I am a parent of a child who has additional support needs, and I totally understand what it is like to approach a school and say that you are concerned about your child and you want to know how to move forward.

That is replicated in what we have seen nationally. As Eileen Prior said, it is difficult to go to school to raise a concern and then feel as though your voice has not been heard. You do not know where to go because you do not understand the legislation and guidance; there is no booklet, signpost or one-stop shop that sets out the journey that parents need to take and what their expectations should be.

As Andrea Bradley said, it is a wide-ranging journey that is not limited to education, and parents appreciate that. They might have to go through the health board, their general practitioner, child and adolescent mental health services or another health professional to be able to move forward and create a joined-up approach. It is not always the case. Some parents do not understand what a co-ordinated support plan is or that other professionals can come in to support their child. On occasion, a school can be a barrier.

For all that negativity, there is a lot of positivity. There are a lot of good examples of things that work well in Scotland. There are areas where we are supposed to share best practice and things that have worked well, and there are a lot of good examples of that in Edinburgh and Glasgow, as well as some in South Lanarkshire. We have to be able to work together and take a joined-up approach.

Parents become experts. Unfortunately, we have to research the guidance and legislation to see where we stand. There is a recommendation in Angela Morgan's report about working together and in partnership, and the key word there should be "partnership". The first word should be communication. Through communication, we can start to build a conversation, have a starter for 10, open that door, and make it welcoming. For a parent, it should never be challenging. A parent should never be made to feel as though their voice has not been heard and that it does not mean anything, because that is demeaning. A parent can feel soul-destroyed when they leave a school believing that the school does not get it, because it does not see what the parent sees in the house.

As I said, for all the negativity, we are moving forward. We have Angela Morgan's review and recommendations, and we now have an action plan that we hope will prove to be the foundation from which we can move forward and start turning these things into a more positive journey for parents, children and young people.

The Convener: Before I bring in Daniel Johnson, I will ask a question, and our witnesses can perhaps weave their answers to it into their answers to future questions. You have mentioned a lot of places and that there is no one-stop shop for parents to go to. Where does Enquire sit in that landscape? Do you have any experience of Enquire and is it working well as an advocacy service that has been funded by the Government?

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I would like to reinforce what Eileen Prior said. In so doing, I will remind the committee of my interests, in that I have a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and I am a trustee of the ADHD Foundation.

In 1982, when I first started school, I would not have appeared in the ASN statistics. That certainly did not mean that I did not have an additional support need back then, because I very much did, as my school reports would have told you. I could not concentrate in class, I fidgeted and I did not keep up. I remember that, on one of my very first days at school, when everyone was asked to put 10 counting bricks together, I was the very last child to finish that by some margin.

My additional support need did not suddenly appear when the definition appeared; it always existed. That is true of the vast bulk of the children we are talking about. The needs are not new, but

we have become much better at identifying them. There is the addition of children who might previously have been in specialist education, but the vast bulk of the numbers are the result of a better understanding.

I will set out my key question. I completely accept that we need more resource, but we must also ensure that teachers are properly skilled. In initial teacher education, how will we progress the agenda? At least one in five children with a neurodevelopmental disorder will be diagnosable; some children will be beyond the diagnosable bracket but will have at least some traits.

I am interested in the panel's perspective on how we take forward initial teacher education to improve teachers' skills and enable them to better address the needs of children who have issues, whether or not they have been identified in the ASN bracket.

Eileen Prior: On the convener's question about Enquire, like Cheryl Burnett, my family had a young person with a learning disability, who is now an adult, so I regularly availed myself of Enquire's services. Enquire is not an advocacy service; it provides advice and information about legislation and policy. It points people to what the policy and legislation say, but it does not provide advocacy. It is fair to say that Enquire does not go into the fine detail of a child's issues—it is not there for that and that is not possible. It clarifies what the legislation says. As we all know, legislation and policy sometimes have yawning gaps in their meaning. For example, what does "reasonable" mean? It is a great word, but that is an issue.

Daniel Johnson is absolutely right about initial teacher education. I was at school many years ago, and my secondary school class had in it at least three people who, looking back, I can say had autism or whatever. Identification is often the issue.

My organisation and I have raised many times the point that initial teacher education provides little insight for new teachers into the partnerships that they will enter into with others in their school, such as classroom assistants; with others who provide support, such as social workers, youth workers or healthcare staff such as physiotherapists and speech and language therapists; and with parents.

Initial teacher education takes an extremely light approach, but that places all the responsibility on the teacher's shoulders. In effect, that says that the classroom teacher is the saviour, whereas they are part of a team. We talk all the time about the team that is around a child. I am not very fond of that phrase, but the teacher's role is to be part of a team that supports a child. The team includes parents and other family members and it might include other professionals and staff in a school.

When someone comes out of initial teacher education, it is important that they have an understanding of the bigger picture and the wider group of people who will support the young people in their class. The role of parents, and their function as the primary educator and person who has the lifelong commitment to and engagement with the child, is what sets them apart. Parents of a child with a disability often know much more about the condition than teachers do, because the parents have taken a lot of time to research it. They are a resource that, currently, schools rarely use effectively.

Ken Muir: In response to Mr Johnson's question and what Eileen Prior said, as many of you know, one of the roles of the General Teaching Council for Scotland is to accredit the initial teacher education programmes. To give some reassurance, the picture has changed quite significantly in recent years. To some extent, the catalyst for that was the committee's 2017 report entitled "How is Additional Support for Learning working in practice?". As a result of that report, the institutions that offer teacher education have closely considered their programmes and ensured that they have embedded the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion. In practice, that means that, when we accredit those programmes, the institutions are asked to provide evidence of how they will do a number of things, such as supporting the students' understanding of the getting it right for every child agenda and what is meant by inclusion. It is difficult for a teacher education programme—particularly a one-year programme—to cover the required range of additional support needs, which we have heard about this morning.

I reassure Eileen Prior that one of the changes that GTC Scotland has made through its accreditation criteria is that the institutions that are presenting their programmes to us are asked to provide evidence of areas relating to the students' understanding of parental involvement and how other services and providers link with the education system.

As I said at the beginning, in response to Mr Gibson's question, teacher education has an important role to play. However, as Andrea Bradley said, it is not just about teacher education programmes. The programmes have a critical role to play but, as the different types of additional support needs change and continue to grow, we also need to look at how we support early-career teachers who are going through their probation, and their career-long professional learning.

Andrea Bradley: I echo what Ken Muir said about the recent sharpened focus on additional

support needs in initial teacher education. The EIS has been interested in that alongside the emphasis on equality matters in initial teacher education programmes. In recent years, we have had a number of conversations with university heads of schools of education about those areas. For a time, we were concerned that some of the inputs around those areas were too light, so it is good that Ken Muir is able to report an improved picture in that regard in recent years.

The point about what can be achieved for student teachers in a year-long course is well made. It is already a packed course in which teachers in training must have a balance of theory and in-school practice. An array of demands is made in that time—it is a very fast year. Having career-long professional learning at all stages of a teacher's career beyond their initial teacher education is absolutely critical. As I said earlier, teachers have been reporting significant deficits in that area for some time. All professional learning is not about courses, of course—that is not how teachers should experience professional learning—but there has been a shrinkage in the number of courses that are available. Courses are one form of learning, but they require funding, and we have seen significant cuts in them.

In response to that, the EIS has, over the past couple of years, provided professional learning to members specifically on additional support needs, to try to look at them generally and specifically. The array of needs can be difficult to cover in a very short time, particularly in one-year initial teacher education courses.

09:15

I want to pick up on something that Eileen Prior said. I have not meant at all to give the impression that our members perceive young people to be the problem. In engaging with us on additional support needs, our members are absolutely and earnestly committed to young people with such needs, and they see it as wholly unjust that they are not being provided with the support that they require. Many of them see themselves very much as partners with parents in trying to advocate for young people to get the best provision that they can, but they frequently find themselves having to jump through bureaucratic hoops that take a long time to go through.

There seems to be a lot of gatekeeping around what we understand to be scarce resources. I think that some of the lack of engagement with parents is to do with the gatekeeping behaviour that has emerged because everybody knows that there are currently not enough resources to go around in the education sector and for additional support needs specifically.

Cheryl Burnett: [*Inaudible*.]—your earlier point, convener, regarding Enquire. Enquire is one piece of a huge jigsaw puzzle for parents. As I said, it would be phenomenal to have a one-stop shop for parents to access, but the realistic picture is that Enquire has a specific journey, specific points and specific information. It supports transition and placement, and it has a great booklet that explains to parents what happens. It covers the legislation, guidance, rights and what to expect but, as Eileen Prior rightly said, that is not a mediation or advocacy service.

There are other really good organisations and charities that support parents. The problem is that there is nowhere to find that out. It is like Chinese whispers. People may find one and speak to somebody, move on and then move on again. It is about making sure that the information is readily available to parents. I did not know about Enquire at the start of my child's ASN journey. It is about how people find things out as they move on.

I keep using the word "journey" because that is what it is. The journey does not stagnate; it evolves and moves. It is not a straight path.

I totally understand what was said about initial teacher education, but we have to remember that teachers are supported by pupil support assistants. Another element in classroom support is ensuring that the pupil support assistants or support for learning assistants get the right training, and that interventions and mitigations are put in place so that they can follow through on their job.

Teachers are there to create class plans and to work out what the lessons will be and how they will move forward the child's education and meet their needs, but it goes back to resource. That has to be resourced, and the skills have to be learned and built on. We cannot expect somebody who has been employed as a support assistant to come in and understand what the child's needs are.

I am very much aware that a partnership is involved, but it is about communication. We all have to talk to each other, because, if we do not, the walls will come back up, there will be barriers, and the journey will become even more arduous to navigate through. I completely understand that foundations are starting to be laid through initial teacher education, and I agree with what Andrea Bradley said about career-long professional learning, but it is about how that is managed. If it is not compulsory, will it be done?

There is an expectation or presumption of mainstreaming. A lot of children and young people are in early years settings, in childcare or in primary school and transitioning into secondary school, and there is support beyond that. There

are charities that do all the work behind the scenes, but it is never brought to the forefront in support for schools, because that comes back to funding. It could be down to the pupil equity fund.

We talk about empowering schools and parents, the national improvement framework, and parents, carers and children being at the heart of the approach, but there needs to be a consistent journey. We need to support each other.

Daniel Johnson: I want to unpack the point about the one year of ITE. I would challenge Cheryl Burnett and Ken Muir on whether it is really an either/or situation. Looking particularly at neurodevelopmental disorders, we are talking about improved understanding of executive functions, focus and emotional regulation. We are also talking about conditions that probably have an impact on a significant proportion of the classroom. Is it a question of an additional element to ITE and, indeed, continuous professional development, or is it about embedding something that cuts across the whole of teaching practice? Surely, many of the approaches that would improve focus and emotional regulation as well as understanding of how children actually learn and how different brains learn would benefit not just the children who are diagnosable but all children. Are we talking about something that should be layered across teacher education rather than an additional element to it? Is that the solution, at least in part?

The Convener: That question was directed at Mr Muir, but I am going to bring Eileen Prior back in first.

Eileen Prior: I agree absolutely with Daniel Johnson because, if it is good for one child, it is very likely to be good for many children. For example, if teachers adopt approaches that address visual learners, that will also help visual learners in the class who do not have a diagnosis. That is an example.

You are absolutely right that it is about a wider understanding rather than a teacher trying to understand every single diagnosis in their class—the diagnoses of all those children and young people. We have the building blocks in place but, for example, CSPs, which Cheryl Burnett mentioned, are like hens' teeth now. Local authorities do not want to use CSPs; they want to use the child's plan. We have come across many parents who have been told by local authorities that they do not do CSPs now. You cannot just not do a CSP—it is a requirement and a legal right. That is why local authorities do not want them, of course: they place a burden, as they see it, on them to provide support for children. As long as we have those attitudes and approaches in local authorities—the line of least resistance and doing the bare minimum in resource terms—we have a challenge, and that is the kind of challenge that Angela Morgan's report highlighted.

The Convener: Before the witnesses respond to that, Mr Greer has a question on CSPs.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): On what Eileen Prior has just said, what is the difference between a CSP and the other plans that are now offered by local authorities? How effective are the CSPs, which are dwindling in number? Has the number of CSPs declined because those that are left are still resulting in adequate support being delivered, or has there been a corresponding erosion in the quality of CSPs?

The Convener: I will go back to Mr Muir and Ms Bradley on Daniel Johnson's direct question to them, and then I will come to Ms Burnett.

Ken Muir: I can give Mr Johnson some reassurance, based on what I said earlier about initial teacher education. I can give a guarantee that every initial teacher education programme that GTC Scotland accredits is underpinned by a requirement that teachers understand what is meant by inclusive practice and the methodologies that they can adopt to ensure that their practice is inclusive. The initial teacher education programmes are predicated on GTC Scotland's professional standards, which are very values based, and social justice is an important part of that. The kind of ITE programmes that we are seeing now are very different from those that we saw—dare I say it—even five years ago.

It is important to stress that initial teacher education programmes are not year-long programmes. A postgraduate programme is 36 weeks, 18 weeks of which are on placement. Therefore, the initial teacher education institutions have 18 weeks in which to cover a wide range of things to ensure that a student teacher is in a position to go into their probationary year. We have talked a lot about the importance of career-long professional learning for teachers who are newly qualified and in service. As I said in response to Mr Gibson's question, that is a critical part of how we address some of the issues that we are facing now in respect of additional support for learning.

Andrea Bradley: In response to Daniel Johnson's question, I say simply that the approach should involve both: there should be an embedding of the principles of inclusion and inclusive pedagogy across the range of ITE and CLPL experience, but there also has to be some specificity in teachers' understanding. They perhaps do not have to understand every single condition, because there are so many of them and so many complexities, given that we are dealing with many thousands of individual young people. Teachers cannot possibly cover every single

condition. However, there could be an understanding of those conditions that present most commonly. For example, ADHD presents quite commonly, so it is important for teachers to understand the nature of the condition and the particular challenges for young people who experience it. We need a combination of both of those things.

The question about CSPs relates a little bit to what I started to say about there being some gatekeeping around resources. Obviously, because of CSPs' statutory nature, there is much closer monitoring of their number and the outcomes from them. Because of that enhanced scrutiny of CSPs, there is perhaps more of a reluctance to open them for young people than is the case for child plans, which are not statutory. That is one issue that members have reported to us as an element of the kind of manoeuvring and perhaps massaging of the bureaucracy to manage what are scarce resources and slow down or inhibit access to the limited resources that are available.

Cheryl Burnett: To reply to Daniel Johnson's comment regarding a typical child who potentially has autism spectrum disorder or ADHD and using visual cues as they are a visual learner, I absolutely agree that such strategies are great, but how do we resource them? At the end of the day, they need to be resourced, and they take additional time for teachers. As Ken Muir said, initial teacher education lasts for 36 weeks or whatever, with 18 weeks on a placement. There is a lot for a person to take on board.

However, health and wellbeing is factored into the curriculum for excellence and the national improvement framework, so we all have a duty and responsibility in that regard. Regardless of whether someone is a teacher, a member of support staff or any other member of staff, we should all have an awareness that children will present differently. We are not all born the same way. We all think differently, and we are independent. For children with additional support needs and potentially autism spectrum disorder, their brains are just wired differently. It is not that they cannot do the work; we just need to find an alternative way to switch on that little light bulb and to support those children.

It is not fair to simply dismiss the work that teachers do, or to say, "Well, not all teachers do those things." We must recognise that a phenomenal number of teachers in Scotland think outside the box and go above and beyond what is expected of them in a school day to support children and young people in their learning.

09:30

We need to think about how we build that collective shared practice, for want of a better term, so that it can be widely recognised as a potential strategy for support. We have the national improvement hub, where Education Scotland stores a lot of its strategies and information for teachers to access. It is open to all. We need to ensure that practice is consistent and that there are places that teachers can go to get information.

On Ross Greer's point, there is a lack of understanding about co-ordinated support plans. To be honest, not many parents even know that such plans exist—they assume that the child's plan covers everything. As I said earlier, I travelled across Scotland prior to the publication of the report in order to gather views from parents. When I asked, "Do you know what plan your child has?" the majority of parents said, "No. What is it?" because the plans all have different names. The plan for their child could be a child's plan, an individual education plan, an additional support for learning plan or, in Falkirk, a form 4 action plan. On the rare occasion that I heard a parent say that they had applied for a co-ordinated support plan, they said that the experience had been challenging and horrific and that there was no joined-up approach.

Parents can see that, regardless of a child's additional support needs, there are a lot of issues with the CSP. I am very much aware that the co-ordinated support plan is about to be reviewed. Many parents will find that their child meets the first four criteria for the plan, but what always trips them up is the question of what is classified as significant. What does that mean for a parent or a child, an education authority or the wider partners that are involved in the multi-agency approach? In order to move forward, that needs to be clear.

As was mentioned earlier, funding is an issue. I agree with what Andrea Bradley said about whether there could be a holding pattern. If there is a commitment to a CSP, the funding essentially follows the child, whereas all the other plans, although they tick the boxes and put in place support strategies and recommendations, are not legally binding and can therefore be removed at any point.

As parents, we find that the process is a challenge—it becomes a battle or fight. To be quite honest, as a parent, you feel like a washing machine on a rinse-and-repeat cycle. Every year, you go through the same situation—you set out what your child's issues are and hear, "That's great—we'll put something in place." It then comes down to the fact that the funding is not ring fenced so the support goes, or you lose the member of staff who understands your child. With regard to

the questions from Daniel Johnson and Ross Greer, there are multiple factors at play.

Ken Muir: In response to Mr Johnson's query about the ITE programmes and what Andrea Bradley said about the specific learning difficulties that some youngsters have, there is a requirement on the ITE institutions to consider the main areas of learning difficulty, such as autism, dyslexia, ADHD, Tourette syndrome and so on.

As Cheryl Burnett suggested, there is a lot of good practice out there; the issue is whether teachers have the time to look at those examples. The GTC recently published a number of professional guides to complement the professional standards. Four of those guides focus on additional support needs—there is one on equality and diversity, one on autism, one on dyslexia, and one on neurological disorders. Teachers find the guides useful but, equally, some teachers say, "We know they're there, and we know that Education Scotland's improvement hub has a lot of resources, but we don't have the time." How do we create the space and time to allow teachers to take advantage of the very good resources and opportunities for professional learning that are out there?

The Convener: I have three members—Rona Mackay, Beatrice Wishart and Jamie Greene—wanting to come in. If any other members have questions, it would be helpful if they could put an R in the chat box. We will go to Ms Mackay first.

She is not there, so we will go to Ms Wishart.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Following on from the discussion about funds being ring fenced—or not, as the case may be—how consistent are local authority finance returns in their identification of spending on additional support for learning?

Andrea Bradley: As I am sure the committee is aware, it is difficult to keep track of how local authorities address the range of additional support needs, the mechanisms that they have in place and the funding that is attributed, because they have different means by which they categorise, classify and record those needs. That disparity makes it difficult to make comparisons. In recent years, in our experience, trying to get a national or a local authority picture in that respect has been like nailing jelly to the wall—it is very slippery, and we are not always comparing like with like.

The Convener: Before we go to Mr Muir, Mr Mundell has a brief supplementary question on rural issues.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): The witnesses have mentioned the impact of pupil equity funding on support for ASN. Do they have any views on the situation in smaller schools? There are a number of such schools in my constituency, which—along with similar schools across Scotland—do not receive any pupil equity funding. They often have only a single teacher and limited time with classroom assistants. Is there a difference in those schools, and does that need to be addressed?

Andrea Bradley: All the money that goes into schools is to be welcomed, but the EIS sees PEF as an imperfect funding mechanism, for the reasons that Oliver Mundell outlined. Not all schools receive PEF, although in the past 12 to 18 months there has been an increase in the number of schools that receive those additional funds. In the absence of differently shaped funding streams, that has to be a good thing.

As I said earlier, there is a high correlation between the incidence of poverty and the incidence of additional support needs. I know that many schools are channelling a lot of their PEF money towards additional support needs. However, that funding is for young people who are living in poverty, and not all young people who have additional support needs live in poverty or attend schools that receive PEF. As a means of addressing the issue of additional support needs in its entirety, therefore, PEF is not adequate and it cannot be the answer. It may be a partial answer for the time being, but the EIS does not see it as a means to fund provision for additional support needs in the long term.

Ken Muir: Beatrice Wishart's question might better be answered by Jennifer King in the next session, from the perspective of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland.

In response to Oliver Mundell's question, there is a way ahead for smaller schools and for those that do not necessarily have access to resources on site. There is potential through the work of the regional improvement collaboratives, which have been brought in to provide more localised support. In addition, the empowerment agenda, which gives schools and headteachers a greater degree of empowerment in how they use any funding that comes to them, is perhaps a way—albeit that it has been sitting on the back burner over the past nine or 10 months—by which some of the issues that Mr Mundell raised might be better addressed in the future.

Cheryl Burnett: The NPFS is fully aware of the pressures on not just rural schools but remote schools; they are two different things. There are urban and rural schools, and a rural—[*Inaudible*.]—on the outer fringes of society may not get access to a lot of the resources. I spoke earlier about organisations that are able to interlink and support parents. Outwith my position as the NPFS vice-chair, I represent parents through the

organisation in South Lanarkshire, which is made up of urban, rural and remote areas.

Schools face significant challenges, which are not just about the pressures on teaching. A remote school could have just six pupils for whom it is not entitled to pupil equity funding. In addition, a lot of community-driven support initiatives have to be put in place, because it is quite a challenge to get access to external support and bring it back internally to those schools. The question is how we move forward with that.

I agree with Ken Muir that regional improvement collaboratives have a role to play not only in sharing practice, but in finding new ways forward. That includes adapting and implementing—that is the key word—all the recommendations that Angela Morgan envisioned in her review. We talked about inclusion—it should not matter whether a child is in an inner-city school or a remote or rural school that has five or six pupils. It is about equity, and we need to find a balance as we move forward.

Beatrice Wishart: [*Inaudible*.]—the next panel the same question.

I have a brief question for Andrea Bradley. The EIS, in its 2019 report on "Additional Support for Learning in Scottish school education: Exploring the gap between promise and practice", expressed concerns about

"a creeping undervaluing of specialism"

and society's undervaluing

"of work that is predominantly carried out by women",

which is

"often ... perceived as work that 'anyone can do'".

Do you have any comments, or an update, on what the report said?

Andrea Bradley: I do not have an update. In our report, we tried to reflect what EIS members had told us about their experiences as additional support needs teachers. Increasingly, in recent years, any cover that is required in schools has been sought from within the additional support needs team. Teachers who ordinarily work with individuals or small groups in whole-class settings are being pulled from that provision in order to cover classes for absent teachers; in the secondary sector, they are sometimes expected to provide cover outside their specialist subject area.

A similar thing has been happening in the primary sector. Schools have employed people—often funded by PEF money—to work with groups of young people who have additional support needs that are linked to their socioeconomic background. However, those teachers find that, because of the lack of availability of supply teachers or of funding to pay for supply teaching, when there is a demand for cover, they are pulled from the extra provision that they give to those vulnerable young people in order to cover classes instead. That has resulted in a sporadic teaching experience for young people with ASN, and a sense that the work that ASN teachers do with those young people is not valued.

The second comment that you quoted from the 2019 report relates to ASN assistants. That issue came through a little in Angela Morgan's report, which talked about the need to invest in professional learning for pupil support assistants, enhance the status of the role and look again at the remuneration for it. To be frank, the pay that that staff cohort receives is paltry, considering their skills and the importance of the work that they do.

Again, that work is done predominantly by women, so we began to get a sense that there was something in the gendered nature of that cohort of the workforce. Could there be some correlation between the lack of status and value and the poor remuneration for what is an important job, and the fact that the majority of that work is carried out by women? We began to ask some questions around that.

09:45

Ken Muir: In response to Andrea Bradley's point about the status of pupil support assistants, we all recognise the wonderful job that many of them do in supporting children and young people who have additional support needs. In other jurisdictions, teaching councils have begun to operate a registration system for PSAs as a means of improving their status and demonstrating their value.

To go back to an important point that was picked up earlier, registration brings with it a requirement to engage in professional learning. If registration for PSAs were to apply in Scotland—currently, it does not—it would allow PSAs to gain from that benefit.

The Convener: We now go to Ms Mackay. Two other members still want to ask questions, and we are running up against the time, so if everyone could be succinct in their questions and answers, that would be fantastic.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Some points in my question have been covered, so we can perhaps keep this brief.

How far can a universally designed system meet the needs of all learners? I am interested in the balance of specialist and universal support, which Andrea Bradley has talked about. She also mentioned a wall of red tape that teachers face in

trying to access more support. How far can teachers differentiate in the classroom? Do they have to stick to a local authority plan? How much autonomy do they have?

Andrea Bradley: With regard to the curriculum and assessment, a cornerstone principle of curriculum for excellence is teacher professional judgment and autonomy in relation to such matters. In our view, teachers should not be acting alone. Eileen Prior painted quite a bleak picture of initial teacher education whereby teachers are set up to be the solitary heroes of the hour—I know that is a cliché—rather than one member of a team around the child.

Although teachers have a degree of professional autonomy in the curriculum, assessment and so on, we want them to have the time to collaborate with and learn from colleagues. That speaks to what was discussed earlier regarding the empowerment agenda. It is supposed to be about enabling greater collaboration not just among teachers but between teachers and other partners and among those other partners, all in the interests of learning and teaching and of individual children and young people.

The extent to which teachers can differentiate is an integral part of teaching, learning and assessment. They have to differentiate in how they choose their resources and materials for teaching; in the assessment methodology that they use; and in how they give feedback to young people or encourage them to give feedback to one another or to self-assess. Differentiation is built into that; there is not really any prescription around what must be taught, when and how—certainly, there should not be. If that was teachers' experience, we would be very concerned to learn of it, whether it was a result of local authority direction or direction from school management teams. We want professional autonomy to be at the heart of how teachers work, with an element of collaboration around that.

To return to Ms Mackay's original question about the relationship between inclusive pedagogy and understanding knowledge and specific needs, we must have both.

Ken Muir: Ms Mackay raised an interesting point, which I will try to address at the outset. Angela Morgan's report asks us to consider the bigger questions—for example, what kind of education system we want in the future. She talks about an aspiration for learning for life, with everything that flows from that being up for consideration. That ties in with the suggestion from the international council of education advisers regarding a universally designed system that embraces all children and young people from the start, as opposed to a system that is fit for the majority of pupils but that treats those with additional support needs as additions to that system.

We talked earlier about the need for a mindset shift in Scottish education. I think that we are undergoing that mindset shift now and that teachers, to an individual, are determined to do the very best for all of the children in their classes. The difficulty is resourcing. I include time as a resource because, as I said earlier, it is critical that student teachers, probationers and teachers who are in service are given the time to gain the skills, knowledge and understanding to allow them to deal with the full range of young people.

Ms Mackay's question also touches on what we value in education. We are currently going through a shift, which is explicit in the context of the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Should we have a system that places greater importance on young people as they become older? There is a view that the current system is predicated on that basis. Alternatively, should we acknowledge the importance of universal design that the ICEA talks about, and the need to build a system for all children and young people from the outset and to ensure that teachers are skilled in dealing with the full range of young people in our schools?

Eileen Prior: I echo what Ken Muir has said. It comes down to the fundamental question of what we want education to be. I made a point earlier about the deficit model, which says that a child with additional support needs is a drag on attainment. Under that model, our system is about producing young people for university. If someone is not in that category, they will just be entertained with drawings. Obviously that is not the case all the time, but there is a mindset in some schools—it has to be said—that our purpose is simply to get young people through their qualifications. As long as we have folk in our education system who see that as the purpose of the system, we will struggle.

We have to reset what the education system is about and what it is for. As a parent, I believe that it is about preparing young people for their future and enabling them to sustain themselves and to be contributing adults. For some, supporting them in that way will mean qualifications and university, but for a whole load more it will mean other things. We have to reset our approach and our aspirations for young people.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Just before the Covid lockdowns, I managed to squeeze in a visit to a school. I took part in a secondary school class in my region on the west coast. At one point, I had a private conversation with the teacher, who said that the problem that she had was a triple whammy: for a wide range of reasons, the school had a higher proportion of additional support needs pupils, the size of the

classroom was a challenge and she had lost a classroom assistant, which meant that around a third of the pupils in her class were additional support needs students. The biggest thing that she felt when she went home at night was guilt that she was not giving enough attention to those with additional support needs to help them to have a meaningful classroom experience and guilt about those who she felt unable to spend one-to-one time with, to help them and push them further.

I know that we have talked a lot about resources and money and who is responsible for what, and that is the same as the conversation that the committee has internally. What immediate things could we do to alleviate the situation for teachers, who are clearly struggling, not in every circumstance but in some parts of the country?

The Convener: Do any of the witnesses want to come in on that?

Andrea Bradley: In the short term, there could be honesty about additional support needs and the lack of adequate resourcing. Our members certainly expressed frustration at the review's remit when it was made known that the review was not going to look at resources. For many years, the EIS had been raising with national Government, local government, and anybody else who would listen the concerns that our members had about underresourcing. We were initially reluctant to give our support to the advisory group for additional support for learning, as it was formerly known, and for the review to go ahead because we thought that it would stall on a question to which we already knew the answer.

In the interim, what Jamie Greene has described is a really common experience among teachers in mainstream education. They feel that they are not able to do the best that they want to do by the young people, their parents and their school communities, and that is a demoralising position to be in. Although I hope that the question of resources is being looked at and will be resolved as a matter of urgency, at least we can be honest with teachers that it is not their fault and that they cannot attend to all those things at the same time. They have large class sizes and have among the highest levels of class contact recorded in the OECD, so they do not have enough time to spend on preparation or engaging in the professional learning that Ken Muir and I have talked about. Teachers face an array of interrelated issues, and being honest, up front, here and now, would go some way towards addressing the questions around their morale.

Ken Muir: As Andrea Bradley suggested, Mr Greene's experience with that teacher characterises the feelings of many teachers. They want to do their very best but they are unable to. As an immediate response to a teacher in that situation, I would always reassure them that they are not the sole solution to the problem and that the headteacher and other senior leaders within the school should be supporting the teacher to find other support mechanisms. That might be services outwith the school coming in to support the children and young people, particularly when they lose a PSA or they are in an area of high disadvantage with a large number of children with additional support needs.

It goes back to what I said earlier: it is very easy to suggest that the teacher in the classroom, the school or, indeed, the local authority itself is a solution to the problem. The solution is much more about the integrated support that is available so that these children and young people who have additional support needs are better able to learn from the experience that they get in the classroom from teachers because of the support that they and their families get elsewhere.

Cheryl Burnett: I would like to take a different slant on that. Parents are aware that teachers' hands are effectively tied and they know what they can and cannot achieve in class. However, from another perspective, we have a community out there that supports schools. We need to stop looking at schools as just being the problem or as just being a wee insular bubble. We need to take a more community-based, outward approach going inwards, so that we get parents who have upskilled because they really understand the complex needs of some children who have additional support needs, such as children with physical disabilities, or because they have had to understand their own children's conditions. It is about using the skill sets of those parents and communities, as well as allowing charitable or community organisations to come into a school.

I totally understand that that would have been great pre-Covid, and I know that we face many challenges because of the impact of Covid and the fact that we cannot go into a school, but there must be other platforms and mechanisms that we can use to support teachers. A lot of voluntary organisations out there have a great depth of knowledge and skill sets. Even if the matter comes down to resources, a teacher should never think, as they walk away from a class, that they have failed a child.

I reiterate that the issue is about partnership. We all have a duty and responsibility, and we should all work together, because we all bring our individual skills to the table. We need to form a picture through the recommendations in Angela Morgan's review to ensure that we will never be in a position in which a teacher thinks that they have failed a child or multiple children. A parent should not have to think that they cannot support their child and that they do not know where else to go.

Walls are slowly coming down, but we have to be clear on the importance of effective, transparent communication—down to the translation of information, with the removal of jargon—to ensure that the picture becomes whole and is not the fragmented jigsaw that we currently experience.

10:00

Jamie Greene: This year has obviously been unusual. Because of Covid, many parents are home schooling their children, and teachers are trying their best to get around everyone in their class virtually while also trying to look after some pupils in the classroom. As we emerge from Covid, how do we help the recovery process, given that many young people with ASN will have been at home and might have missed the one-to-one interaction with the teacher that they need the most?

The Convener: I will bring in Mr Greer to ask his question, and hopefully we can wrap the questions up with final answers.

Ross Greer: I go back to the previous discussion on pupil support assistants and particularly to what Andrea Bradley said. Should a PSA who is assigned specifically to work with a child with additional support needs be required to have some kind of qualification in ASN?

I recognise what has been said about how that role should justify greater remuneration and so on. If those assistants are designated to support children with additional needs, should there be a requirement for some level of training or qualification in that area?

Eileen Prior: In response to Mr Greer's question, the situation with regard to training and qualifications of ASN assistants—different local authorities call them different things—is patchy. Parents have an expectation that an individual who works with their child—whether that child has a disability or a learning difficulty—should have a clear understanding of strategies to work with them. It comes down to a sense that those individuals should have specific training and learning opportunities, so that they are able to undertake that role effectively.

On a more general point, I bring us back to what Angela Morgan said in her report. We need to shift to a mindset that says that children and young people who have additional support needs are not a problem and that those of them who are in schools require a more inclusive approach from local authorities to young people and their parents and families. The purpose of education and of what we do—whether in school or elsewhere—is to support each young person in their growth and development as an individual.

The work that we have done and the surveys that we have run over the pandemic have thrown up some horrific stories from families. We have heard that young people in some families have effectively been abandoned. They say that they have had no contact and they do not know who to contact—they cannot phone the school and they are completely out of the loop. Some families have talked about the fact that their child is so distressed from being out of school because of their condition, with their everyday routine disrupted, that they have become violent and their behaviour has become unmanageable. If it has been difficult for us as adults to deal with Covid, we should think about how difficult it is for some young people.

The question was about recovery. We highlighted way back at the start of the pandemic that, as children go back to school and resume their classroom learning, there must be detailed conversations with families about how remote learning has gone, and what issues have arisen and what support children need to move forward. We are not in the same place as we were 10 months ago, when this all started. Things have changed within families, and professionals in schools have to understand families' lived experience. That very much echoes what Angela Morgan said in her report.

The Convener: We are right up against time, so I will bring in Ms Burnett, followed by Ms Bradley.

Cheryl Burnett: I want to cover both points that have been made. On recovery, we have to be clear that the current opinion is that every child in Scotland now has an additional support need because of the impact of the pandemic and whatever trauma they have faced, whether that is a result of not seeing their friends, not going to school or going outside, or of suffering a family bereavement or illness. There are multiple mitigating factors that will play a role in how a child will cope in going back to school.

As I mentioned earlier, I am a parent first and foremost—I have a child with additional support needs, so I totally understand the challenges that parents face in trying to help a child who really struggles with remote distance learning. As a parent, I know that the expectation is that, even with a recovery plan, my child will not initially be able to go back to school full time. They will need to go back over a period of time, because of the significant impact on the way that they learn and adapt, and the change that that will involve.

However, that is not to say that it cannot be done. It can be done, but we need to be aware that the education landscape has significantly changed. Nobody knows what is around the corner. When the report was written, there was a clear and defined pathway. Covid has brought

about many changes, so we need to think about how we work together to ensure that there is a transition. Transition is key, and we are looking at a new phase of transition that did not previously exist. We have never transitioned from a pandemic before. We need to ensure that we set up the right strategies to provide support for all children—not just those with additional support needs—for parents and carers, and for staff, to make sure that the picture is complete.

I will say a quick word on pupil support assistants. I agree that there needs to be some sort of qualification, or at least some acknowledgement or recognition that an assistant should have prior experience of working with somebody who has additional support needs.

The Convener: I will bring in Ms Bradley. I note that Mr Muir has put a comment for members in the chat box. Perhaps they could look at that.

Andrea Bradley: On the question about support assistants, professional learning, and potentially qualifications, should be undertaken by that cohort of the workforce. International evidence shows that the more qualified professionals in education are, and the more initial education that they have, the better the outcomes for young people. However, we should also recognise the wealth of pre-existing experience among that cohort. If we were to look at creating something in that area, it would need to be as inclusive as possible rather than excluding people on the basis of the acquisition of qualifications. We would need to look experiential learning and accreditation in that respect as well.

On recovery, we were clear after the first lockdown that, in reopening schools, particular attention had to be paid to the young people who had been most disadvantaged by the lockdown. Those were, of course, the poorest young people and those with additional support needs. We urged that, in the spirit of the recovery curriculum, time should be spent on health and wellbeing.

We should not simply take the approach of resuming business as usual. It is important that that is understood when we emerge from the current lockdown and enter what I imagine will be quite a lengthy period of education recovery thereafter. We need to think about recruiting additional teachers to work with those young people who have been most disadvantaged by the Covid experience.

We have suggested that all supply teachers who are out of contract should be contracted for at least a year to be part of the recovery effort. Working with young people who have additional needs and others who have been disproportionately impacted by Covid would be a key area for those teachers, who could mentor those young people, support their health and wellbeing and help them further with blended learning outwith the face-to-face classroom experience in the recovery period. We must also look at class sizes, because the time that teachers have to spend with young people—I made points about that—will be critical to the recovery phase and beyond. That is everything that I have to say at this point.

The Convener: I say a huge “Thank you” to all our panel members for a helpful session. We are up against time, so I will move on quickly to our second panel.

10:10

Meeting suspended.

10:12

On resuming—

The Convener: We move to our second panel, and I welcome Mr Gray, who has been able to join us. I ask members who have questions to indicate that by putting an R in the chat box. Ms Wishart has a question that she asked the previous panel, and I will go to her first.

I welcome Jennifer King, education manager for ASN, educational psychology and inclusion and representative of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland; and Laura-Ann Currie, head of inclusion, wellbeing and equality at Education Scotland.

Beatrice Wishart: I will pose a question that I asked the previous panel about resources and information on budgets. How can spending on ASL be identified in local authority finance returns? How volatile is such spending?

Jennifer King (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): I can give a partial answer. Further work might need to be done in relation to the work that Audit Scotland was undertaking, which was paused because of the pandemic. Some of the information on additional support for learning that is in the financial returns that each local authority makes has been included in the annual reports to the Parliament in the past 10 years. There are broad indicators, but variation exists because, as we know, there are differences in the delivery of additional support for learning and in the structures and the organisation of local authorities. They differ because the demographics vary from rural authorities to urban authorities. The complexities and variations in structures and workforces across local authorities are reflected in financial returns.

As a manager in a local authority, and from what I hear from colleagues, I would not describe the

funding and resourcing for additional support for learning as volatile, but we keep it under constant review and there are significant pressures.

My final point is that any learning that we take forward with regard to what will be meaningful in how we look at financial returns must be better aligned to outcomes and a more meaningful outcome reporting framework for additional support for learning. I will probably return to that theme a lot in my responses, but that is as far as I will go in responding to that question.

10:15

Laura-Ann Currie (Education Scotland): Jennifer King is obviously in a better position to answer that question in relation to finance. I agree with and reinforce the need to link finance with how it is used in relation to overall need and outcomes. As Angela Morgan highlighted in her report, we have not always found—and still have not managed to crack the area around—what are meaningful outcomes for children with additional support needs.

Many of the learning outcomes that children with additional support needs achieve are not valued because they are not measured. Education Scotland has been discussing that with ADES and the additional support for learning implementation group, to see how we can improve the situation. That will provide some data to inform decisions on where resources need to be diverted to, increased or used more effectively.

A wider discussion around what we mean by resources is required, because it is not just about getting more people, as the committee will be aware. It is about how we deploy those resources most effectively, which comes back to the outcome side of things. If we deploy resources effectively, we should achieve better outcomes for all children including those with additional support needs.

We also need to think about how to use those resources creatively. I know, from our inspection evidence over a long period, that that happens in education authorities. Authorities are very creative in using specialist provision and special school staff to support mainstream teachers by giving advice, sharing resources that are used in special schools and coaching and mentoring mainstream teachers. That is an example of how what is, in essence, a special school resource can be seen in a wider context. That also needs to be taken into consideration in terms of professional learning, to inform teachers across the special and mainstream sectors.

I am sure that we will come back to many of those issues during the discussion. It is a complex area and the people that the committee has talked to previously have highlighted some of that, but I will reinforce the fact that resources are not just about putting extra money in. It has to be linked to effective outcomes, and we need to think creatively about how we use those resources, particularly in the context that we are currently working in and with Angela Morgan's plea to look at mainstream schooling more holistically and as a lifelong learning activity.

The Convener: Thank you. I apologise that we do not have a camera for you at the moment, Ms Currie. Does Ms Wishart want to come back in?

Beatrice Wishart: No, that is fine. Others have plenty of questions.

The Convener: Okay. I ask Mr Gibson to put one question and a supplementary, if possible, because we are very tight for time.

Kenneth Gibson: There is an understandable presumption of mainstreaming, but where should the boundaries be drawn? Has cost been a factor, with mainstreaming being less expensive than special schools? Ms King spoke of outcomes. Have outcomes improved for children who are now mainstreamed but would not previously have been?

Jennifer King: There were two parts to your question, Mr Gibson—one with regard to boundaries around, or limitations on, mainstreaming and one to do with outcomes.

Going back to some of the answers that the previous witnesses gave on taking a more holistic approach to that, we cannot define those boundaries. It is helpful to use the themes that were referred to in the most recent presumption of mainstreaming guidance with regard to looking at children's and young people's participation, their support and their achievements. Inevitably, it will be tied to outcomes. In considering that question, we probably need to make greater use of local authorities' accessibility strategies. When we look at the extent to which children are included in their local community and school, the three factors that we look at with regard to accessibility—the curriculum, the physical environment and communication—are very relevant. Therefore, boundaries can sometimes come down to the fact that, for example, there are limits to how far we can adapt the learning environment in certain buildings. However, there are new buildings and we continue to build new schools, so we must take into account how accessible those three factors are when it comes to inclusion.

The presumption of mainstreaming and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 consider children's additional support needs to be on a continuum from universal provision to additionality and targeted support that may be provided in a local school or

nursery and the community to specialist provision. Of course, not all local authorities necessarily have special schools, because of their demographics. Therefore, there cannot be a boundary as such, but we need to revisit the themes with regard to the presumption of mainstreaming and the factors for accessibility, which interrelate. That gives us and local authorities a guide, and we look at children as individuals within that, alongside cohorts of children, because we must look at children in their communities.

Reporting outcomes was one of the key recommendations in Angela Morgan's report, because our reporting for children with additional support needs has had its limitations in the past few years. I am a member of the additional support for learning implementation group, as are Laura-Ann Currie and some of the previous witnesses, and it is working with Government colleagues on how the national improvement framework can be more inclusive and better represent the considerable achievements of children with additional support needs, particularly those with complex needs. As everyone is aware, when we report in August, particularly for the senior phase, we report on a relatively restricted performance of pupils. The wider data is within the system. There are children who achieve a wide range of accredited qualifications within the SQA framework, but we do not report on them. That must be a significant change. It relates to the point that Eileen Prior made, that it is about what we value, what we want for young people and what additional support for learning should achieve for a young person as they move into adult life. Schools and local authorities are responsible for young people from birth to 18, when, largely, young people move into adult life. The outcomes that we want for them when they become adults is what we should be trying to achieve through the years that they are in school. Having a more meaningful outcomes framework would help us to answer your question, which we can answer only partially at the moment.

Laura-Ann Currie: I have two points to add. At all times, we start with a child's needs, and it is not the case that mainstreaming is all that we will consider. We need to think of the child or young person in the round, and ask what they actually require. From there, we think about the best set of interventions that we can offer to meet those needs.

Needs will change over time and will be different for different children. Children might move in and out of provisions. For example, they might start in mainstream and then spend some time in a specialist unit to get specific and more focused interventions. As I said, teachers and others might come in from other resources to provide that support.

It is not just a question of accommodating all children in the main stream; it is a case of looking at what the child's needs are and determining what will best meet those needs. That is not just done in a school setting. Systems and processes such as GIRFEC and the staged intervention that accompanies the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 outline how we go about identifying the needs and determine, over time, how needs change, increase or decrease. It is not a one-size-fit-all process; it is, and should be, complex.

The process should also involve other agencies supporting us in identifying needs, such as speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, community learning and development and youth services. When we talk about additional support needs, we are talking about children who are care experienced or who have had adverse childhood experiences, such as Gypsy Travellers. A wide range of children can be categorised as having additional support needs under the act.

Therefore, my first point is that we should look at what children's needs are and provide for them rather than think about whether they should be in mainstream or specialist schools. Secondly, the concept of inclusion sometimes ends up meaning inclusion in mainstream education. However, given my previous response, it is about much more than that. All the research evidence demonstrates that children who experience an inclusive environment generally go on to do much better. Jennifer King touched on the point that it is about lifelong learning. Children and young people who have additional support needs grow up in communities, and, as the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child. We need to think about what experiences our children with additional support needs are getting. In a mainstream setting, they are being exposed to the lifelong learning approach, and they are also being exposed to their local community, what happens there and the support that they will need when they transition out of school into further education or work. That is one of the reasons why, in the research, the idea of mainstreaming is held up so strongly.

Scotland is part of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. I do not like the term "special needs", but that is how it refers to additional support needs. The agency promotes inclusion and many of the approaches that we already take in Scotland. In fact, we are held up as a good example from a policy and guidance perspective. I think that we would agree that implementation is something that we are

building and strengthening as we move forward, and Angela Morgan's report will help us to do that.

10:30

Kenneth Gibson: I take on board what has been said about looking at the child in the round and taking into account their individual needs, backgrounds and so on, but, although I accept what Jennifer King said about accessibility, are young people judged against the same mainstreaming criteria across Scotland, or is there more of a subjective postcode lottery? In other words, might someone be mainstreamed in Edinburgh who would not be mainstreamed in Ayrshire or Glasgow? What criteria are used when one considers whether a child should be mainstreamed?

Jennifer King: I do not think that it is a postcode lottery. As I said in my previous answer, demographics will always have some influence. In some local authorities—particularly, but not exclusively, in the more rural areas—there are no stand-alone special schools. Support for the particular children and young people concerned will be given in a local school in those areas, albeit with the specialisms and the enhanced support being provided within that community setting. I do not know that there is necessarily a postcode lottery.

We have an additional support for learning code of practice, which provides us with broad criteria. The factors giving rise to children's additional support needs provide a starting point for determining the extent to which a child has additional support needs. That sits alongside the on-going assessment of learning and teaching that teachers and those who work with them carry out every day. For some children and young people, that happens before they come to school. As I say, there are broad criteria.

One thing has slightly complicated the landscape—reference has been made to it with regard to planning. We assess children's wider wellbeing, and the wellbeing indicators—the safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included indicators—which are sometimes referred to as the SHANARRI indicators and which came with the introduction of GIRFEC, provide us with a more holistic view of a child and the support that they need in their family and community. Within that, we have some children who have additional support needs and the factors that give rise to those needs, which map on to the wellbeing indicators to some extent.

There will be some variation between authorities simply because of the demographics, but we have frameworks that support staff across local authorities to work in a common way.

Laura-Ann Currie: I do not have much more to add to that. Jennifer King has already referred to the code of practice and to staged interventions. I agree that there are frameworks that help to make decision making more consistent. I also agree, however, that much depends on what resources are provided in each individual authority, and those can be quite different. I am not making any value statement about that; they are different because of the context in which local authorities work, including whether they are rural, urban and so on.

I disagree that there is a postcode lottery. Sometimes we will hear parents saying, "If I was in Edinburgh," for example, but that is not the case. Parents might say, "If I was in this authority, I would get speech and language therapy for my child." Sometimes we need to look beyond what schools provide. There are, indeed, differences in how allied health professionals deliver their services. In one authority, they might be provided through building capacity among class teachers to provide some of the speech and language therapy, integrated into the literacy curriculum. The speech and language therapist will work with a class teacher, advising and consulting on individual children in the class. In another authority, the health board might deliver the service on a one-to-one basis with a child.

There are differences in how services are provided, but that does not necessarily make any of them ineffective or irrelevant. It can be perceived as a postcode lottery when, in fact, there are justifiable reasons why a provision is delivered as it is. That is just one example of why you might hear that from parents.

Kenneth Gibson: Thank you.

Oliver Mundell: I want to follow on from that issue. I am particularly interested in how ASN support is delivered in smaller schools to ASN pupils who are in mainstream education, and in whether you recognise that provision can be patchy and that teachers in the classroom can be under an awful lot of pressure, particularly in single-teacher schools.

Jennifer King: You refer to provision being "patchy". As was referred to in previous answers, there are necessarily differences. A small, rural community school will have to have its support delivered somewhat differently to that in a small urban authority, such as the one that I work in, in Dundee. Therefore, the partnership that exists between rural community schools and the central services is really important. How it supports the building of capacity with the workforce of teachers and support staff is critical for a small, rural school. There are considerable expectations of a single teacher in that respect. I would argue that such a

person has developed immense experience and skills in being able to work in such a flexible way.

One theme that came up in the previous panel, and which Angela Morgan referred to in her report, is that continuing to address additional support needs in terms of putting children in categories—at the moment, we categorise them as having autism, ADHD, social and communication needs, and so on—is unhelpful. I understand that labels can be very helpful for families in many circumstances, because they can be a short cut to understanding a child's development and behaviour. However, from the perspective of provision and support, labels can cause the perception that there are a number of children with very different needs, when, in fact, there are commonalities and common underpinning factors among additional support needs, with social communication probably being the most important one.

Support for schools in rural communities, in particular, has to be provided by a strong partnership that includes not just teachers, support staff and the headteacher, but the central staff who support them. Laura-Ann Currie referred to staff in other areas, such as community learning and development and allied health professionals, all of whom are currently having to work in some quite different ways. I think that learning will come out of the pandemic through case studies that show how virtual support is proving to be a very effective way for central services to provide support when, for example, staff cannot make long journeys. At the moment, that is happening for good reason, but I think that those aspects will remain.

I think that there are opportunities and challenges, particularly for rural schools and communities.

Laura-Ann Currie: I will broaden the discussion a little, as Ms King has discussed the issue from an education authority perspective.

Education Scotland tries to provide support for all teachers through our professional learning activities and through the signposting that we do in alerting teachers to new resources that might support them with individual children and also to third sector organisations that can provide not only resources but, in some cases, help for teachers who find themselves working in a context in which they do not feel particularly confident.

Professional learning is a very important offer by Education Scotland. However, together with that is obviously how we support schools, individual teachers and authorities through our regional teams and regional collaboratives. In the example that was given of a single teacher in a rural location, if it was felt to be required by the regional collaborative, our regional teams would be able to provide support to that individual teacher. However, as Jennifer King said, they are more likely to provide the support to the central staff so that they can help an individual teacher within the context of their particular local authority and community.

Education Scotland offers a lot in relation to that, and the regional teams are an important part of that in building the capacity in the system. If the teacher in that single-teacher school has a similar range of issues, for example, they will support, coach, mentor and whack up the central scaffolding for the approaches that the teacher can take for that particular child. That learning can be deployed in future contexts.

I am sure that we will come back to the whole notion of professional learning and how it is delivered, but that is how we address some of those variables—through a more systemic approach, working at those regional, local authority and school levels.

Oliver Mundell: This question is for Laura-Ann Currie. I understand and hear what you are saying about how it is not a question of teachers' abilities or skills. In some cases, very experienced teachers are coming back and saying that it is about cutbacks to additional support and the capacity that a teacher has to be flexible if there is only one person there to teach the young people.

Does Education Scotland take a view on the minimum level of support that could be expected? Does it recognise that, in some local authorities, in some instances, young people and their families are not getting the one-to-one support that they would expect and that most reasonable people would want to see—including teachers themselves, who are trying their very best?

The Convener: I invite Ms Currie to answer those questions.

Laura-Ann Currie: [*Inaudible*.]

The Convener: I am sorry, but we do not have Ms Currie's sound. We missed the start of that, Ms Currie—could you start again?

Laura-Ann Currie: No problem.

Education Scotland does not have a view on minimal ratios in relation to teachers and so on. As I said before, we try to support the authorities in supporting those situations, and some of that support might be about going in to work alongside a class teacher. It would be for local authorities to make judgments about what kind of support was required and whether it was sufficient to meet the needs of that individual child.

Oliver Mundell: Does Education Scotland go back to local authorities and say that something is

not working or is not a good approach? Do you advise them that there is better practice elsewhere and ask that they think about doing things differently? What is the nature of that sort of conversation?

Laura-Ann Currie: Our inspection colleagues would obviously be able to give you a much fuller answer, and I can certainly follow that up. However, through inspection, we identify gaps in provision and where there is good practice. Such information is fed back into the regional teams, which agree with our regional collaboratives about priorities on the developments and interventions that might be required. We then target particular authorities or schools.

10:45

I can give examples of places in which that is happening just now. Education Scotland's regional team is picking up on inspection evidence in particular schools where provision was felt not to be satisfactory. It is working alongside education authority senior staff who are responsible for additional support needs and with the headteachers and senior leadership teams of the schools involved. That is how we use evidence that comes from inspection to provide support that is relevant to a particular authority and an individual school.

We also obtain evidence through our links with local authority staff who are responsible for additional support needs, who carry out their own evaluations of individual schools and of each authority's policy and practice. Using such evidence, we work alongside the authority, through its improvement planning process, to tackle issues that have been evaluated as requiring further attention and work. Again, examples of that exist in the regional teams.

That was a good question. I am sorry if I did not explain the point in my original answer.

Jennifer King: I want to come back in on Laura-Ann Currie's points about support from Education Scotland and the provision of challenge.

I chair the national ADES network of managers with a similar role to mine. It provides peer support and challenge to local authorities, particularly on what provision for traditional support for learning looks like. That is a real mix across the country, from places such as Shetland, Orkney and Highland to the larger urban authorities. We are not complacent about the situation; we know that we must continue to support and challenge each other on such issues while allowing for context.

Our network recently held a meeting at which the focus of our members' discussion was challenging each other on knowing whether provision is good enough, knowing where the gaps are and being able to answer such questions. We need to use those factors to establish a more meaningful improvement framework. Fortunately, such work is now under way.

I wanted to make the point that, within its own organisation, ADES provides peer support and challenge in that area.

Alex Neil: I have two short questions, which I will group together to help with time constraints. They are on the extent of available resources for additional support needs, and on the use of such resources.

Given the relatively large percentage of pupils who are now designated as being in need of additional support, has the time come for us to look again at how we define such needs? Should we target resources towards the most needy in that group more than we do at the moment?

My experience is that, in local authorities that are under budget pressures, the numbers of ASN support teachers and associated factors are easy targets for cuts. Is there now a need to ring fence such resources in local authorities' ASN budgets? By definition, such pupils require at least a minimal level of resources to be spent on them if they are to have any chance of having a successful school career.

Laura-Ann Currie: There are two parts to your question. The first is about widening the definition of ASN so that we can target the most needy, and the second is about whether we need to ring fence resources. Some of that question is beyond Education Scotland's duty.

The definition of ASN is already extremely broad. Our approach in Education Scotland would be to start with a universal offer, which the advisory group has talked about, as I mentioned previously. Another aspect thereof would be strengthening that offer so that we capture the needs of all children.

I go back to my original answer, which was that we need to start with the needs of the individual child in the classroom. We need to meet the needs of all children and not just those whom we identify as having the label of additional support needs. Labels are not helpful, and neither is that kind of deficit model.

We need to start from the child's needs and consider how we meet those in a particular setting. If we cannot meet a need in that setting, the question is about what we need to supplement in order to address the shortfall in meeting it. We have already talked about the range of things that we can do in relation to that issue.

We start from building and strengthening the universal offer—the quality of teaching, learning

and pedagogy that is at the crux of some of the issues that have been raised previously. If we do not get that offer right, we create barriers to learning and more additional support needs that we cannot meet.

Education Scotland firmly believes in supporting the universal offer. We have done a lot of work in that area through refreshing the curriculum for excellence context and considering how to make it work with the current thinking around teaching, learning and our experiences of Covid.

We have also tried to strengthen the ability of schools to evaluate that universal offer through the development of the "Getting it right for all learners during Covid-19" tool to reinforce the need to consider matters of leadership, curriculum, teaching, learning and assessments, because we need to get that approach right in order to prevent the barriers that create more additional support needs in children.

I know that I am labouring the point, but it is absolutely critical in some of the discussions that we have been having. We do not need to consider broadening the definition of ASN; we need to consider that definition in the universal offer.

In the education context, we already have systems and processes that allow us to identify the most needy. We have talked about the code of practice and the child's plan, which considers the health and wellbeing aspect of children's development. We are able to identify the most needy and consider a broader, multi-agency approach through that identification to ensure that those children have their needs met, but in their least-restricted environments—that is another important concept.

In relation to whether we need to ring fence funding, it is not easy to cut ASN resources, because the demand for them is written in the general budget, and legislation also places requirements on education authorities to meet the needs of those children who are identified as having significant needs. Authorities are therefore led into breaking the law if they do not have the resources that enable them to meet those needs and the requirement under the law.

In the schools and authorities with which I have been involved as an inspector, I have not found cuts targeting the area of ASN more than other areas. That is a personal insight, given my experience in inspection.

Jennifer King: I do not have much to add to what Laura-Ann Currie said. I agree that the definition of additional support for learning is already pretty broad and inclusive. The code of practice is a good guide to how to interpret that and to the factors that give rise to additional support needs. I entirely agree with what she said about retaining the focus on the strength of universal provision, which, as we have said before, varies in some of the demographics.

The authority that I work for in Dundee has had to take a very inclusive approach to many of our primary classrooms, particularly P1 and P2, with regard to children's social, communication and language development. A targeted approach would have been an inefficient way to support those children as they moved into P1, because so many children come into school with—this is partly related to poverty—significant gaps in their language and communication development. We have therefore had to take a universal approach, which is supported in part through the Scottish attainment challenge funding and framework. I agree that the issue is about how we guide and support people who are working within the additional support for learning framework to make better use of its criteria.

On whether additional support needs are easy targets for cuts, I support Laura-Ann Currie's answer. My experience as a manager is that we have to ensure that we are meeting the requirements of the legislation and that we have a workforce and—this is not just about people, remember—other resources that are able to support children and young people with ASN. Those aspects should not be seen as easy targets for cuts.

In moving forward and addressing the recommendations from Angela Morgan's review—all nine of them; they cannot be seen in isolation—local authorities must be mindful of their responsibility to implement those recommendations along with the others who are named in the report and the subsequent action plan. The identification of an increasing percentage of children with additional support needs tells us that we must take a more inclusive and universal approach.

The Convener: Mr Neil, are you content for us to move on to other members?

Alex Neil: Given the time constraints, I will let others come in now.

The Convener: Thank you very much.

Before moving on, I have an additional question. There have been a lot of questions about the nature of support and funding and what constitutes support in different local authority areas. I suggest that part of the committee's difficulty in understanding the issues concerns definitions. We know what an additional support for learning teacher is because that is clearly defined, and there are associated rules on class numbers, for example. However, classroom assistants can be defined as many different things in different local authority areas. Some authorities require an

additional support staff member to have specialist training, but others do not. If we are talking about a shift in how we approach ASL, is part of that a need for commonality across local authorities? Have you had any discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about how that might be achieved?

Laura-Ann Currie: That is an interesting insight. Yes, we know what a teacher is and does, but the role of PSAs varies and they are deployed variably across authorities. I hope that the working group arising from Angela Morgan's review will look at what we mean by a PSA and at the expectations about what they will do in an inclusive context.

Education Scotland has a representative on that group. It would be helpful to define some of the roles in order to get more consistency and to raise expectations of what PSAs can offer. I have seen examples of the good practice of PSAs in supporting children with additional support needs with targeted interventions, which works well and improves outcomes for those children.

11:00

PSAs can do things that teachers cannot do in a classroom. When a child gets to, say, primary 6 and is still trying to remember the initial letter sounds of words, that cannot really be dealt with in a classroom setting. However, the PSA can do the rehearsal and practice without embarrassing an older child by going over interventions that would be done in primary 1.

I am probably going into too much detail about PSAs, but, on your general point about defining what they can do and where they are most effective, we should draw on our inspection evidence, as well as on other people's views and experience of assisting children with additional support needs, to inform that. PSAs have an important role as the significant adult, particularly for children who have had adverse childhood experiences, such as care-experienced children. The PSAs are the people in whom those children confide, sometimes more than they would in others.

That is a long answer, but I wanted to make a few comments on PSAs because they are so important in delivering for and supporting children with additional support needs.

On defining some of the other roles, a debate around that would be helpful, so that we are all starting from the same page. That would also be important for parents, because sometimes they do not understand the roles of different professionals. Professional groups such as educational psychologists try to define what their role is and what they do. Parents might say that they could not get to see an educational psychologist, or, when they saw one, that they did not work with their child but went into the class and observed.

On your general point, yes, it would be helpful to have better definitions of what professionals provide. Some of that work will have to be done in the context of local authorities, because they operate differently.

The Convener: Would you like to come in on that point, Ms King? I will then move on to Mr Greer.

Jennifer King: Yes. ADES and our partner organisation, the association of support for learning officers, have a fairly regular focus on that issue. I will not repeat it, but I agree with everything that Laura-Ann Currie said. The national working group that will be addressing a number of the issues will certainly produce interesting work.

In Angela Morgan's report, there is reference to a considerable amount of work that took place, albeit in England and Wales, which produced a strong body of research on and evidence of how to make the best use of teaching assistants. The research is on the Education Endowment Foundation website, and it goes back over many years.

Irrespective of the name or title that we give the job, what is important is the deployment of those staff and their partnership and the role that they play with class teachers. I think that seven recommendations were made on making the best use of teaching assistants. That is because the research found that there is an assumption that having a pupil support assistant or an additional support needs assistant makes the difference. The evidence tells us that, in and of itself, it does not, and it does not necessarily improve children's attainment. In some circumstances, it can actually become a barrier to a child's inclusion and participation—for example, if there is a risk that the adult becomes the person who does the support and work for the child, or if other children are less likely to form friendships because there is another adult sitting with the child.

The situation is complex and sophisticated, but that in no way diminishes the incredible role that many of our pupil support assistants play.

Another thing that the research tells us, and which we have looked at in a number of local authorities, is that we need to define better leadership roles for those staff. They have a vast wealth of experience. Although qualifications are welcome, they represent only one form of adult learning. Accredited, work-based learning can be equally powerful and is sometimes easier to achieve. Staff who are pupil support assistants do not always have the time outwith their working

lives to take part in more formal learning. Some authorities have arrangements with colleges for recruiting their workforce from among those who have undertaken a certain level of qualification. However, as Ken Muir implied with regard to teachers, that is sometimes just the start of their professional learning journey.

A vast amount of evidence says that work-based learning and how we value and deploy our support staff are fundamentally important to the difference that they will make to the lives of children and young people, particularly as they move into adult life. Some young people will always require assistance for their personal care and other aspects as they go into adult life, but, as many move into adult life, that other adult will no longer be there. In many cases, we have to work towards supporting children and young people to become independent of that support. Much of the research on making the best use of teaching assistants identified ways in which that can happen. There is a lot that we can learn.

As for having some commonality in terms of a framework, there are national frameworks in other parts of the United Kingdom from which we could learn, and I am hopeful that the work of the steering group will address that. There will always be differences between individual authorities because of their structures, but a common framework would be hugely helpful.

The Convener: We will move to questions from Mr Greer, and Mr Johnson wants to come back in. If any other member wants back in, they should please type R in the chat box.

Ross Greer: I would like to return to the discussion about co-ordinated support plans that we had with the previous panel. Has there been any review of the statutory guidance for CSPs since it was first produced? I am aware of at least one legal case that resulted in case law relating to the statutory guidance. Has there been any review by Education Scotland, or are you aware of a review that is perhaps being led by the learning directorate, to see whether the guidance is adequate to fulfil the functions that it was designed for?

Laura-Ann Currie: As far as I am aware, there has been no review of CSPs. As members will know, the statutory guidance to the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) 2004 Act was amended, and CSPs are still clearly defined in that guidance.

You will be aware that, through the additional support for learning implementation group that is mentioned in Angela Morgan's review, CSPs will be reviewed not in relation to whether they should exist but more broadly—that is, in relation to how they are working and how we can make them work better. There is no doubt that there are areas of misunderstanding about what CSPs are for and that they need to be better defined. Work also needs to be done—Education Scotland was involved in this prior to Covid—on the statutory guidance in relation to staged intervention, the opening of CSPs and how that is implemented in authorities, because that can be quite different. Whether the additional support that is required is significant can be interpreted very loosely in some cases, and that needs to be given due regard, too. I am part of the group and will certainly be asking those questions.

The other aspect that needs additional clarity is the difference between CSPs and the GIRFEC child's plan, because that is causing confusion in the system. Again, prior to Covid, some work, which had to be halted, was being done on that. It aims to provide greater clarity and to make the links between the levels in the child's plan that would necessitate additionality, in terms of intervention and support, and the stages for determining whether a co-ordinated support plan requires to be opened. Bringing those two elements together would provide clarity in the system. Education Scotland has been involved in that work with the Scottish Government, and it will progress that in the CSP working group, which comprises a range of stakeholders. I hope that the group will address some of the issues that we know exist around that decision-making process.

Jennifer King: I will add to what Laura-Ann Currie said. The group, on which ADES has a representative, will review the implementation of CSPs. On some of the differences that have arisen, it is no surprise that, with the introduction of GIRFEC—and particularly in the early stages of 2014, when the bill that became the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 was being considered—we have seen a considerable rise in the number of children with child's plans and what appears to be—it is only a correlation—a decline in the number of CSPs. There is an implementation issue with regard to a purpose for planning. The introduction of many aspects of GIRFEC was a big focus in all local authorities, with regard to the assessment of children's wellbeing and how we met those outcomes. That became a focus. I do not think that children's additional support needs were ignored, discounted or diverted in that process, but the planning formats were, to some extent. One of the tasks for the review group is to look at how we can create better alignment.

As everyone here knows, the CSP sits within its own legislation—the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004—and, without doubt, it involves a level of administration and bureaucracy that a child's plan does not. I fundamentally disagree with the comment that was

made in the previous evidence session, that local authorities do not co-ordinate the support plans because they are gatekeeping and preventing the allocation of resource. That is not my experience or the experience of the members that I work with in the ADES network.

I will again refer to outcomes. Another point that the CSP review group should consider is that we do not really have any evidence to tell us what planning format actually makes a difference to a child's progression and development. Is a CSP any better at doing that than a child's plan?

Those are the issues that we must consider. The amendment to the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 in 2009, which places greater emphasis on the rights of looked-after children and young people to a co-ordinated support plan, is helpful. However, again, a careful and considered approach to planning is required, because we do not want that to become an overly complicated experience for children and young people.

My local authority did some work on what experience parents want in assessment and planning and on having a plan that they can understand and use. The answer that we got was, "The simpler, the better." We must bear that in mind. Plans that become overly complicated and that are not co-ordinated with parents and families will not necessarily achieve the outcomes that we want.

That is probably a slightly broader answer to your question, but I hope that it helps in some way.

11:15

Ross Greer: I have no doubt that Ms King is correct in saying that parents want a plan that is simple and easy to understand. The committee has considered additional support needs quite consistently during the five years for which I have sat on it. The other key bit of feedback that we receive alongside that comment, and which we have absolutely heard, is that they also want a plan that gives them recourse and an ability to challenge what they perceive to be a lack of support. CSPs are unique because of their statutory underpinning, but I accept that a wider discussion needs to be had on whether they fulfil the function that parents need and on whether approaches that are used for other plans might be drawn into the CSP process.

I have a follow-up question for Ms Currie. You mentioned a couple of bits of work that either had been started or were on-going before the pandemic, and which were then halted. Will all that work be rolled into the CSP review that is about to begin, or will any of it sit outside the review and be continued? It would be helpful for the committee to know that what sounds like useful work that unfortunately had to be halted will not be lost. We will ensure that it either carries on through the review or is simply restarted in a separate pathway.

Laura-Ann Currie: That work will be picked up by the CSP implementation group, which will meet in February to work on the terms of reference, so it will not be lost. It involved significant input; it was informed by ourselves, the Scottish Government and an employee of Perth and Kinross Council who is steeped in additional support needs issues.

Picking up on what Jennifer King said, an important part of the work that was carried over concerned simplifying the landscape around planning issues, which had become complex, and making it accessible to parents and professionals.

I will certainly champion the work that had been done previously, and I will ensure that it embedded. I have already had discussions on that with the Scottish Government representative who is leading the group. I am sure that Jennifer King will support it, too. It is good to hear that Mr Greer is keen for the work to go ahead and for us to consider such issues.

The Convener: We are really hitting time pressure now. Mr Greer, are you happy for me to move towards our final questions, which will be from Mr Johnson?

Ross Greer: Yes. Thank you.

Daniel Johnson: I am afraid that I will have to begin by challenging something that Jennifer King said earlier.

Although I completely agree with her wider point about the need to consider the broader common strands that can occur when someone has a diagnosis of ADHD or autism spectrum disorder, I must ask her not to use the term "label". I also ask her to acknowledge that, when a child has such a diagnosis, not only is it useful for them and their parents; it should directly inform teaching practice and the support that is provided to them. I know that Ms King perhaps was not quite meaning to say otherwise, but I ask her to bear my comments in mind in the future.

I had wanted to ask specific questions, but as we are coming to the end of the meeting I will put one broad one. As I sit here, listening to our two witnesses, I find it slightly difficult to reconcile their contributions with those of the witnesses on our previous panel and the findings of the Morgan review. I completely accept that an awful lot of good intention exists and that an awful lot of work is being in done in the area. However, for me, three key points stand out from the Morgan review.

The first is that, although teachers might be well intentioned, they do not necessarily have the required practice in place or—as was made loud and clear in the report—the right approach. The second is that the right supports are not necessarily in place for such teachers, whether they be additional resources or training. When the committee previously took evidence on the subject it also heard loud and clear about the complete paucity of continuous professional development. Finally, parents often have to fight to get the support that they require.

Do we need a fundamental sea change in approach, rather than an incremental progression in our current approach? If so, what would bring that sea change about?

Jennifer King: Picking up on Mr Johnson's point about my reference to labelling, I apologise for how my comments were perceived. I was trying to make the more general point that the categorisation to which Angela Morgan referred is perhaps unhelpful, given the complexity that it may add with regard to how teachers are perceived. I do not in any way minimise the need to understand the specific aspects of what it means to have autism or ADHD—far from it—but I accept Mr Johnson's point about the way in which I referred to that area.

On the question of whether we need a fundamental change in the three areas that Mr Johnson mentioned—parents, training and teachers—Angela Morgan's report absolutely gives us a steer towards that in her nine recommendations, all of which are interconnected. The very first point that she makes in her report relates to the need to refresh and create a new vision to which the key stakeholders, including parents, local authorities, Education Scotland and the Government, need to contribute.

There is no doubt in my mind that that gives us a platform, or the initiative, to reflect on that need, but it must be tied in—as I have mentioned several times—with the outcomes that we want for children and young people in an inclusive society. That should apply as they become adults, not just for the length of time for which they remain children or young people.

I hope that the committee has seen the action plan. All the recommendations have actions against them, and the additional support for learning implementation group, of which Laura-Ann Currie and I are members, has, with Jan Savage as its chair, already undertaken considerable work in looking at what those outcomes are and how they will be measured.

Angela Morgan's report was hugely welcome, and ADES accepted all of its recommendations. We will start with a refresh of the vision for what it is that we want to, and should, achieve, but without losing sight of the nine interrelated recommendations, which are all of equal importance.

Laura-Ann Currie: I am passionate about inclusion and additional support needs; I have worked in the area for 35 years, as an educational psychologist and a manager of services. Some of the issues that have been raised today are exactly the same issues that I came across when I started out in my career, which is disappointing. However, we have made a lot of progress, which gives me hope that we can continue to develop our new vision. In fact, it is perhaps not a new vision, but a refreshed vision that can give us clarity about the journey that we need to be on to implement the aspirations for the legislation and the guidance that accompanies it.

Nobody disagrees that that is right and correct, and that we should build on that vision in a social justice context, but we have work to do on professional learning. Education Scotland provides a lot of professional learning, as we mentioned in our submission—I will not go through it, because I know that we are pushed for time. Part of the issue is that although we can provide professional learning, we cannot guarantee that people will necessarily take it on board or use it appropriately or effectively.

There is a bigger picture with regard to how we provide professional learning. It cannot be done only through courses—it has to be about engaging with teachers. We need to have better conversations about what the challenges are and how we meet the needs of the diverse range of children with additional support needs and provide the excellent education that is every child's right. That is enshrined in our direction of travel in Scotland.

We need to look carefully at professional learning and identify what it is that teachers are asking for, because the current provision obviously does not match what some teachers think that they need.

Again, that is a discussion about hearts and minds. Communication is central. All the way through my journey in additional support needs, I have experienced parents saying that they have had to fight for everything. I worked with children with learning difficulties in early years education, which was called pre-school at that time, and parents would say, "This has not been easy." Communication is an issue. We have improved on that—we have systems and processes in place and third sector organisations are there to help, but we need to publicise that provision more and ensure that parents get access to that objective advice.

The question about the need for a sea change touches on what Angela Morgan referred to in her report. We have to think again, in our current context, about what inclusion is. Covid has helped us to take forward our thinking in that regard, because all children have experienced disadvantage as a result of the pandemic, whether that relates to their mental health or to other issues in their lives. That gives us a platform to look at the inclusion agenda in a universal context.

I hope that that answers some of the committee's questions, and I look forward to progressing some of Angela Morgan's recommendations.

The Convener: I am afraid that, at this point, I have to call the session to a close. I thank Jennifer King and Laura-Ann Currie for their attendance this morning. We now move into private session.

11:27

Meeting continued in private until 11:56.

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