

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Wednesday 22 November 2006

Session 2

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2006.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Licensing Division,
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by Astron.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 22 November 2006

Col.

SCHOOLS (HEALTH PROMOTION AND NUTRITION) (SCOTLAND) BILL: STAGE 1	4307
--	-------------

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

31st Meeting 2006, Session 2

CONVENER

*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
*Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)
*John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab)
*Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
*Dave Petrie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green)
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)
Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab)
Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP)

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Lynsey Currie (@Home Centre)
Annisha Davie (Rosehall High School)
Marion Davis (One Plus)
Paula Evans (Children in Scotland)
Douglas Hamilton (Save the Children)
Greig Walker (Rosehall High School)
John Watson (Barnardo's Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Katy Orr

ASSISTANT CLERK

Catherine Fergusson

LOCATION

@Home Centre, Airdrie

Scottish Parliament

Communities Committee

Wednesday 22 November 2006

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Convener (Karen Whitefield): Good morning. I open the 31st meeting in 2006 of the Communities Committee. I take this opportunity to welcome everyone to the @Home Centre in Airdrie. I thank the @Home Centre for hosting this meeting of the committee.

Today we will consider legislation that will directly affect Scotland's young people. For that reason I am especially pleased that pupils from a number of high schools in North Lanarkshire are in the public gallery today. I extend a special welcome to pupils from Taylor high school, Rosehall high school, St Ambrose high school, Calderhead high school, Brannock high school, Coltness high school, Chryston high school and St Aidan's high school. We have received apologies from Christine Grahame and Patrick Harvie.

The first and only item on today's agenda is consideration of the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Bill. We will hear from two panels of witnesses. I welcome the first panel, which is composed of John Watson from Barnardo's Scotland; Paula Evans from Children in Scotland; Marion Davis from One Plus; and Douglas Hamilton from Save the Children. Do you think that the Scottish Executive has consulted on the bill? Were you able to participate in the consultation process?

John Watson (Barnardo's Scotland): We believe that we were able to participate. All the organisations that we represent are used to doing that, so it is easy for the Executive to get opinions from us. When we discussed the issue earlier, we wondered about the number of children who were consulted—50 is a small number. It would have been nice if there had been an initiative that allowed a larger number of children's voices to be heard.

Douglas Hamilton (Save the Children): Along with many other agencies, we had an opportunity to respond to the consultation. Hopefully, that gave a lot of children and young people a chance to respond. It is good that some young people have come along to give evidence on the bill today. John Watson alluded to the fact that the primary school consultation involved only 50

children. Just under 360 children responded to the Young Scot consultation, which is not even a third of a normal-sized secondary school. There has not been a lot of consultation with young people, and more effort could have been made to get the voices of more children and young people heard. A few years ago, we conducted a web-based consultation on school meals. It is easy to get a few thousand children to respond to such a survey, if it is done properly. It seems that on this occasion not as much was done as could have been done.

The Convener: I hope that you recognise that the committee has tried hard to engage with Scotland's young people. You may be interested to know that we wrote to every school in Scotland. The purpose of this meeting is to focus on you, as children's representatives, and to ensure that young people are able to engage directly with the committee. We have tried to make a better attempt at that, although I am not saying that we are perfect or that there are no other things that we could look to do in the future to involve young people in the scrutiny of parliamentary legislation.

Marion Davis (One Plus): One Plus was a touch disappointed that the Executive ruled out discussion in the consultation of universal provision of free school meals. That set the parameters of the discussion.

The Convener: I am sure that we will come on to that issue at a later point in questioning. We will be interested to hear your views on universal provision.

Given that the bill places the hungry for success initiative, which is being implemented across Scotland, on a statutory footing, do you think that there is a need for it?

John Watson: The legislative agenda is packed up until the election and it is therefore interesting to see a bill that does not contain much that is new but is instead about strengthening existing legislation.

I am happy to accept the logic that the bill will strengthen existing good work, try to extend it throughout Scotland and spread best practice everywhere. We have some comments about how consistently that principle is applied through the measures in the bill, but we are happy to engage with it.

Paula Evans (Children in Scotland): We welcome the implementation of the hungry for success initiative and we are happy for it to be made into a statutory duty. However, why has the principle not been extended to pre-school provision? If guidance is not good enough for schools, why is it good enough for pre-schools? We need to discuss that question further.

Marion Davis: I support that comment. It is crucial that younger children in the pre-school age group in particular get the opportunity to have a variety of healthy and nutritious food when they are developing their taste buds.

The Convener: One of my colleagues wants to discuss that point extensively with you later in the morning.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): The bill proposes a duty on all education authorities to ensure that every school is a health-promoting school. What benefits, if any, will that duty bring to children?

Douglas Hamilton: The experience from the hungry for success and health-promoting schools initiatives shows that they have made an impact. School is a useful place to promote healthy eating and lifestyles at an early stage. We know that that is a big problem, particularly for many of the poorest children in Scotland. If such a duty helps to make it clear to schools that health promotion should be an integral part of education, it will be helpful.

Paula Evans: Health promotion is about more than food and nutrition. A duty on schools to take a whole-school approach to health promotion is welcome. That will entail putting the focus on break times, leisure facilities and education about food, where food comes from and food sustainability. We welcome that whole-child, whole-school approach.

Marion Davis: I reiterate that. We support the legislation in light of the latest statistics on children's health and obesity. Before I came here today, I read that around 21 per cent of four and five-year-olds and 34 per cent of 11 and 12-year-olds are overweight. Children are caught in an obesity time bomb. It is incumbent on us to tackle that as quickly as we can, given that the level of obesity in Scotland is double that of the United Kingdom. We support very much the move towards schools' involvement in that area.

Tricia Marwick: Douglas Hamilton said that he was dissatisfied with the level of consultation, particularly with schoolchildren. How best can children be involved in the development of health-promoting schools?

Douglas Hamilton: If health-promoting schools are to be effective in any shape or form, it is essential that children and young people are involved in the process of such initiatives within their schools. Schools already have a range of ways to involve children and young people in decision making, such as school councils. Statutory provision would ensure that children are involved in school development plans. I do not think that it would be beyond the scope of the bill to provide that children are consulted and involved

integrally in decision making about health-promoting schools, diet and nutritional provision in schools. The only way that the bill will be successful is if there is a proper partnership between the pupils, parents and teachers to identify effective solutions in schools.

Marion Davis: In countries such as Finland, young people participate to a high degree. In Finland, there is universal free provision in primary, secondary and further education. There is restricted choice, but the young people choose the menu for the term, which means that at some point they will get their favourite choice. Parents are also informed of what their child is going to eat the following week; they receive an e-mail at the weekend telling them what is on the menu for lunch, so they can plan for their evening meals. There are various levels of participation to consider.

Paula Evans: We should not underestimate the importance of involving children and young people in the development of menus. We have to ensure that children and young people buy into the decisions that the school institutions are making. Such involvement can take a number of forms. In the pre-school sector, best practice in involving children in health promotion includes having vegetable patches or making bread in the morning. That is a good example of involving children in the process of developing healthier habits as well as the decisions around them. That is a key point to take on board.

John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I have a couple of specific questions, the first of which is for Mr Watson. The submission from Barnardo's Scotland comments on the need to recognise the importance of opportunities for children to play as a significant element in health promotion. You might find that a number of us agree with that. Is that an issue that the bill should address, or could it be covered in guidance from the Executive?

John Watson: The bill is about improving what currently exists. I was struck by the target in the consultation document of one hour's cumulative activity a day for school pupils. Most of the discussion that we have on that subject centres on physical education, which has been a political football in recent times. That target cannot be achieved through PE alone; we need to consider how to encourage walking and cycling to school and opportunities for play. That is not something that we hear a lot about and it does not feature much in the health-promoting schools literature.

We do not know how much opportunity children get to play at school, because we do not measure it or have good, up-to-date research on it. The research that we have suggests that break times are decreasing. We hear a lot of anecdotal

evidence that teachers see break time as a problem, because that is when behavioural difficulties arise—it is a problem to be contained, rather than an opportunity.

If the bill is going to make the idea of a health-promoting school into a statutory obligation, there needs to be follow-up guidance to help schools to promote play and see it as an opportunity that is part of the being well, doing well agenda for health-promoting schools.

John Home Robertson: I recall that one of my sons had to choose between having a school meal in the middle of the day and taking part in football or rugby training, which could be done only in the middle of the day. That is why he always had to make do with packed lunches at the time. Often, the middle of the day is the only time that is available for sports training and play. Is that a problem?

John Watson: I believe that it is a problem. I do not have good detailed research to prove it, but that is the indication that we get. We have a very crowded school day. We welcome the idea that in a health-promoting school there will be more discussion in the classroom about good health, but our concern is that we are seeing a trend whereby kids are being brought inside to learn lessons about good health, which is not a positive development.

10:15

John Home Robertson: Paula Evans referred to pre-school education. Children in Scotland and, I think, other organisations have made the case for pre-school education to be included in the scope of the bill. The witnesses might find that a number of committee members agree with them on that. Would Paula Evans explain why the proposed duty on education authorities to ensure that schools are health promoting should be extended to all pre-school provision?

Paula Evans: As I said, if we are making the case for moving from a guidance-led approach to a statutory approach in schools, the same arguments apply to the pre-school sector. In certain respects, the pre-school sector is more important, because if we want to change culture and habits, we need to focus on children before they form habits and tastes. It would make sense to engage with children's nutrition at the earliest stage, before children's palates develop and they acquire a taste for high-fat, high-salt foods.

The pre-school years offer a good opportunity to use children's education to educate parents about food provision, nutritional standards and what parents should be expected to provide in their children's packed lunches when they go to primary and secondary school.

The pre-school experience is important, for the reasons that I have given. We accept that it is difficult to tackle the sector, given the unique mix of providers. However, that should not be a reason for failing to take action. Rather than just tagging the pre-school sector on to the bill, Children in Scotland thinks that there is a case for setting up an expert panel like the expert panel on school meals, which drew up the hungry for success standards, to consider the pre-school sector, because that sector is complex and is different from other sectors. However, as a bare minimum, the pre-school sector should be included in the bill.

John Home Robertson: Do you feel strongly that the pre-school sector should be included in the bill and not just in guidance?

Paula Evans: Yes.

John Home Robertson: That is probably desirable. Do you have evidence that there is a problem to do with poor standards of nutrition in pre-school education?

Paula Evans: The evidence on standards in the pre-school sector presents a mixed picture. Standards are not the same across the board in voluntary, private and local authority-run nurseries, which is an issue. There is anecdotal evidence of good practice. Sometimes children make bread and are educated about new foods. For example, children make "pink cake", which is beetroot cake. However, there are examples of bad practice. On my way here, my taxi driver—

John Home Robertson: Don't go there.

Paula Evans: The taxi driver told me that his daughter is given crisps and fizzy drinks at her pre-school. Bad practice is happening and children are being given snacks that are not of the highest nutritional standard. As a bare minimum, we should extend the duties in the bill to cover the pre-school sector.

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): In response to the convener's questions, witnesses touched on the benefits of putting the nutritional standards on a statutory basis. Will you comment further on that?

Douglas Hamilton: Save the Children thinks that it is key that there will be a consistent approach nationally. Wherever a child goes to school in Scotland, we can be assured that they will receive food that meets minimum nutritional standards. It is important that the same standards apply to all children. It is important that we give a bit of extra force to the existing guidance because we know that the intake of fruit and vegetables among children in Scotland is low, as the evidence from the Scottish health survey that we quote in our submission shows. That is especially true of children who live in poverty, who are less likely to

get five portions of fruit and veg a day than are children in other parts of the population. It is vital that we try to address that situation in schools. Statutory regulation will certainly help with that.

John Watson: We feel that the main reason for taking up legislative time with the bill is to plug gaps. The hungry for success initiative has resulted in good improvements, as the evaluations have shown, but there are still gaps—there are areas that the existing guidelines do not cover. In pre-school provision, which Paula Evans mentioned, there is a difference between what local authority nurseries provide and what is provided in voluntary sector or private nurseries.

Scott Barrie: I am interested in the idea of consistency. It seems to me from conversations with my local authority and other local authorities that there is variation in provision. How do we ensure that we get consistency? Will the bill achieve that?

John Watson: The monitoring bodies—Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care—are the main mechanism for achieving that. The main tool for ensuring consistency is to check that such issues form part of the monitoring framework that HMIE and the care commission use when they inspect institutions.

Douglas Hamilton: There has to be consistency both in standards of provision and in levels of uptake of meals, which we will come on to. We think that statutory regulation will help to achieve consistency, but provision is not the only issue on which we need to be consistent. Nutritional standards on their own will not help to increase uptake—in fact, they may well do the opposite. We must consider all the other mechanisms that we need to employ alongside them.

Paula Evans: If we are to impose a duty to increase uptake, I would ask to what level it should be increased. The bill fails to set any baselines or parameters according to which local authorities will be inspected and monitored. There is a case for discussing that further.

Marion Davis: There are extreme differences in uptake across the pupil population, especially in relation to free school meals. In the primary sector, the take-up is about 60 per cent in Glasgow and about 37 per cent in Renfrewshire. The reasons for such major differences in take-up are complex. They can be to do with queueing and whether young people find the facilities encouraging.

Scott Barrie: Do you have any comments to make on the recommended nutritional standards that the expert working group came up with?

John Watson: I do not think that any of us is an expert in that area, so we do not have anything to add to what the experts said.

Tricia Marwick: An issue that has come up repeatedly as we have heard evidence and gone round schools is the problem of young people buying unhealthy food from, for example, mobile vans and local shops. Could the bill be improved to tackle that problem, or does it need to be tackled by local authorities and parents? Given competition laws and the like, can anything be done?

Douglas Hamilton: There are things that can be done, although I am not sure whether new legislation is required. I know that mobile vans require licences. Local authorities issue licences for hot food takeaways, so something could be done through the licensing provisions. Some statutory change might be required to assist local authorities in enforcing their powers in that regard, but that would certainly seem to make sense, especially in relation to mobile vans. Such vans can stop quite close to school gates, and shops can be close, too. The issue can be tackled. If we do not build that into the system, much of what is done in schools will be counterproductive, because unhealthy food will be easily available outside.

However, I stress that it does not necessarily help to start banning the sale of some foods to children in shops and mobile vans throughout the country. That option is not sensible. What emerged clearly from the consultation with children and young people is that children need to have a choice. We should educate them to make healthier choices and the food that is provided in the school environment should meet nutritional standards. We are not making a simple call to ban Mars bars, but more could be done to take a more sensible approach to assist schools with their health-promoting message.

Marion Davis: The only long-term solution relates to choice. If children who are under five or who are at primary school now have access to nutritious foods and that is part of the education system, over time they will not want to choose other food and they will prefer to stay in the school and enjoy a healthy school meal in a pleasant social environment.

Paula Evans: It is important to recognise that we are working in a society in which nutrition is not an everyday part of children's lives. Until we reach the point at which the changes that we are making now affect the choices that children make, we must consider the consistency of a policy that bans the sale of unhealthy foods in the school environment but does not tackle vans that park directly outside schools to fill the gap in the supply of such food. We would support measures to

tackle that. The topic is somewhat complicated, given competition law and business interests. The question needs to be discussed, but we do not advocate further moves.

Tricia Marwick: I have seen a few smiles from the young people in the audience as we have had our discussion.

We have heard some evidence about the difficulty of keeping young people in school, particularly at lunch time, when they go to local shops. Nobody suggests that they should not do that if they so wish. What do you think of the environment of dining halls and the idea of showing MTV on flat-screen televisions? What can be done to improve the ambience of dining halls? I am sure that we will ask the young people those questions.

Douglas Hamilton: You will probably hear a better answer from the young people than you will from me.

Tricia Marwick: Absolutely—I am well aware of that.

Douglas Hamilton: There is more to do. Some schools have made efforts to improve the environment—that has been part of the work that has been done in the past few years. In speaking to young people and children previously, I was struck that they talked less about the quality of the environment and more about the length of queues. That seemed to be one of the biggest issues.

The environment can be made nicer, but many schools have space limitations. If the environment of the dining hall is nice, more people will want to go there, which will increase queues and the length of time to get lunch. That has been mentioned. I do not know how long lunch time is in most schools—roughly 45 minutes. If 20 minutes of that is spent queueing for lunch, that has a knock-on effect on the chance of doing anything else. The environment should be improved, but we need to ensure that people can buy their lunch and sit down to eat quickly. The more we can do to encourage people to stay in school, the better.

Paula Evans: The environment is the other side of the coin. One question is how to prevent children from leaving school to buy food or how to prevent businesses from selling food on school perimeters, but another equally important question is why children want to leave the school environment to buy food. It is a question of the schools being more sophisticated about the environment for eating in schools, as well as the quality and presentation of food and matters such as queueing. One way to tackle the issue is through the schools consulting children and young people properly about their attitudes to buying school meals and using the results of that to inform the development of their policies.

10:30

Scott Barrie: I have a brief question about mobile shops. I accept that there must be an element of choice, but rather than attempt to ban mobile shops from outside schools, could something be done to influence what those vans offer? Could proper competition be encouraged, so that the choice is not just burgers and chips but a proper variety of foods?

Douglas Hamilton: I agree with that. Perhaps I did not make it clear that I was talking about conditions of licence, which could involve not only where the vans could stop but what they are allowed to sell.

John Home Robertson: There is more to the issue than mobile van shops—there are also shops in the vicinity of schools. Do the witnesses feel that that is a problem? Do you feel that it is not enough simply to have healthy food in schools, and that if substantial numbers of students are going out and eating unhealthy stuff near the school, there is probably a need—either by stick or by carrot—to do something to ensure that better-quality food is available in the neighbourhood?

Marion Davis: That is a key issue, because less than 50 per cent of children take school meals anyway. Only 46.1 per cent take school meals, so the children who do not take them are obviously getting their lunches from a variety of sources, including packed lunches and local shops. In the centre of Glasgow, beside the University of Glasgow, if you go out at half past 11 you get knocked down by crowds of teenagers making their way to queue up in the local takeaways.

John Home Robertson: I assure you that that does not happen only in Glasgow.

Barnardo's Scotland raised a specific point about the independent sector, or private schools, and the case for extending the proposed nutritional standards to the private sector. We have been advised by Executive officials, perhaps disingenuously, that it is not their practice to interfere in what independent schools do, although there are education inspections of standards in those schools. Would you like to expand on the case for the legislation to extend across the board?

John Watson: It is a question of consistency. The argument that is presented for introducing the legislation is that we have achieved a lot through guidance and we want to plug the gaps, finish the job and do as much as we can by making the provision of healthy school meals a legislative duty. The assumption is that that will make a difference, so that is what is happening to local authority provision.

The parallel argument is that guidance is good enough in the independent sector, but that is inconsistent. To say that it is not our practice to impose such standards on the independent sector is not an answer because it has not, until now, been our practice to have a legislative duty to meet nutritional standards, but we are now creating such a duty. Bills are introduced so that we will do things differently, but the question has not been answered, when we have asked it, why guidance is considered good enough in the independent sector.

The independent schools sector covers only a small proportion of pupils in Scotland. We are obviously more concerned about nutritional standards in pre-school and nurseries, as we said earlier. I notice that the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing that accompanies the bill quoted research that says that children have developed their tastes by the time they go to school: that should make us wonder whether we are shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted. We are spending so much time and energy worrying about school meals, but we are not spending enough time worrying about developing children's taste buds through the food they eat before they attend school, particularly in pre-school provision and nurseries. Provision for that age group is not like school provision because there is a local authority school for every child to go to, but not a local authority nursery. There are not enough of them, as I know from experience. We have several private nurseries around us but the local authority one is away up the road. We do not have the choice of sending the child to a local authority nursery.

Marion Davis: The issues around children's health and the obesity time bomb affect middle-class children as much as children in poverty or upper-class children.

John Home Robertson: As a survivor of the private education system, I certainly endorse that point.

You referred to food for pre-school children—which is clearly important—and your point was well made. The policy memorandum states that when a local authority arranges nursery provision with a private provider, guidance will be issued under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 about taking account of health promotion and the nutritional requirements regulations. I have asked the question and you have answered it once, but the issue is so important that it needs to be wrapped up conclusively. Are you saying that you are not satisfied that guidance in those terms is sufficient for what we are trying to achieve?

John Watson: Yes—that is what I am saying. We have seen no argument as to why we need to

move from guidance to legislation in one area but to remain with guidance in another area.

I can give an example. I looked at the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care's website to get the inspection report for my local nursery, which is just round the corner. It is jointly inspected by the care commission and HMIE. Care standard 3.4 refers to good nutrition and well-being, but when joint inspections happen they do not inspect on all the standards. The inspection report that I read inspected on only five of the dozen or so standards. Standard 3.4 was not one of them, so the nursery was not inspected on the standard that had been set on nutrition. The system does not seem to be working.

John Home Robertson: Does everyone else agree?

Paula Evans: Yes.

Marion Davis *indicated agreement.*

Douglas Hamilton *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Mr Petrie has a supplementary on nutritional standards. He can ask that and then move to his questions on snacks.

Dave Petrie (Highlands and Islands) (Con): My comment is about a point that came up in previous evidence. We should not rush to the assumption that children that leave the school premises will always eat rubbish—many children go out and eat healthily. It is important that we encourage as many children as possible to stay in the school but, as you say, queuing can be a problem, which perhaps puts kids off. We must be fair to children and acknowledge that when they leave the school they do not always eat hamburgers and chips.

On snacks, the bill gives education authorities a statutory power to provide pupils with food or drink at any time of the day. What benefits do you think the proposed power for education authorities to provide snacks at school, either free or at a charge, will bring to children?

Douglas Hamilton: That is one of the better aspects of the bill in that it is something new. It is important that statutory provision be made to give local authorities the power to provide snacks. The fact that they will also be able to give snacks out free is also important.

Someone told me recently that they reckon that a lot of breakfast clubs and so on that are provided by local authorities may have been operating outside the law for a while, because they did not have the power to operate such services. It is important that it will now be clear in statute that local authorities have the power to do that and to provide free snacks. It will be of huge benefit, particularly to the poorest children in schools, if

there are increased powers to provide children with free drinks, fruit, vegetables and so on.

As we say in our written evidence, our only other point on the issue is that a variety of snacks should be provided. One way of putting children off healthy food would be constantly to provide fruit and vegetables. Other healthy food can be promoted. The bill also mentions cereal-based snacks and other healthy snacks that can be provided. We are very positive about the measure.

Dave Petrie: Are there any other comments?

Paula Evans: I echo Douglas Hamilton's remarks.

Dave Petrie: Should we phase in nutritious drinks and so on rather than make a sudden change? Is there a case for phasing in good habits, or should it be done instantly?

Douglas Hamilton: I would be happy for things to happen straight away—especially the free snacks. A lot of schools already offer breakfast clubs, so good practice exists. The sooner we can extend that the better, to ensure that more low-cost or free healthy food is provided.

Dave Petrie: I agree that breakfast is very important. I represent a constituency with a lot of rural schools. Do you foresee a problem for children in rural areas who have to leave home very early to get to school? Will they have time for breakfast before classes start?

Douglas Hamilton: We would still encourage people to eat breakfast at home; the school provision should be regarded as supplementary provision for families who cannot provide a breakfast at home—for financial reasons or work reasons. Timings at schools could be flexible, and addressing local needs would make sense.

Dave Petrie: This question is for John Watson in particular. Why do you suggest that authorities should be able to provide snacks outwith normal school hours?

John Watson: A few years ago Barnardo's did some research and interviewed families who were living in poverty. We found that school holidays are a particularly difficult time. Not only do families suffer from the additional financial demands of entertaining the kids, but the parents sometimes do not work as many hours as normal because they must be around to look after the kids. They also lost out on free school meals and had to feed the kids themselves.

It is obviously not straightforward to transfer the school meals system into the school holiday, because the kids will not all be together in one place. Local authorities might develop innovative ideas for school holiday provision—it would be useful for them to be able to link that provision to

an extension of the school meals system. If authorities can find a way of providing services, they should be given the opportunity to do so.

Dave Petrie: You are suggesting that education authorities should have a role during school holidays.

John Watson: There is a need for provision during school holidays. We accept that there is a need during term time, and parents do not have an additional income during school holidays, so they have an additional burden. If the problem of pupils being dispersed can be overcome, it would be useful for local authorities to have the power to provide such a service, if they can find a way of doing so. We do not have a set model that we want to promote, but local authorities should have that power. Different activities will be going on during school holidays, and we hope that that will give authorities the incentive to think about ways of providing additional support.

Marion Davis: The bill gives powers to provide snacks but limits powers to provide universal free school meals. One Plus is concerned about that, but I do not know whether other panel members agree.

Paula Evans: Children in Scotland agrees with that. There is no requirement, but there should be a power that would allow local authorities to provide the meals. We do not see the logic in preventing that.

Dave Petrie: Are you firmly of the opinion that uptake can be increased by providing free school meals?

Paula Evans: It is complicated. Uptake is not high for a number of reasons: food can be bought outside school, food in the school might not be right and the environment in the school might not be right. The availability of free school meals is not the only factor that affects uptake; we have to consider the whole package. However, if it is not possible to provide free school meals, the issue cannot be addressed. To prevent local authorities from providing lunches is unhelpful.

Marion Davis: We should consider examples of where free school meals have been introduced. Hull has been mentioned—research from there is due next year. In Hull, free school meals have been provided for all primary children for the past two years and the latest news is that uptake has increased from 36 per cent to 65 per cent. A pilot scheme is running and is successful. The uptake is highest in areas with high levels of poverty.

The research that has been done by a professor at the University of Hull will be out next year. It is to be hoped that Hull City Council, which had a change of leadership last year, will continue with the pilot and implement it. There was a worry that

the new Liberal Democrat leadership of the council might change what had been the policy of the previous Labour leadership, but the council caved in to pressure from Westminster. The local MP—a Labour MP—got 90 signatures for an early day motion on the subject and the Liberal Democrat controlled council changed its view and decided to wait until next year, when it had seen the results. That is a hopeful model.

10:45

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): We would like to hear more views on issues around entitlement to free school meals. One Plus and Children in Scotland are clearly of the view that there should be universal provision of free school meals and we have heard evidence from other organisations about the pilot in Hull. However, we have also heard evidence that argues that resources would have to be diverted from other areas to provide universal free school meals, which would be provided to children of families who could well afford to pay for meals at school. It has been suggested that any money that might be spent in that way could be better used if it were targeted on families and children who are most in need.

Can the representatives of Children in Scotland and One Plus—I note that the other organisations have slightly different views—say more about why your organisations are convinced that universal provision is the best way to go?

Paula Evans: For us, this is not an either/or situation but a both/and situation. Children in Scotland has long been committed to issues around nutrition, food uptake and, as you will see from “Children in Europe”—the magazine that I have provided the committee with—it has done a lot of cross-Europe research into various models of provision. For us, the universal principle is the best way in which to achieve a culture change to a situation in which all children are on an equal footing and engaged in learning about food—hopefully together around a table—at the earliest stages. We realise that there is a case for targeting, but we think that the measures should be complementary rather than be pitted against each other.

Marion Davis: One Plus has been working on the policy of universal free school meals for more than 15 years. We have done that because we have consulted the parents and families with whom we work. As the committee will know, lone-parent families tend to have lower incomes than families with two parents and also tend to live in poorer areas. We organised a series of focus groups that showed that there are issues of stigma for children who receive free school meals. Regardless of whether we have an anonymised

system, there is no getting away from the fact that a child who is in receipt of free school meals has a set amount of money to spend—in Glasgow, it is £1.15—while their schoolmates from better-off families have a lot more. We have been persuaded by examples from other European countries such as Finland; indeed, we invited a teacher from Finland to come and tell us about the Finnish system of universal free school meals, which was introduced as part of an overall policy to deal with the same serious problems of heart disease and obesity that we have in Scotland.

The families with whom we work have persuaded us that the issue is very important. Members might find this a strange point to raise, but although lone parents and other parents on low incomes want to work, they find that when they do, the in-work costs can prove heavy and begin to drag them down. For parents on low wages, the price of school meals can be considerable—they are persuaded by the proposal to provide their children with healthy nutritious lunches that do not come out of their incomes. We are acting on behalf on those people.

Cathie Craigie: You are right to raise that issue, because it is relevant. I understand why your consultation base should consist of the lone and low-income parents with whom you work, but you will not be surprised to learn that we have spoken to people on low, average and higher incomes and have found that parents who do not have low incomes feel that universal free school meals provision is not the best approach. After all, why should someone who can afford to pay for lunch benefit from that provision? Could the money not be better spent elsewhere? We need to balance the arguments. Moreover, should we not work with our Westminster colleagues to try and target the existing system better?

Paula Evans: The health service and the education system are offered free to all: we do not ask people who are better off to pay for them, although they can choose to pay for private education or health provision. The provision of a healthy and nutritious lunch in the public education system is a key issue because our children face very serious health problems. As nutritional experts have said, it is a time-bomb—our young people are going to start dying before their parents. It is a major issue for the families with whom we work because they live in poverty, but we are all investing in our children's lives. We are talking about the future of Scotland. The key consideration is not whether parents are well off but whether we want a healthy and happy adult population in 20 years.

Cathie Craigie: In order to do that we need to get young people when they are still at school—provided that they take the school lunch and do not go to the van or the chip shop instead. Do you

have any statistics for take-up of free school meals among young people who are eligible for them? I did not note the figures that you mentioned earlier, but I think you referred to a figure of 60-odd per cent in Hull.

Marion Davis: Take-up in Hull is 67 per cent, which is what has probably persuaded the politicians there about the approach that the pilot has taken. That said, we await the pilot's interim results, which will not be published until next year.

The University of Hull is measuring how well children do at school, their improvement, their attendance and the number of exclusions, so it will be able to see the concrete changes that come about through the policy.

The policy in Hull is not just about universal provision of free school meals; it is also about the standard of the food that children are given. I have some statistics on Glasgow, where there is a high level of entitlement to free school meals. Take-up there is some 60 per cent across the board for free or non-free meals. By comparison, other areas that have low entitlement to free school meals have low general take-up of school meals. I guess it depends on the angle from which you look at the matter.

I know that the committee visited Drumchapel high school, which has a high level of entitlement to free school meals. Take-up of school meals there is pretty low, but of the children who do take school meals, 95 per cent get them free. It is not just the children who are entitled to free school meals who are turning away—it is the whole school population. If children are not taking up school meals, it is not because the meals are free, but because of how school meals are dealt with by the school.

Cathie Craigie: Barnardo's and Children in Scotland state in their submissions that entitlement to free school meals should be extended. How could that be achieved?

John Watson: We make that call because there is a stark difference between the percentage of children who live in poverty—23 per cent—and the percentage of children who are eligible for free school meals, which is 18 per cent. It seems strange that an anti-poverty measure is set at a level that excludes an awful lot of children who it is accepted live in poverty. I think that the other organisations that are represented on the panel agree that that needs to be addressed.

Under the Education (School Meals) (Scotland) Act 2003, ministers gained the power to change the eligibility rules for free school meals, but three and a half years later, nothing has happened. The bill is about coming back to things and making them work, so it needs to address eligibility. A group of organisations met Peter Peacock recently

to discuss how the bill could do that. We talked about different models of extension, including universal provision of free school meals for children in primaries 1 and 2 and extending the eligibility rules to include families on slightly higher incomes. His response was that, whatever level was chosen, it would be easy to run the bureaucracy of choosing the people and administering the system through the child tax credits system. We were left with the idea that the challenge is not about running and managing the system—which would be easy—but about political will and the amount of money that is spent.

Cathie Craigie: Does the bill need to be amended to take that into account or can it be covered under existing legislation?

John Watson: We state in our submission that we would like the 2003 act to be amended to set a minimum level of eligibility, such as a minimum number of children to be included. We are concerned that the 2003 act is not being used. The level of uptake is the same as it was before the 2003 act. We would like a minimum level to be introduced so that all children who live in poverty—under the accepted definition—are eligible for free school meals. Free school meals are an anti-poverty measure so we should make sure that the system works properly. That is what the bill is about, so it is justifiable to do it through the bill.

Cathie Craigie: Convener—we have not discussed protecting the identity of children who receive free school meals.

The Convener: We will come back to that.

11:00

Douglas Hamilton: I would like to clarify something. I confirm that Save the Children supports the universal provision of free school meals, mainly because we are concerned that not all the poorest children get such meals. We want every child who lives in poverty to get school meals and believe that universal provision is the best way to achieve that aim. However, other measures could be introduced that would go some way towards meeting that need, one of which is extending entitlement through the tax credit system. We support the universal provision of free school meals, but we are also committed to extending entitlement through other mechanisms.

Cathie Craigie: Professionals in the education sector have told us that resources would have to be taken from elsewhere to provide universal free school meals. Should resources be taken from the education budget or another budget, such as health? How would a balance be struck?

Douglas Hamilton: That is a fair question. It is a matter of making additional resources available

to education budgets so that the resources can be administered through the education system. However, no straight choice would be involved that would mean that resources would have to come from the health budget, for example. Cuts could be made in many areas of Government spending in order to provide the required money.

I take the point about the spend that would be required and recognise that money must come from somewhere. The universal provision of free school meals would be the costliest measure, but we believe that it would make the biggest impact. However, if resources were tight and universal free school meals could not be provided, the first priority should be to extend entitlement to the children whom John Watson mentioned, who are recognised by the Government as living in poverty but who are not entitled to free school meals. That anomaly must be addressed first. That is what should happen if there are further claims on the money. I will let others debate where the money should come from, but I do not agree that it could come only from the health budget. It could come from other budgets.

Marion Davis: The Executive has costed the introduction of free meals in primary 1 and primary 2 at £22 million. To spend £22 million on a targeted strategy to improve children's health and remove stigmatisation would be to spend that money well. I suppose that it is up to the politicians to decide where the money should come from.

Tricia Marwick: I want to pick up on points that Children in Scotland and One Plus made in their submissions. Children in Scotland has urged the Executive to provide free school meals to all three-year-olds and four-year-olds, all primary school children and all families that receive working tax credit. One Plus has argued that all primary school children should receive free school meals. However, no one has mentioned universal free provision in secondary schools.

Paula Evans: We could ask for the earth when it comes to free school meals. We could ask for all children in all forms of education in Scotland to be provided with them, but we listed our priorities in our submission. The organisations that are represented on the panel agree that entitlement to free school meals should be extended, but each organisation has particular priorities that are based on its membership's priorities. Our priority is to extend entitlement to three-year-olds and four-year-olds, bring about a culture change in the provision of food in primary schools and extend entitlement to those who receive more than the family element of child tax credit. We wanted to find a package that would work, rather than propose that a particular group be left out.

Marion Davis: Our argument is similar. The last time that a bill to introduce universal free provision

went through the Parliament—the School Meals (Scotland) Bill—one of the key issues was cost. People who have been involved in the free school meals campaign, including Oxfam, the Headteachers Association of Scotland, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Poverty Alliance and the Scottish Trades Union Congress, tried to take that on board. That is why we focused on primary schools as a start—it was cheaper.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Like John Home Robertson, I went to a private school after having been to a state school. I will mention for the record that the food at the state school was better than the food at the private school. I remember that, when I was at that state school all those years ago, children got differently coloured tickets depending on whether their lunch was free or whether they paid all or half the cost. I think that I can dispense with my first question quickly. I take it as a given that you all see that there is a stigma attached to the child who takes free school meals, and to their parents.

Witnesses: Yes.

Mr Stone: Arising from that, local authorities will have a duty to keep the pupils' identities hidden. How will that lead to an increase in the uptake of free school meals? Is the thinking on that clear?

Douglas Hamilton: Stigma is one of the issues around uptake, but the evidence that the committee has already received is that there are many others that impact on the uptake of free school meals. The duty that the bill proposes needs to be examined; I am not entirely convinced by it. As well as stigma, there seems to be a more general issue about bullying in schools. The stigma might be not about free school meals, but about the type of trainers or the sort of top that a pupil wears. The free school meals issue does need to be addressed, but a wider, whole-school approach needs to be taken to address how children are treated in schools and their experience of school.

There is no excuse now for using differently coloured tickets, as Mr Stone described, or for making people join different queues and so on. There is no need for that. That would be to identify children deliberately, to pull them out and make them different. Other, quite simple, approaches could be taken. Whether or not they would directly increase uptake I am not sure—the jury is out on that. However, the experience would certainly be improved for the children concerned, and that is a worthy enough justification in itself.

John Watson: The only way to eliminate the stigma associated with poverty is to eliminate poverty. That is something that we would all gladly come and talk about on another day.

There are things going on in schools that exacerbate the situation. The primary goal needs to be to stop those. My old school was recently criticised for having different queues for free school meals, differently coloured tickets and so on. The fact that that still goes on after years of the hungry for success initiative is a real problem. I would therefore welcome a statutory duty. We need to get rid of that sort of bad practice.

Bringing in good practice will be more complicated. I do not think that there can be a one-size-fits-all response. I know that palm scanning and such things make good media headlines, but whether they are a good practical proposal, I do not know. It sounds like spending a lot of money on a high-tech scheme that may or may not work. We need to get rid of bad practice, in any case, and we support that.

Marion Davis: There are bigger challenges in the primary sector compared with the secondary sector when it comes to such schemes. Younger children losing cards is a big issue in the primary sector. That is reflected in the figures. In Glasgow, only 8 per cent of primary schools have anonymised systems for free school meals—they have not really got there. It is different in other areas: in Dundee, 93 per cent of schools have anonymised systems, which is incredibly high. Glasgow faces a bigger challenge. It is a bigger city with more schools, and the cost will be higher. We welcome any measure that minimises stigma, but no system that we come up with will be foolproof. In a system of incentives, a child who has wealthy parents and can spend £2.50 or £3 on their school meal can gain more points and win the iPod more quickly than can a young person who spends only £1.15 per meal, because they are entitled to free school meals. We cannot avoid such situations.

Paula Evans: John Watson made the point well that there is a difference between eliminating bad practice and developing good practice. I reiterate Douglas Hamilton's point that the bill addresses health promotion in schools. Children's health includes mental health and the effects of bullying and stigmatisation. We must consider why poverty carries a stigma among children and we must try to address that problem in schools as well as to eliminate bad practice that sets apart children who receive certain benefits.

Mr Stone: Thank you for your answers. John Watson suggested that palm scanning was not a great idea and would be expensive. What do other panel members think? Do you have examples of best practice on anonymised systems?

Douglas Hamilton: Palm scanning and swipe cards would be expensive ways of delivering anonymised systems that might have quite limited results, particularly in smaller schools, or in

schools in which the majority of children get free meals. In such schools stigma might not be much of an issue, so it would be ridiculous to introduce an expensive swipe-card system. Expensive approaches have proved useful in some schools but should not be obligatory for all schools in Scotland.

Marion Davis: Computerised systems can be useful in providing information to parents. When we consulted parents, at the top of the list of their concerns was the fact that they did not know what their children were eating. Parents' ability to find information can depend on the level of parental participation in the school or on whether the parents work and have time to find out the information. The parents whom we spoke to were keen to know not just what was on the menu but whether their children actually ate what was on offer.

Paula Evans: I do not know whether palm scanning is a good system. Perhaps we are being like the Americans and spending millions of pounds to develop a pen that can be taken into space, instead of just taking a pencil. The focus should be on the good practice of not distinguishing between children who receive free school meals and other children. We might or might not use technology to find innovative ways of addressing the problem, but technical solutions should not necessarily be rolled out to every school in Scotland. Each school should be able to make a judgment on how to tackle the issue.

John Watson: I do not know whether palm scanning would work, but we should not be led into it just because it would be exciting for the media and receive a lot of attention.

I would want to be reassured that palm scanning or any such initiative would be about ensuring pupils' anonymity rather than keeping more information on them.

The Convener: We touched on the duty on local authorities to promote the uptake of school meals, but I want to drill down further into the issues. What impact will the changes have, especially if there are no targets? Paula Evans suggested that you would like targets. Last week, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities said that targets were unnecessary and would not be helpful. Why do you think that targets might have a place?

11:15

John Watson: There are different targets and things to measure. In the annual school meal statistics, the variation between local authorities is striking, not just in take-up but in registration for free school meals. Increasing registration presents the strongest case for a target. Parents must register so that their children can take up free

school meals, but their doing that depends on the information that local authorities put out. Some local authorities are not making it easy enough for parents to understand the rules or encouraging parents who are eligible to come forward, so an initial target must be to increase registration.

Some local authorities have a take-up percentage in the 90s, but others are far from that. All should be in the 90s.

Douglas Hamilton: Promoting uptake goes back to the key point, which is that thousands of poor children in Scotland are not receiving free school meals, some because they are not entitled and others because they are entitled but are not claiming them. Some authorities do better than others, according to Scottish Executive statistics.

John Watson is right that we could ensure that every child who is entitled to a free school meal gets one. That would be a sensible target to start with. The figures from the last census showed that across Scotland a third of children who were entitled to free school meals were not taking them up. We should address that as a starting point and focus targets on those who need the help the most.

Marion Davis: Targets can offer a supportive framework and do not have to be seen from a negative point of view. They mean that measurement is easier and that we can see where there is a gap, what the problems are and how support can be given to improve take-up.

Paula Evans: To reiterate my point, placing duties and requirements on local authorities is one thing, but setting expectations of certain achievements is another. We can discuss the details—whether the targets are a carrot or a stick and whether they represent minimum or maximum requirements—but the important point is that they are a useful way of measuring what we are achieving: how quickly we are improving our children's nutrition and increasing the number of children taking school meals.

John Watson: We raised the question of the variability among different local authorities with the Executive some time ago, and our research team noticed that, just after that, the Executive published a research proposal to examine the differences among local authorities and how they came about. Our team was going to bid for the research, but it did not. It would be useful to know the research outcomes, so the committee might want to ask the Executive if it has anything to show for it yet. We would like to know, too.

The Convener: That is a helpful suggestion. We will pursue it when the minister comes to the committee in a fortnight.

We have touched on a number of ideas that

might help to promote the uptake of school meals. Queues, the eating environment and stigma all undoubtedly affect whether young people choose to have a school lunch. Are there any other issues or examples of good practice that could make a positive difference in the promotion of school meals?

Paula Evans: The one crucial point that is missing is the involvement of children and young people in planning the meals, the dining environment and finding solutions to queuing. It is only by involving children and young people that we will work out what schools can do to make the system work.

The Convener: My final question is for One Plus, but others may also have some views. Marion Davis touched on the involvement of parents, particularly in promoting the importance of school meals and taking up entitlements. On our visits to schools, children have suggested that there need to be taster sessions for parents so that parents can see that school meals are not the same as they were when they were pupils. What do you think about that? How can we get parents to engage with education authorities?

Marion Davis: Our feedback from parents is that they would welcome the opportunity for more involvement, but enabling that is a challenge. There is an issue with parents' participation across the board, because a lot of parents work. Many lone parents are moving into employment because the Government has a target of 70 per cent of lone parents being in work. Parents' time is pressurised.

There definitely are issues about what parents think about school meals. They have a negative view of them that goes back to their days at school, when the meals were just things like mince and gravy. The hungry for success initiative has raised the profile of school meals as a key issue, and there has been a lot of publicity around it. Material has gone out to all parents, and each local authority puts out leaflets about the menu and what is happening. Communication has improved.

It is for schools as community schools to work out how to involve parents. The idea of taster sessions is good. The primary where I live in Stirling had a taster session. It held an open evening for parents that involved many different things, including a stall with little sample cups of the food that the children had eaten that week. That is a fantastic idea and a good model.

Paula Evans: If parents have a positive attitude towards their children's school meals, children are more likely to have a positive attitude too, so involving parents is crucial, even just in the process of deciding what meals contain. That

could involve taster sessions at parents evenings, but it could also involve the school engaging with parents on what should be in packed lunches rather than assuming that parents know what the nutritional balance of a packed lunch should be if they choose to control their child's food intake in that way. Schools could develop more helpful ways of engaging with parents on nutrition.

The Convener: That concludes the committee's questions. Thank you for your attendance. If there are any subjects that we did not raise but that you would like us to consider, please do not hesitate to write to us, and we will give them due consideration.

The committee will suspend until 11.30 to allow a short comfort break and the changeover in witnesses.

11:23

Meeting suspended.

11:33

On resuming—

The Convener: I reconvene this meeting of the Communities Committee and welcome our second panel of the day. We have been joined by Lynsey Currie of the @Home Centre in Airdrie, and Annisha Davie and Greig Walker of Rosehall high school in Coatbridge. Thank you for coming. I know that you are probably a little bit apprehensive at being put in the firing line, but please do not be scared or anxious. We are not here to trip you up or catch you out; we just want to know about your views on the legislation that we are considering.

My first question is to ask you what you think about the proposal that schools should be health promoting. I know that Rosehall high school has some particular experience of that because it has been engaged in health promoting for some time. Would the witnesses like to share with the committee their views on that?

Annisha Davie (Rosehall High School): I think that it is quite a good idea to have health-promoting schools because they have a wider variety of food.

Lynsey Currie (@Home Centre): I think that health-promoting schools are quite a good idea but I do not think that we should completely block out unhealthy foods because that is more likely to make kids want to go to the chip shop and elsewhere. Perhaps schools should give us healthy foods Monday to Thursday and then have a treat on Fridays—something like chips or pizza—so that we will not boycott the school meals to go to the chip shop.

Greig Walker (Rosehall High School): It is not just salad and stuff that is healthy; it is always a good idea to have healthy pizzas or something like that. There can always be a variety of healthy food, because salad is not the only healthy food.

The Convener: Do you think that it is important that a health-promoting school does not think only about the food it offers and that it tries to encourage young people to take exercise and get involved in fun activities that they enjoy? How can we ensure that some of those activities run through the school curriculum?

Annisha Davie: Our school runs a lot of activities through lunch times and after school. We have everything from yoga to rugby. Also, we do not say that the boys can do one sport and the girls another; everyone can try any sport they want. It is quite good that way.

The Convener: I am sorry to interrupt you, but the sound man is just giving you a bit of help with your microphones, just in case anyone at the back cannot hear you.

Lynsey Currie: Not everyone likes to participate in PE. A lot of people in my school forget their kit—[*Laughter.*]

The Convener: Is that intentional?

Lynsey Currie: Yes.

The Convener: We had better not tell Mr Berry that.

Lynsey Currie: Perhaps having clubs after school is a good idea. At our school, a dance teacher once came in to take the PE class and a lot of people participated in that. It should be made a lot more fun than just the basic activities. If it was, people would be more willing to participate.

The Convener: Lynsey, this is a question for you. St Margaret's high school has just become a sports academy. Will all those new facilities at the school encourage people to engage in all sorts of activities—not just football, basketball and all the other traditional sports, but dance, theatre and other activities?

Lynsey Currie: I am sure they will, but I go to Caldervale high school.

The Convener: I am sorry.

Tricia Marwick: I can tell you that I forgot my PE kit for six months out of every year. Do you think that activities such as dance would be better options than just straight PE?

Lynsey Currie: I think they would. When we did dance at our school, a lot more people who usually forget their kit remembered to bring it so that they could participate. A lot of people who do not normally participate in PE decided that they

would join in because they enjoyed it more than football and basketball. Guys like that sort of thing, but not a lot of girls do, so they forget their kit so that they do not have to participate. Doing dance and things like that would make them more willing to participate.

Tricia Marwick: We will not address the issue of forging a note from mum.

Do the witnesses have any examples from their own experience of how children and young people have been involved in a positive way in health promotion or healthy eating campaigns? Earlier, we heard some of the professionals say that young people should be a lot more involved in meal planning, the school ethos, and the school hall dining area. Are you able to make any input to all that at the moment? Would you like to be able to do that?

Lynsey Currie: At the moment we are not, but just before the summer we were given a lesson in sun awareness and told about how that could affect our health. Before healthy meals were brought in at my school, we had a questionnaire about the sort of things that we would like to have. That was our input, but I think that we should have a bit more input because we feel that healthy eating has been forced upon us.

Annisha Davie: I have had a lot of involvement because our school does that. Everyone does sports. Last week, our head teacher spoke to the fifth and sixth year girls because there is not much for us to do—there are no netball teams near school that we can play. The head teacher said that there was money spare that could be used to get a yoga instructor, for example. All the fifth and sixth year girls sat down one lunch time and decided to go and ask the teacher in the physical education department what she thought would be good for us. We decided on yoga and aerobics because they are relaxing, especially just before exams and so on, and they keep you healthy and fit.

Greig Walker: We are involved not just in healthy eating but in lots of different sports and activities. One teacher does table tennis. All the fun teachers, and none of the grumpy ones, participate. The teachers do not say, "I will beat you today because you did not do your homework." It is nothing like that.

The teachers try to get us involved in different activities and put up posters everywhere. In the classes, they ask, "Are you coming to the activity tonight?" It is great that they are enthusiastic and ask us to come rather than just say, "It's on, so come." We are asked to come and participate rather than just hang around. The activities are for fun and the teacher is there for fun as well.

Tricia Marwick: A lot seems to rely on the enthusiasm of individual teachers. Do you feel that you have an input? Can you put forward ideas by saying, "We would really like to do this"? Does that happen at the moment? Would you like to see that happen in the future?

Greig Walker: Our English teacher has just started a badminton club after school on a Tuesday. So far, there has been a lot of input from the pupils as well as the teacher. The club is attended by a few teachers, including an English teacher and a French teacher and one of my maths teachers used to go as well. Lots of teachers go to it. If people do not like a particular teacher, they might not attend the club on the week that he is taking it. We have a lot of different activities and many different teachers who make an input. That encourages people to go and enjoy themselves.

Tricia Marwick: It certainly beats cross-country running on a November morning.

Dave Petrie: I speak as a former—hopefully fun—maths teacher and a great fan of extracurricular activities. Can I take it from what you are saying that if more activities are offered over lunch, it is more likely that pupils will stay in school for lunch? That is what I believe in as well.

Annisha Davie: Yes, that is kind of true.

Dave Petrie: Has that proved to be true in your school?

Annisha Davie: Our school serves a variety of food. It has a salad bar, where people can buy salad and sandwiches, and a place where people can get hot food. There are two separate queues, so they go down a lot more quickly. People can take their lunches down to the PE department, where they can eat their lunch and then get ready so that they can take part in the activity. That means that they have more time to do the activity.

Dave Petrie: What happens outwith lunch time if activities take place before or after school? As schools are being given the opportunity to offer snacks as well, is it possible for pupils to get nutritious food when they participate in activities before or after school?

Annisha Davie: We are working on that. After school or at weekends, we have rugby. Fresh fruit and water are available then. We are allowed to take as many bottles of water and as much fruit as we want, as long as we do not waste it. Fruit and water are always available and many people choose to take them.

Dave Petrie: That is really good. Does Greig Walker have any other comments?

Greig Walker: The exact same applies to me. I go to the same school and I, too, play rugby. Fruit

is always made available. The fruit is not just a box of bananas but bananas, apples, oranges and lots of different healthy things.

Dave Petrie: Are the bananas for the forwards?

Scott Barrie: I must say to Dave Petrie that the concept of a fun maths teacher is a bit of a contradiction.

Do you think that school menus should include only healthy options? Particularly for secondary pupils, we talk about choice. Should pupils be able to make some sort of choice for themselves?

Greig Walker: I definitely do not think that there should be just healthy options. There should be more healthy options than unhealthy options, but we should always have the option. If healthy food is the only option available and kids do not want to take that, they will just go and spend their money in the shops, in the chippie or at the burger van. There should always be the option.

Annisha Davie: I agree with Greig. At our school, we have options. For example, we can still buy chocolate. Fizzy juice is not sold any more, but we can have plain water or a variety of flavoured waters.

11:45

Lynsey Currie: I do not think that only healthy foods should be available. As I said, people will just go to the chip shop, as many in my school do. It would be a better idea to offer a treat on a Friday, such as chips or a healthy pizza, rather than just banish all unhealthy foods.

Scott Barrie: It seems to me that young people in particular vote with their feet. If we say that school meals are just about eating healthily and we do not involve young people in choosing what they want, they will just walk out of the school and eat somewhere else. You all seem to think that we should find a balance.

Witnesses indicated agreement.

Dave Petrie: I think you acknowledged that you are quite happy that there should be a ban on fizzy drinks?

Greig Walker: Yes.

Annisha Davie: The system works well in our school. Loads of people drink water. There are water machines, so we can fill up our water bottles when we run out.

Lynsey Currie: In my school, we are not allowed to take fizzy drinks or any type of juice into class, so most people stick to water, which they can take into class.

Dave Petrie: Is there a problem with pupils going out of the school to buy fizzy drinks?

Annisha Davie: Some people do, because not everyone wants to drink water all the time. Some people want fizzy juice, too.

Dave Petrie: Should crisps with a high fat content be banned?

Lynsey Currie: A ban on high-fat crisps might be a good idea. Crisps with a lower fat content are available—they are in the vending machines at our school—and are just as good as the regular crisps. There should not be a problem with a ban.

Annisha Davie: We have low-fat crisps at our school, too.

Dave Petrie: Are the vending machines that do not sell fizzy drinks or high-fat crisps well used?

Annisha Davie: Yes.

Greig Walker: Less chocolate is available and there are more cereal bars, such as Nutri-Grain bars.

Dave Petrie: Are the vast majority of pupils at your school happy about that?

Greig Walker: Yes, I think so.

John Home Robertson: We talked about chip shops and vans. What would it take—short of locking the gates, which no one suggests we do—to persuade young people to stay in at lunch time and eat what is on offer in school? Is it just a lifestyle issue? Do people just want to go and get what is available on the high street?

Annisha Davie: Cafeterias need to be made more accessible and more fun places to have lunch. In our school we have school radio and television and we take it in turns to take part. The school newspaper is sold in the cafeteria, too.

We got up a petition to have one of the burger vans moved further from the school, so people have to walk further to get to it—

John Home Robertson: To burn up some calories.

Annisha Davie: People do not want to walk to the van any more, so they stay in school or go to the shops.

John Home Robertson: Are you saying that by creating a better environment and organising school meals better, there is a chance that we can encourage more young people to take advantage of school meals and not go down the street in the rain?

Annisha Davie: Yes. It depends on how welcoming the cafeteria is. Ours is welcoming and there are always teachers about who we can talk to. We have big tables, too.

John Home Robertson: Your school made its cafeteria welcoming. What was the result? Did the

proportion of young people who eat meals in school increase?

Annisha Davie: It increased a lot. We had a problem with seating and had to get new, bigger tables and more chairs, because there was not enough room to fit everybody in.

John Home Robertson: That is a good sign. My final question on this theme is that, given the general agreement that what people eat out of school is part of the problem, is there a chance that the people who want to buy something off the school premises might buy healthier sandwiches or baked tatties if the vans and chippies near schools could be persuaded to make better quality stuff available—or will they almost certainly buy something relatively unhealthy if they go down the street?

Annisha Davie: It depends on the individual and their opinion about healthy food. We try to promote healthy food in school and more people are buying it. Even in the shops they buy water instead of fizzy juice.

John Home Robertson: Do Greig Walker or Lynsey Currie have anything to say about chip shops and vans?

Greig Walker: I agree with Annisha Davie. If it is put across well enough that healthy eating is better and people still do not want to go to the canteen, shops should sell healthy food—although we cannot force them to do that. If people go to the shops, it would be better if they had the chance to choose a healthier option.

Lynsey Currie: The two places nearest to my school are chip shops, so I do not know how we could get them to sell healthier food. One shop has started to sell sandwiches and things like that, but it is right next door to the chip shop. It is up to the individual whether they want to choose the sandwiches.

Tricia Marwick: I would like to rewind a wee bit. You spoke about the things that are done in school, such as sport, gym and different forms of PE. Are cookery classes compulsory in first and second years? Do boys and girls get them? Do you find that they tap into the ethos of health-promoting schools as well?

Greig Walker: They definitely do in our school. Most of the recipes that we use in home economics are healthy. Boys and girls in first and second years are forced to—

Tricia Marwick: Forced?

Greig Walker: In a good way. The recipes are certainly healthier now—we are not always making chocolate cake; now we make apple cake or something. It just sounds better.

Tricia Marwick: With not too much sugar in it?

Greig Walker: No.

Lynsey Currie: In my school, hospitality is a compulsory subject in first and second years, but we can choose to take it after that. Most of the recipes are healthy. Once in a while they let us make a cake, but most of the time we make things such as stir-fries and chicken. The food is much healthier now than it used to be when we only made cakes. The healthier home economics classes get, the better.

Cathie Craigie: I have a question about vans before I move on to the question that I intended to ask. Annisha Davie mentioned that there was a petition to have the van outside your school moved further away. Who organised the petition?

Annisha Davie: I think that it was the teachers, but the pupils were also involved, including pupils who eat at the cafeteria. It was part of our effort to get our eco flags and gold award for health promotion.

Cathie Craigie: So there was support in the school for having that van removed?

Annisha Davie: Yes. There was a lot of support from pupils as well as from teachers.

Cathie Craigie: That was a good initiative.

Let us move on to something about which you might have heard us speak this morning, which is the stigma that some people might feel is attached to young people who receive free school meals. Is there a stigma? Will you explain how the system works in your school?

Annisha Davie: We put money on our Young Scot cards. When we buy something, our cards are swiped, money is taken off and we get points for what we buy. The healthier the food we buy, the more points we get. We also have prizes. One of the boys in our school has won quite a lot, including an iPod and a PlayStation 2 through eating healthily at school. In our school, everybody just uses their Young Scot card.

Cathie Craigie: So you would not be able to tell whether someone was getting a free school meal or was paying for it?

Annisha Davie: I cannot tell the difference. I do not know who has free school meals in my school.

Cathie Craigie: This morning, we were told about the incentives that some local authorities are putting in place to encourage people to eat healthily. That is good in one way, but the downside would be that a young person who was in receipt of school meals—and therefore had only a limited amount of money to spend each day—would never be able to gain as many points as someone who could spend as much as they wanted to. How does the system work in your school?

Annisha Davie: One of the girls who won an iPod gets free meals—she does not mind people knowing that she does, so she told me. She wins a lot of prizes. It depends on the person.

Cathie Craigie: And what they are eating.

Annisha Davie: Yes.

Cathie Craigie: It has been suggested that the ticketless system that you are using is fine for secondary schools but might be more difficult to operate in primary schools because younger people might lose the swipe cards.

John Home Robertson: Some adults lose cards, too.

Cathie Craigie: I know I do.

It has been suggested, because of that problem, that there could be a sort of palm-scanning system. What do you think of that?

Lynsey Currie: It would be unwise to use swipe cards in primary schools as the children would lose them. To be honest with you, most of the people in my school have lost their card—I have lost mine twice. They are very easy to lose and, when you lose them, you are left without a lunch. My school managed to devise a ticketed system that enables people to pay with money if they lose their card, but that has sort of defeated the purpose of having the cards.

Cathie Craigie: What do you think of the suggestion that schools could have a palm or thumb scanner that could identify the individual and connect them to their school meal account?

Lynsey Currie: Well, they definitely would not lose their palm, but such a system would probably be really expensive and you might be better spending the money on other things.

Greig Walker: People at primary school would probably like to put their hand in a machine to get it scanned. That might encourage them to go for school meals more.

Cathie Craigie: That is another point.

Greig Walker: I think that it would be a good idea, but it depends on how much you are willing to spend.

Cathie Craigie: Lynsey, you are from a different school from Annisha. Is the stigma issue noticeable in your school? Is it something you worry about?

Lynsey Currie: Since we got the cards, it is no longer noticeable. Before, however, there was a lot of stigma because you would have to go down at break to collect your ticket from one of the assistant head teachers. Everyone knew that you were getting a free school meal. It was seen as a sort of poor people's thing and it could be one of

the reasons for bullying—people would get called names because they had to go and get the ticket. Because of the card system, people do not know who has a free school meal, so people cannot judge them on that basis.

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): Do people have to put cash on their Young Scot card at the beginning of the week?

Annisha Davie: There is a machine in the cafeteria that you stick your card in to top it up. You can put as much money as you like on your card whenever you like. I am not too sure what the people who get free school meals do. In our school, while people are in classes, the dinner ladies put money on the cards for the people who are on free meals. We do not know who gets a free school meal in our school unless they have told us.

12:00

Lynsey Currie: I think that the money is credited automatically to the cards of the people who get free school meals. They do not have to put any money on their cards and no one knows that they get free school meals.

Frances Curran: There is a proposal that all school meals in primary schools should be free. Do you have a view on that? It would mean that parents would not be giving their children money for school meals every day.

Annisha Davie: If school meals were free, a lot more people would always go to the cafeteria to eat, as that would save them having to go and pay for stuff. They would be like, "Oh yes, the school's paying for more stuff for us." They would get their free lunch and then be able to go wherever they wanted after that. However, if all 1,000 pupils in a high school got free school meals, how would the school be able to feed everyone in the space of a lunch time?

Mr Stone: Do you think it is right that the children of wealthier families should get free school meals in the same way as the children of poorer families?

Lynsey Currie: I do not think that that is fair. If you are well enough off to pay for your own lunch, you should do so. If someone from a poor family cannot pay for their lunch, that is not their fault, which means that they should get free meals. Free meals would encourage more people to eat in the school, but I do not think it is very fair.

Frances Curran: Do you have to pay for sports clubs and sports facilities in the school?

Lynsey Currie: No.

The Convener: That concludes the committee's questions. Thanks for your evidence and for sitting

through the previous evidence-taking session. You did not need to be nervous at all. I learned a valuable lesson, which was that I should have checked out the badge on the blazer, not just the colour of the tie. That way, I would not have made such a terrible faux pas. I will not be welcome in Caldervale again. At least it was not someone from Calderhead—my old school—who was sitting in front of me. I would never have been forgiven for getting that wrong.

If it occurs to you that there is something that we did not cover during our questions, you can write to us to let us know and we will consider those points as well.

That concludes this meeting.

Meeting closed at 12:03.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Tuesday 5 December 2006

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

OFFICIAL REPORT daily editions

Single copies: £5.00

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at Document Supply.

Published in Edinburgh by Astron and available from:

Blackwell's Bookshop

**53 South Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YS
0131 622 8222**

Blackwell's Bookshops:
243-244 High Holborn
London WC1 7DZ
Tel 020 7831 9501

All trade orders for Scottish Parliament documents should be placed through Blackwell's Edinburgh.

Blackwell's Scottish Parliament Documentation
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament, their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0131 622 8283 or
0131 622 8258

Fax orders
0131 557 8149

E-mail orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Subscriptions & Standing Orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Scottish Parliament

RNID Typetalk calls welcome on
18001 0131 348 5000
Textphone 0845 270 0152

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers