EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday 1 June 2005

Session 2

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE
10th Meeting 2005, Session 2

CONVENER

*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)
*Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP)
*Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)
*Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)
*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)
*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
*Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)
Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)
Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Kelly Bayes (Aberlour Child Care Trust)
Una Chrystal (Right Track)
Gary Daniel (Fairbridge in Scotland)
Ben Haynes (Scottish Executive Education Department)
Alan Locke (Renfrewshire Council)
Steve McCreadie (Aberlour Child Care Trust)
Tom McGhee (Spark of Genius)
Robin McKendrick (Scottish Executive Education Department)
Shona Pittilo (Scottish Executive Education Department)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Roberts

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Education Committee

Wednesday 1 June 2005

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:02*]

Subordinate Legislation

St Mary's Music School (Aided Places) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/269)

Education (Assisted Places) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/270)

The Convener (Robert Brown): Good morning. I welcome people to this meeting of the Education Committee and ask them to ensure that they have switched off their pagers and mobile phones.

Item 1 on the agenda is consideration of the St Mary's Music School (Aided Places) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 and the Education (Assisted Places) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005. The purpose of the first set of regulations is to uprate the qualifying income levels for the remission of fees and charges and the making of grants under the aided places scheme in respect of St Mary's Music School. The purpose of the second set of regulations is fairly similar and is to uprate the qualifying income levels for the remission of fees and charges and the making of grants under the assisted places scheme.

I am pleased to welcome Ben Haynes and Paul Wilson, who are policy advisers to the registrar of independent schools in the Scottish Executive Education Department. The two hold similar positions.

Both Scottish statutory instruments are subject to the negative procedure, so unless there are strong objections, after it has heard the witnesses, the committee should agree that it does not want to make any recommendation in its report to the Parliament on them.

I ask Ben Haynes to make some introductory comments to remind the committee what the regulations are about.

Ben Haynes (Scottish Executive Education Department): As you set out, the amendment of these regulations is an annual occurrence. The instruments raise the thresholds for parental contributions for the aided places scheme, the assisted places scheme and some associated allowances. As in previous years, the rise has been set based on the retail prices index—at October 2004, that meant 2.1 per cent.

The reason for the regulations is to ensure that parents whose children are on the assisted places scheme or the aided places scheme do not end up paying substantially more as their wages increase with inflation.

The Convener: I notice that at the end of the second instrument there is a list of independent schools that participate in the scheme. Obviously, it includes only some independent schools. Is there any reason why some independent schools participate and others do not?

Ben Haynes: When the assisted places scheme was phased out in 1997 it was decided that pupils who held assisted places at the start of the 1997 school session would receive assistance until the end of the school session in which their primary or secondary education was completed. The schools on the list are those that are left in that situation.

The Convener: Is that different from the regulations with regard to St Mary's?

Ben Haynes: Yes. Those are separate regulations. When the assisted places scheme was introduced, for various reasons, St Mary's did not fit within it, so the aided places scheme was established as a separate scheme for St Mary's.

The Convener: What I meant was, will the St Mary's scheme continue?

Ben Haynes: Yes. The St Mary's scheme will continue. There are no plans to end that scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I will ask a general question. How many pupils or what percentage of pupils stand to gain from the regulations?

Ben Haynes: Five pupils are on the assisted places scheme. There will be 51 pupils on the aided places scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Thank you.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): We must be coming to the end of the assisted places scheme for pupils in both primary and secondary schools. At what point does it cease? Will there be a date at which we will not receive the regulations in future?

Ben Haynes: The current pupils on the scheme should finish in 2007.

The Convener: Thank you very much.

If no committee member has other views on the regulations, I suggest that we should agree that we do not want to make any recommendation on either instrument in our report to Parliament. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Additional Support for Learning (Appropriate Agency Request Period and Exceptions) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/264)

Additional Support for Learning (Changes in School Education) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/265)

Additional Support for Learning (Co-ordinated Support Plan) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/266)

Additional Support for Learning (Publication of Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/267)

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of four sets of regulations under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, which is a piece of legislation that the committee considered last year.

The purposes of the instruments, which are subject to the negative procedure, are to specify a period within which a request for help by an education authority from an appropriate agency must be complied with; to make provision for education authorities to take action in connection with changes that occur in the school education of children and young people with additional support needs; to make provision in respect of the co-ordinated support plan; and to add to the information to be published by education authorities, to set timescales for publication and to prescribe the form and manner of publication.

I am pleased to welcome from the Scottish Executive Robin McKendrick, the team leader of the additional support for learning division; Shona Pittilo, the policy officer in the additional support for learning division; and Louise Donnelly, a solicitor with Legal and Parliamentary Services.

Would Mr McKendrick like to make some introductory comments? We will take all the regulations together.

Robin McKendrick (Scottish Executive Education Department): I will take the Additional Support for Learning (Appropriate Agency Request Period and Exceptions) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 first.

The instrument applies only when the education authority requests help from an appropriate agency under section 23(1) of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. That is definite. Also, the instrument does not list the appropriate agencies that are covered. Those will be included in a separate order made under section 23(2)(c) of the act, which will be laid in due course.

The focus of the instrument is to set the request period and the exceptions to that period. It is worth pointing out that we started out by suggesting that appropriate agencies should have a six-week window in which to respond to requests. However, during our consultation exercise, many of the agencies stated that that period was not long enough and was too tight. Therefore, we have increased the period that appropriate agencies have to respond to a request from six to 10 weeks.

I emphasise that the clock starts ticking when the request is made—when it is communicated to the appropriate agency. There is no requirement in the regulations that the request be signed, because requests might be made by e-mail or at a videoconference. The important thing is that the request should be in a form that is capable of being used for subsequent reference.

The regulations also cover exceptions to the period. If an appropriate agency becomes aware that it will not be able to meet the 10-week deadline, it must inform the education authority that alternative provision will have to be made.

To safeguard children with additional support needs, the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 makes provision, subject to certain definitions, for certain actions to be taken when there is or is likely to be a specified change in a child's school education. The Additional Support for Learning (Changes in School Education) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 define what those changes are. They apply to a child starting pre-school education, primary education or secondary education, to transfers from one school to another and to other situations involving school closures or exclusions.

To ensure that changes happen as smoothly as possible, education authorities will require to have in place appropriate arrangements for all children, not just those with additional support needs. To ensure that the arrangements are appropriate for a child or young person who has additional support needs, the regulations specify the action that an education authority must take at various transition points in the school career of that child or young person. When authorities consider it appropriate, they should involve other agencies to ensure that the transition is as effective as possible.

A number of issues arise. It was thought that 12 months was an appropriate period in which to arrange for a move from primary school to secondary school. However, in relation to children entering pre-school education, the consultation suggested to us that the timescale should be changed and, given the rapid development of children at that age, a six-month timescale was judged to be more appropriate.

I stress that, if the education authority considers it appropriate to seek relevant advice and information from an appropriate agency or another person, it is also required to take account of the views of the child and their parents or of the young person when making arrangements, before the change takes place.

The regulations require education authorities, within specified periods, to consider which agencies might require information to make arrangements to meet the additional support needs of a child prior to a change in their school education. Once identified, the education authority must provide such information with a minimum of six months' notice. The period of six months applies in all cases apart from when a child is entering pre-school education, when the consultation suggested that a three-month period would be more appropriate. Again, that is because of the rapid development of children at that age.

I turn now to the Additional Support for Learning (Co-ordinated Support Plan) (Scotland) Regulations 2005. As the committee will be aware, the co-ordinated support plan is a statutory strategic planning document, which will be subject to regular monitoring and review for those children and young people who meet the criteria set out under section 2 of the 2004 act. Section 9(2) of the act sets out certain information that a CSP must contain, but under section 11(8), we are allowed to develop the criteria. Therefore, the regulations prescribe the form and content of the co-ordinated support plan, the time limits that must be complied with when preparing and reviewing the plan, the exceptions to those limits and provisions in connection with the keeping, transfer, disclosure and discontinuance of the plan.

The additional information that a CSP will now have to contain as a result of the regulations includes the biographical and contact details of the child or young person, the contact details of the parents or of the adults who have responsibility for the child, the pupil profile, the comments of the parent, child or young person on any aspects of the plan and a review timetable.

The schedule, which is on page 8 of the regulations, sets out what the co-ordinated support plan should look like. I stress that the template is the result of extensive consultation by our development officers with front-line professionals, who think that it is a reasonable way to set out a co-ordinated support plan. The code of practice provides further information about the content of the plan and about the detail of the regulations. Separate guidance will be produced on how to complete a plan. That will operate in conjunction with the training materials that will be available shortly. I undertake to copy any information that the committee wants to receive. Indeed, we would be happy to provide training for the committee.

I do not intend to go through the details under all the main headings in the regulations, but I will say that provision is made for the time limit for preparation of the plan, the time limit for the review of the plan, time limit exceptions, arrangements for keeping the plan, the transfer of the plan between authorities, the disclosure of the plan and the discontinuance, retention or destruction of the plan.

The committee might be interested to know that we are currently developing an electronic version of the co-ordinated support plan. A feasibility study that was carried out towards the end of last year concluded that it would be possible to run with the idea and we have created a working group to examine the concept.

The Subordinate Legislation Committee had some questions about the drafting of regulation 5. We found those comments helpful and have undertaken to come back with an amendment to the regulation prior to the commencement of the legislation on 14 November.

10:15

The Convener: That is an unusual thing to do. Will it not get a bit confusing if a regulation is followed by an amendment? Is that a satisfactory and transparent way of handling the problem?

Robin McKendrick: The Subordinate Legislation Committee was quite content with that procedure.

The Convener: Okay. We might come back to that later.

Robin McKendrick: Last, but by no means least, we have the Additional Support for Learning (Publication of Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2005. The 2004 act specifies that education authorities must publish information about the range of matters that are specified in the act at section 26(2).

During the consultation exercise on the code of practice and the regulations, we asked what else it might be useful for education authorities to publish. As a result, we are now adding to the list of issues in the act and are amending section 26(2) of the act to the effect that there is now a requirement to provide details of any health board for the education authority area, or any part of it, where advice, information and support can be obtained. That change recognises the important role that health boards can play in the provision of information, advice and support.

Further, there will now be a requirement to provide details of any other person who the education authority thinks appropriate from whom parents and so on can get advice, information and support, including support for advocacy. That is in

recognition of the important role that voluntary organisations can play in supporting parents, providing advocacy and so on.

Education authorities must publish that information within three months of the commencement of section 26 of the act. It must be available free of charge either at the authority's headquarters or at public libraries. It must also be available in electronic form, for example, on the authority's website. It must also be made available free of charge to such other persons as might reasonably require it. If the parents of a child with additional support needs were moving from one authority to another, it would be reasonable for them to ask what the authority's policies were and to access the information that could be provided. It would also be reasonable for a researcher to be able to access the information free of charge in any form that would be considered to be reasonable.

The act stipulates at section 26(1) that authorities must keep that information up to date and under review. I can confirm that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education's review of the implementation of the act will also examine that issue to ensure that, in the early stages, authorities are keeping that information as up to date and relevant as possible.

The Convener: For clarity, we will now deal with the regulations separately, starting with the Additional Support for Learning (Appropriate Agency Request Period and Exceptions) (Scotland) Regulations 2005. Regulation 3 concerns exceptions and paragraph (1)(a)(i) talks about a situation in which a process of assessment "cannot take place". That seems quite stark and I wonder whether there is any definition of what "cannot" means in those circumstances.

Robin McKendrick: There are a number of reasons why an assessment could not take place. For example, the parents of the child might not turn up for the interview—that would be the principal reason. Alternatively, the agency might not have received information that it has requested from another agency.

Fiona Hyslop: I think that the principal reason is covered by regulation 3(1)(b). I share the convener's concern about regulation 3(1)(a)(i). I suspect that in effect what it means is that if an assessment by a health professional was needed but could not be provided because of staff shortages, for example, the request period could be extended. One of parents' key concerns is that any delay will be due not necessarily to the request for help and support but because they have to get an assessment from another authority. There are shortages all over the place so, regardless of everything in the act, if professional support was needed, that one line in regulation 3(1)(a)(i) could provide a get-out from providing a co-ordinated support plan.

Robin McKendrick: That said, regulation 3(2)(a) says:

"The appropriate agency must, when it becomes aware that the time limit under regulation 2 cannot be met, inform the education authority which made the request of-

(a) the reason why the time limit cannot be complied with; and

(b) a new date",

which

"in any event must be not later than 16 weeks starting on the date when the request was made by the authority."

We are talking about only a slight extension. There is still a back-stop at 16 weeks.

The Convener: I take the point about the 16 weeks, but that is quite a long time. The practical issue is whether the regulation will be used to provide an automatic exemption. I am conscious of what often happens in court procedures, in which exemptions can become the norm rather than the exception. I cannot remember whether there is anything in the guidance or elsewhere about a push towards 10 weeks, not 16 weeks, being the norm.

Shona Pittilo (Scottish Executive Education Department): The code of practice makes it clear that there is an expectation that education authorities and other appropriate agencies will meet requests for help or assessment—or whatever the request is—within the 10-week timescale. However, it is recognised that there will be situations in which that is not possible. Perhaps an assessment cannot take place because a therapist is not available, possibly due to staff shortages. However, as soon as the appropriate agency becomes aware that the 10-week timescale cannot be complied with—for whatever reason—it must notify the education authority of that, with the reasons, then set a new date. As Robin McKendrick said, the regulations make it clear that that new date cannot extend beyond a further six weeks.

The Convener: Will that be monitored in some way?

Shona Pittilo: That would be part of the HMIE review. If authorities are making requests for help and those requests are not being met within the timescale, that would have to be considered. Originally, as Robin McKendrick said in the introduction, the timescale was six weeks. You commented that 16 weeks is quite a long time. It was extended mainly because of concerns from the Health Department that it would find a six-week limit difficult to meet, partly because of shortages and so on. Where a child is already known to the service, it would be possible, but

where a child was new to it, the department felt that longer would be needed, so the timescale was extended to 10 weeks, and then to 16 weeks, to take account of those more exceptional circumstances in which a child is coming new to a service and requires a more in-depth assessment, because information is not already there to help to draw conclusions.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can perfectly understand the reasons for the extension, but I wonder why the timescale has been extended so much, from six weeks to 10, then from 10 to 16. The extension seems considerable. Might a lesser figure have been more appropriate?

Shona Pittilo: Initially, the period was shorter, but we had to take account of the concerns that were raised in the consultation, not just from those in health but from those in social work, who felt that if the timescale could not be met, they would be led into unnecessary disputes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: But my question is why it is necessary to go so far beyond 10 weeks. Would not 12 or 14 have been enough?

Robin McKendrick: The judgment was born of the results of our consultation. If a request cannot be met because of the reasons that have been pointed out, such as a staff shortage, would it be possible to address that problem in one, two or three weeks? The regulations state that it is reasonable for an agency to be able to carry out any review and respond to the education authority in 16 weeks. That is a final limit past which the process cannot go.

We have listened to what respondents to our consultation said in their written responses. Some wanted to go back to 20 weeks and 24 weeks, but we think that we are on reasonable ground by saying 10 weeks and, where there is a problem with that, 16 weeks, although, as Shona Pittilo pointed out, we say in the code of practice that that is an exception.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Obviously it is a question of balance and judgment but, if in the light of experience it is found that 16 weeks is longer than is strictly necessary, will you amend the regulations?

Robin McKendrick: As the minister made clear when he spoke to the committee about the code of practice last week, nothing is written in tablets of stone. We will examine all aspects of the act and the code and, if we believe that we can safely develop anything that is in the regulations, we will certainly do that when we have sufficient information on which to base a judgment.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): Under regulation 3(2), an agency that cannot carry out an assessment must make the education authority aware that the time limit has been broken. What provision has been made for the recording of the timescale and the delay in assessment? If HMIE is going to monitor that, it will have to have that information. What provision has been made to ensure that a record is made of the fact that a request was made at a certain time, that it was not complied with for whatever reason and that measures are being taken to ensure that it is complied with within the extended timescale?

Robin McKendrick: The act and the regulations make it clear that any request that is made under the act must be made in a form that is capable of being used for subsequent reference. They do so without being specific about how the request should be made—for example, it could be made in writing, by e-mail or by video—but the fact that we say that the request must be capable of being used for subsequent reference means that it is a matter of fact that the communication took place on a certain date. Therefore, as I said in my introduction, the clock starts ticking on that date and, in any review of a specific case, HMIE would be able to refer to that date as the date on which an authority asked an appropriate agency to comply with a request that had been made under section 23(1) of the act.

Fiona Hyslop: For many children with additional support needs, the clock actually starts ticking when the parents ask the education authorities for an assessment, which could include an assessment by a health professional. The problem is that the legislation means that the official clock starts ticking only when the education authority makes the request. We have still to report on the code of practice, on which we took evidence last week, but some evidence that we have had on it suggests that the clock should start to tick when parents ask for the assessment. My concern is that an education authority could end up delaying making a request to a health authority until it knows that the request can be complied with. Perhaps, if we have concerns about the timescale and we want HMIE to track how long it takes for a request to be complied with but accept the timescales that are in the regulations, the code of practice needs to be amended to include reference to the point at which parents request the involvement of health professionals. That might be a more effective way of monitoring progress and reflecting the reality that, for the child, the clock often starts ticking not when the education authority asks for the health assessment, but when the family asks for it.

Robin McKendrick: It is reasonable that the code of practice should make those matters absolutely clear.

The Convener: We will leave those regulations for the moment and come back to what we want to do about them later.

The second set of regulations is the Additional Support for Learning (Changes in School Education) (Scotland) Regulations 2005. I have a question about what happens when a school closes with the result that people make a transition. How do the regulations relate to general regulations on school closures? Are they interrelated?

10:30

Robin McKendrick: The regulations set no relationship. I used a school's closure as an example of when the regulations would kick in. If a school were to close, an education authority would have to take action more than 12 months before that happened or as soon as possible if the closure were less than 12 months away. Nothing in the instrument contradicts or clashes with anything in other regulations.

The Convener: The third instrument is the Additional Support for Learning (Co-ordinated Support Plan) (Scotland) Regulations 2005, which has a technical issue to which the Subordinate Legislation Committee adverted. When I interrupted you to ask my initial question, I was getting at the fact that the regulations are to be amended before they come into force. Why do you not just make further regulations that contain the amended aspect?

Robin McKendrick: The amendment will make the regulations clearer. One of the Subordinate Legislation Committee's comments was that regulation 5 made five cross-references to the parent act. We have taken on board that drafting point. The committee's other point was about making absolutely clear, when regulation 5(a) refers to

"subsection (5)(a) of that section",

whether "that section" is section 10 or section 11 of the act.

The redraft will not change the policy content. Given the importance that parents, education authorities and others attach to having early sight of the co-ordinated support plan, which is a new concept, it is better to enact the regulations now, if the committee agrees. After that, we will amend those small matters to make the regulations clearer. The amendment will not change the policy. As I said, the code of practice will make absolutely clear the policy content of the co-ordinated support plan.

The Convener: So it is a matter of distributing the regulations to people, even though they will not come into force yet.

Robin McKendrick: Absolutely. The Subordinate Legislation Committee made helpful points on the drafting.

The Convener: When we discussed the code, a point was made about the form of the document in the schedule and the interrelation with individualised educational programmes. We were told that, rather than bureaucracy being created by a requirement for the same information to be conveyed in two formats, the relevant sections of a CSP might say, "See IEP". Will that happen? If so, should there be a reference to that in the form, which will be a working document for teachers and other education professionals?

Shona Pittilo: We can consider the schedule in conjunction with the template in the code of practice. The way in which the regulations and the schedule are drafted is quite bald. The template in the code of practice gives more information about the content of sections of the plan. The IEP question probably relates to the profile, which provides the possibility of including information about other plans that a child or young person may have. That will be made clear in the code and in the guidance that is to be produced on completing co-ordinated support plans and the information that will be held in plans.

The Convener: As people fill in plans, they would read the code and other guidance rather than the schedule to the regulations.

Shona Pittilo: Yes. That is in response to the consultation, in which people said that they needed separate guidance.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): How does SSI 2005/266 interact with SSI 2005/264? An education authority has 16 weeks to produce a CSP and 12 weeks for a review. If, while doing that, an education authority must ask an agency for information or advice, that agency may have up to 16 weeks' grace in which to reply. If SSI 2005/264 gives agencies as long as that to reply, could that not create considerable pressure in relation to the preparation of a CSP?

Shona Pittilo: One of the exceptions in the CSP timescale would apply if another agency that had been asked for help was unable to comply within the required timescale. If the other agency required an extension to its timescale, that might have a knock-on effect on the education authority, which might need to extend its timescale as well.

Dr Murray: So the overall timescale could, I think, be up to 24 weeks.

Shona Pittilo: The code is clear about the interrelation between the time at which an authority asks for help and the timescale for those requests. As the authority must be mindful of that timescale, the sooner that the requests are made, the better. The code recommends that, when the authority gives notice of its intention to perform an assessment, it should notify the parents which agencies it will contact and it should contact those

agencies at that point. The sooner that the authority does that, the better, because the clock will start ticking from the minute that that intention is made known.

Dr Murray: I presume that HMIE will monitor the timescales. Will its findings be published? Will that information be made public? For example, will HMIE say how many authorities have exceeded the 16-week limit?

Shona Pittilo: There will also be monitoring through the tribunal, to which parents will have a right to appeal if the authority does not comply within the 16-week timescale and if no reasonable exceptions apply. Therefore, there will be dual monitoring, I suppose.

Ms Byrne: How will the co-ordinated support plan work with the individualised educational programme? Many IEPs give more information than will be given under the proposed format for the CSP, because many IEPs include both the young person's profile and the different agencies that will work with him or her. Could the IEP format be used for a CSP? I am concerned about the paper chase that is developing, which we talked about last week. Some teachers will look at the CSP form and think, "I have more information on the IEP, so why do I need to fill out this form as well?" What is the position on that? Must there be a piece of paper for the co-ordinated support plan to which the child is entitled?

Robin McKendrick: As a result of that discussion last week, the code of practice will make it absolutely clear to professionals, including teachers, what the relationship is between an individualised educational programme and a co-ordinated support plan. Whereas an IEP has educational targets for a school term, the CSP is about the broader context of how health, social work and so on will contribute towards educational objectives on a slightly longer scale. IEPs have individual objectives on a weekly or monthly basis for a school term, but CSPs will deal with a longer, more sustained period. Given the risk of confusion, the code will make clear the precise relationship between the IEP and CSP. The last thing that we want is a paper chase.

The Convener: Rosemary Byrne asked whether the CSP must be a document. I think that there will need to be a document to comply with the regulations.

Shona Pittilo: The CSP will be a statutory document.

The Convener: If the child has an IEP, can the CSP refer to the IEP so that it is not necessary for all the details to be written out again?

Robin McKendrick: Yes, indeed.

Ms Byrne: My point is that many IEPs already set out the co-ordination of the different agencies, so the CSP could simply repeat what is already documented. Will the format of the CSP be piloted to see whether it works before it is pushed out to all schools? Will we be able to review the format of the CSP? I think that there will be difficulties with it.

Robin McKendrick: As I said in response to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, nothing is set in tablets of stone. Obviously, we will want to review things in the light of our experience of implementing the act. However, the CSP template has not been arrived at as a result of bureaucratic decisions within Victoria Quay. The development officers who worked with the Scottish Executive met front-line professionals and they piloted the proposal in schools. As a result, we feel confident that the regulations provide a reasonable first stab at a co-ordinated support plan. The code will make clear the relationship between the IEP and the CSP and we will take things from there.

A group of parents and professionals advised us on the development of the act, and an advisory group will continue to work, alongside the HMIE review, as part of the review process. We can use that group as a sounding board on how people are finding the implementation of CSPs and other aspects of the act. As a result of that dual approach, as well as officials going out and speaking to parents groups and professionals alike, we think that at the end of the two-year period we will have a sound knowledge of what is going on. As a result of that, we can make any necessary changes.

Ms Byrne: Is any feedback available on the pilot that has been done? That information would be helpful to the committee.

Shona Pittilo: Two of the development officers visited schools and authorities throughout the country and spoke to teachers and officers. I am not sure whether a report was drawn up on that, but if you would like that information to be shared, I can certainly find out. If there is no report, we could draw some conclusions from that work.

Ms Byrne: That would be helpful.

The Convener: Presumably, you incorporated the results of that work into the format of the CSP.

Robin McKendrick: Absolutely. I am not aware whether a formal report was drawn up on the pilot, but the results were fed into the development of the co-ordinated support plan and they form part of the CSP as we see it now.

Shona Pittilo: Initially, we considered that the IEP could be incorporated into the CSP, but during the development we found that that would not be practical. As Robin McKendrick said, the CSP is a strategic document. The CSP includes educational objectives for a year, whereas the IEP drills down

further, with termly targets. We envisage that the IEP will be used in conjunction with the CSP. The CSP informs the IEP and vice versa. As Robin McKendrick said, we are looking into the CSP being an electronic document, which will make the transfer of information from the IEP to the CSP much easier. That will reduce the burden that teachers might feel they are under in the record-keeping process.

Ms Byrne: I do not want to labour the point, but I have a final comment on the matter. A school may well choose not to continue to develop a child's IEP because of the CSP. At the moment, many young people have reviews every three months or even more frequently, but that good practice might be set back by the yearly reviews. I am concerned that schools will not continue to give young people the opportunity of more frequent reviews. If those issues are taken on board by HMIE and the situation is monitored and recorded so that there is evidence and we can look at the matter again, I will be reassured. However, there are issues of concern and we need to ensure that we consider them carefully.

The Convener: Are there any questions on the Additional Support for Learning (Publication of Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2005?

Members: No.

The Convener: We move on to discuss what we want to do with the regulations. On the first instrument—the Additional Support for Learning (Appropriate Agency Request Period and Exceptions) (Scotland) Regulations 2005—there was concern about timescales. Although we would not want to make recommendations about that, given the assurances that the regulations are under review, would it be appropriate for us to note in our report to the Parliament that we have concerns? That might reflect the committee's view. Would that be possible?

Martin Verity (Clerk): Yes.

The Convener: That would not annul the instrument or interfere with the legalities of it, but it would indicate that the committee attaches importance to the timescales and thinks that some attempt should be made to keep on top of them. Is that acceptable?

Fiona Hyslop: Yes, but our report should also refer to the code of practice and we should state that we would like a record to be made about the initial date for assessment from parents.

The Convener: Yes. We can include that. Is the committee agreed that it does not want to make any recommendation on the Additional Support for Learning (Appropriate Agency Request Period and Exceptions) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 in its report to the Parliament, other than as noted?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: I do not think that there were any particular issues on the Additional Support for Learning (Changes in School Education) (Scotland) Regulations 2005. Is the committee agreed that it does not want to make any recommendation to the Parliament on the regulations?

Members *indicated agreement*.

10:45

The Convener: On the Additional Support for Learning (Co-ordinated Support Plan) (Scotland) Regulations 2005, the only remaining issue concerns the amendment of the regulations. We have received an explanation of what will happen in that regard. Are members broadly prepared to go along with the instrument?

Fiona Hyslop: I find this a bizarre way in which to proceed. Bearing in mind that the instrument was laid only on 19 May and that it does not come into force until 14 November, would it not be better if it were redrafted, submitted and approved instead of it having to come back to the Parliament? I understand and respect the explanation that has been given, but I find the process a bit odd. The convener might want to advise the Subordinate Legislation Committee of our concern that this should not become a common occurrence.

The Convener: I am given to understand that the Subordinate Legislation Committee is satisfied with the explanation. We have not seen its report formally, but that is the advice that we have.

Fiona Hyslop: We do not have the report.

The Convener: The Subordinate Legislation Committee is the expert committee on these procedures. However, in the light of the complexities that were referred to when we first saw the instrument, the transparency of the legal process is helped if regulations are introduced in one document and not in several. Given the undertakings that the officials have given today and the Subordinate Legislation Committee's view, I am inclined to stick with what we have and not to get into other procedures. To require the instrument to go before the Parliament in another shape or form is probably disproportionate to the issue. I am sure that the officials will take on board what has been said.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It can be confusing for parents if a later draft, about which they may not be aware, comes through and is approved. I ask the officials to note that, in terms of transparency and of parents knowing what is going on, this is not an example of good practice.

The Convener: I would be surprised if any parents were to read the documents. There is a limit to how far we can take the point.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I meant the charity that represents the best interests of parents.

The Convener: Are we agreed that we do not want to make any recommendation in our report to the Parliament on the Additional Support for Learning (Co-ordinated Support Plan) (Scotland) Regulations 2005?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: Finally, are we agreed likewise on the Additional Support for Learning (Publication of Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2005?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: I thank the committee and officials.

Pupil Motivation Inquiry

10:47

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is our pupil motivation inquiry. I welcome our first panel of witnesses. Una Chrystal is the operations manager of Right Track; Gary Daniel is from Fairbridge in Scotland; and Tom McGhee is the director of Spark of Genius. Given that we have your written submissions before us, we do not intend to take opening statements. Thank you for providing the submissions, which are very useful to our inquiry.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): Several submissions have identified factors that have a positive or negative effect on a child's educational performance. Regardless of whether a child has weaknesses, is disaffected or is very talented but should be doing more, how might we improve that performance by developing more effective links with families and homes? How effective are home-school links and how can we do more to assist families in the learning process?

Tom McGhee (Spark of Genius): Working with families after 3 o'clock, in the evenings and at weekends is a fundamental part of what Spark of Genius does. As most of our pupils are excluded or self-excluded, we cannot do what we do with young people unless we have good, strong relationships with the families. All the teachers, instructors and other people who are involved with our organisation know that the work does not end at 3 o'clock. Very often our pupils come from mainstream settings in which it is not possible for teachers to spend time with families in the evenings and at weekends in the way that we can. The point that you have raised is fundamental to rebuilding motivation in our pupils.

Mr McAveety: What if a family's problems or values are impacting on a child's opportunity to improve? Some of the submissions that we have received from the teaching profession over the past two or three weeks claim that we sort out children by sorting out the family. You are at the sharp end of things and are dealing with struggling youngsters—[*Interruption.*] Sorry about the screaming; it must be the Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill Committee. How do you get families to feel that they can change things and make a difference?

Tom McGhee: The other witnesses might have similar experiences. With one or two exceptions, almost every family that we have worked with is as keen as any other family in Scotland is for their children to do well. However, the household might be affected by alcohol or drug dependency, or even worse problems. With our guys, who are at

the extreme end of our school spectrum and are excluded or self-excluded, we do not reduce the level of education that they receive or ask less of them. Instead, we should ask more of them. Parents and pupils have a very direct response to such an approach. The parents are impressed by the fact that their children have the opportunity to study the same subjects as those that are studied by the kids they left behind in the mainstream schools. They buy into the process and, most of the time, they become our partners in finding ways of re-engaging our young people.

Una Chrystal (Right Track): We encourage parents initially to attend with the young person to find out what the project is about and what they are buying into. It is important that the parents buy into what we are doing. We also have our own support workers who link with homes; if a young person does not attend the project, the home will be contacted by that support worker, who is the named person, not by our trainers.

Glasgow City Council education department is working on a strategy for home-link workers. We approve of that move and have been assured that we can buy into it. That will help with such links.

Mr McAveety: Does the home-link approach receive adequate provision? Is it coherent, or does it depend very much on individual education authorities' initiatives?

Una Chrystal: It is down to individual education authorities. Obviously, if the links were adequate, we would not have to employ support workers. We need to help ourselves out in that respect. However, as I said, we welcome the Glasgow home-link strategy.

The Convener: You deal with young people who have issues with school. Are those situations always or mostly accompanied by a breakdown in parental contact with the school?

Una Chrystal: No, not always.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): You said that you place great emphasis on supporting families. Do you do so more than mainstream schools? I suspect that, in general, many schools and teachers are reluctant to consider getting involved with families as part of their duties or responsibilities.

Tom McGhee: I think that teachers in mainstream schools would like to become more involved, but they have a huge burden these days. If they could do so, they would probably spend much more time—as much time as they could—with families, but the reality is that they have big classes throughout the five or six year groups. Academically, they want to do the best for people, but some of them see their jobs as being different from our teachers' jobs. They would probably like to become much more involved. However, with our young people in particular, we must touch base and form relationships with families, as motivation and success go far beyond the school hours of 9 o'clock until 3 o'clock. That is probably true for all young people.

Mr Macintosh: I have a lot of sympathy for teachers who have many duties. The issue is more to do with the structures within which they operate. If something works, motivates pupils and is a key component of what makes organisations such as Spark of Genius and Fairbridge in Scotland work, it should be an important part of the mainstream curriculum and mainstream school activity. Forming home links for all pupils and teachers—whether that is the responsibility of teachers, guidance staff or somebody else at the school—could motivate not only the most excluded children, but children in mainstream schools who are demotivated and quiet.

Tom McGhee: That is a good point. The issue does not involve only the most excluded young people. We have a project with East Renfrewshire Council that involves young people who are in danger of exclusion, but a lot of resources have been made available for young people who are simply a little demotivated and could perhaps do better at school and obtain more highers. Rather than obtaining only two highers, they could obtain four or five highers.

A fundamental difference is involved. I mean no harm to my two colleagues on the panel, but our approach to motivating and working with young people is completely at variance with the approach that is taken by Fairbridge in Scotland and Right Track. Members should take on board that important point.

The Convener: Will you clarify what you are saying so that we understand the key points?

Tom McGhee: Spark of Genius is an independent school that is subject to HMIE inspection—the school was rigorously inspected last year. We believe in the craft of teaching, teachers delivering education, self-evaluation and being evaluated by HMIE. A number of projects in Scotland are not subject to such evaluation and do not have the same expectations of young people. We have a fundamentally different philosophy and approach to dealing with young people. We believe in more education rather than less education.

Gary Daniel (Fairbridge in Scotland): I agree with some of what Tom McGhee said about involving parents and families, which is crucial. In Edinburgh, Fairbridge in Scotland has adopted a different approach. As part of the working together partnership and work with a range of providers, we work with people whom the Education Department

has identified as being able to form links with homes and young people. They are seen as the young person's worker, but they have contact with the family. Parents are included at a meeting halfway through the initial programme and there is a celebration of the young person's achievements over the four weeks at the graduation event. There is also regular contact with the development co-ordinator.

I agree with what Tom McGhee said about treating everyone—young people, those in schools, parents and people such as us—as partners. Everyone has an important role to play in providing a service for young people who, for whatever reason, are excluded from education or are disadvantaged. Our approach is different, but it fits within a matrix of need throughout the country. No one approach will work. The more diversity there is to meet the diverse needs of the young people with whom we work, the better.

The Convener: We will stick with home and school links for the moment and return to other issues later.

Ms Byrne: I want to take things a step further. What are your views on early intervention? A key part of early intervention, in motivating pupils and keeping them motivated is work with families, parents and the children when they are at a very early age—indeed, as early as possible. There is good practice in nursery schools and nursery teachers are well equipped. How early do you see the young people whom you receive? Do you get a sense that there have been efforts at early intervention with those young people, or do you get a sense that you would not need to be there for some of them if there had been proper early intervention?

11:00

Tom McGhee: That is a good question. By and large, it is true that the earlier the intervention, the better. It is important to get young people when they are very young—before they go to nursery, if possible. It would also be good if we were able to spot early signs of disaffection or exclusion in school, because that would allow balanced judgments to be made about whether problems would be likely a year or two down the line. We are involved in the East Renfrewshire inclusion project, which deals with kids in secondary 1 and 2, but we are also looking at young people in primary 6 and 7. By and large, the younger people are when intervention takes place, the better.

Gary Daniel: Through the working together strategy's network of provision in Edinburgh, Fairbridge works specifically with 13 to 16-year-olds. When someone reaches the age of 16, they can move on to the Fairbridge core programme. The working together strategy's network of provision reaches right down to primary schools. We identified that we were not the agency that should work with primary school children—we know what our strengths are—but through the Education Department we found partners and we have provided a network of services to cover a broad range of ages.

Una Chrystal: Initially, our programmes were set up to deal with pupils aged 15 or over, but through the schools themselves we are now able to deal with pupils aged 13 or over. A pilot study in Glasgow is considering whether primary 6 is the stage at which demotivation sets in. We are not there yet; we are looking at 13-year-olds.

Dr Murray: I have a question on a related area, which is interagency working. I notice that the submission from Spark of Genius says:

"we need to find ways to work with other professional agencies like social work, careers, the police and the youth justice system".

You go on to talk about the possibility that achieving joined-up working locally might prove to be difficult. Such working was one of the principles behind the new community schools, but I get the feeling from your submission that the idea is not working quite as well in practice as the theory would suggest.

Tom McGhee: I think that the other witnesses would agree that joined-up working can be difficult to achieve on the ground. Gary Daniel is right that we must, in order to have the best impact, have relationships with as many professionals as possible. However, in areas where there are few social workers but with big case loads, it is sometimes difficult to get them to attend meetings to discuss important issues relating to people's motivation or their family circumstances. Sometimes it is important for organisations just to recognise the situation, to live with it and to make as much of an impact as they can on their own. Sometimes it is necessary to make as much noise as we can to get a result for young people.

Dr Murray: What do you do when you feel that you are not getting the sort of professional support that you feel is appropriate?

Tom McGhee: We do a lot of work ourselves. People sometimes act as social workers in the evening and at weekends—for example, by taking kids to football matches if there is no one else around to do that, or by working on parenting skills for the parents. In other words, we pick up some of the burdens that a social worker would normally take on. Such work would obviously be closely monitored by our management team. That way, things get done; the alternative would be to wait for other professionals to arrange meetings, but that might not happen quickly enough for the young people concerned.

Dr Murray: I am worried that there is a problem. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 requires professional bodies to work together to support young people, but I get the feeling that that is not happening to the extent to which it should be happening.

Gary Daniel: When a young person has concerns that he or she cannot or will not voice, Fairbridge can exert professional pressure on people. We can ask awkward questions in a professional open forum. Our development staff provide initial support when a young person needs it. If a young person makes the effort to come into the centre and meet the development staff, their immediate needs will be met. That will be followed up by action that is taken in consultation with the rest of the team in the management structure. Key workers, social workers and youth justice staff will be asked when things are going to happen. We might not always like the answers that we get on timescales, but we can ask the questions.

The young people respond well to that important aspect of our work. They do not really want to talk to some of the social workers and other people who are identified as their key supports. The phrase that comes to mind is, "The young people pick us; we don't pick them." A guidance teacher or a key worker can be identified, but unless the young person is able to form a relationship with them, the process is meaningless. When such work is done right across the agencies with which we work, it is powerful and effective. We can act as the voice for someone who might be a wee bit afraid or unsure about asking questions themselves.

The Convener: Is the fact that you are in the voluntary sector helpful in that regard? Is there an element of your being seen to be a bit more on young people's side?

Gary Daniel: I think so. We are looked at differently sometimes, but it is a powerful position to be in, because we are on various committees and working groups and we can ask the politically sensitive questions about education, health and social work. Being the person who raises a subject is a pretty good position to be in, because the discussions can get quite lively.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In your experience, do children perceive vocational training as a soft option or is it regarded in a positive light? Are we doing enough to encourage parity of esteem? I put those questions to Tom McGhee first.

Tom McGhee: I have seen no more than anecdotal evidence that vocational training does any more for our target group of young people than anything else does. They are excluded from school and people say, "What should we do with them? We'll make them joiners and plumbers." I see no evidence for doing that. If you ask a lot of our young people what they would like to do, they will probably say, "I'd really like to learn some skills that would give me a job later on as a car mechanic," but they will also tell you that they want to steal some cars that weekend and do some drugs. Their choices are not always the best choices. Vocational training is an old-fashioned answer to a nut that is difficult to crack. When young people are excluded, you cannot whip education away from them and stick them in a joinery craftwork shop and expect them suddenly to become model citizens. We think that we should be asking more of them.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: How can teachers best be supported in consolidating their position as positive role models?

Tom McGhee: A lot of what Scotland already does is very good. Most of our young people are really happy with the education that they get. Teachers work really hard and produce really good results everywhere I go. However, for some young people, that particular trick does not work. Unfortunately, many teachers are worried about the one or two kids in their class who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and who cause a lot of problems. They are probably worried about the inclusion agenda. If they are being honest, they probably think that those young people would best be educated in different environments from the one that they are in.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: What is the solution?

Tom McGhee: Do you mean for those young people?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, and for the teachers.

Tom McGhee: For those young people the answer is schools such as Spark of Genius—places where there are firm boundaries and multilevel individualised education programmes to deal with different types of behaviour. Gary Daniel is absolutely right to say that no one answer fits all young people—there are lots of different answers for different young people. However, those answers have to be provided in places that are inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, that are bound by the same rules as everyone else and where safety and education are paramount.

The Convener: For the avoidance of doubt, are Fairbridge and Right Track HMIE inspected?

Una Chrystal: Right Track is slightly different in that the young people are still attached to their schools, so although they attend Right Track they still belong to the school. Our provision is based

on individual needs, which can mean that they come to Right Track purely for interventions. Attendance might not be full time—it might be part time or for only one session a week—so the young people who come to us are still the responsibility of the school.

Gary Daniel: HMIE inspections of Fairbridge take place in Glasgow because the project is supported by teaching staff and through educational psychological services, but they do not take place in Edinburgh.

Mr McAveety: I go back to what Tom McGhee said. You have quite a radical approach to youngsters who are not achieving their full potential—you said that you ask more of them than is the case in the conventional view that they are best slotted into a vocational agenda. We have received much evidence on how vocational education can be a route to inclusion for young people. Could you tease out the argument? I am intrigued by what you said, and am interested in hearing you expand on it. What does asking more of them mean in practice for 14 or 15-year-old students?

Tom McGhee: We get a lot of kids who have done questionable things and nefarious acts. We try to get them to face up to the consequences of their behaviour in different situations, such as the family home. We then try to teach them as many as possible of the subjects that they would get in mainstream education. I am an ex-teacher and when I taught, it was always the case that the difficult weans would end up in technical classes. Why? It was because the technical teacher's environment tended to suit them better because it was noisier, a little bit of swearing was more or less condoned and they did things that they felt were quite effective. It is to some extent a myth that that sort of technical education is somehow better for such kids.

We formed Spark of Genius as a place to which we would be proud to send our own children. We do not think that children who have had difficulties and who are the most vulnerable in our society should suddenly have lots of choices taken away from them and be faced with simply a vocational or technical education choice. We think that the choice should be much broader.

Mr McAveety: What do the students say to you when you provide that education?

Tom McGhee: We are the biggest provider of such education in Scotland, with 109 kids. Predominantly, although not always, they buy into what we try to do. In most cases, they change their initial behaviour that has presented as social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and which has brought them to us. They improve and become good students again—they were always good people. That is done by putting them in a situation in which they do not feel that they are in—to use their phrase—a spazzy school, where suddenly they are completely different and excluded. All their friends are still in Govan High School getting the full range of subjects, but they are suddenly whipped out and are climbing mountains for a living.

Mr McAveety: Can elements of the model that your approach is based on still be recreated inside community schools? Can there be a culture in which one can create that kind of psychology and attitude in a mainstream school as much as in a Spark of Genius-type school?

Tom McGhee: Yes, as long as there is breadth in provision, it is HMIE inspected and as long as the choice for children is not driven by money. A significant reason why many children go to projects instead of to places such as Spark of Genius is not to do with the choice of the children and their families, but is to do with money; the other places are cheaper.

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): I want to pursue what Frank McAveety said to Tom McGhee. You talked about Spark of Genius as having the structure of an independent school, which we are debating in Parliament this week. When we think of independent schools, we do not naturally think of excluded pupils—

Mr McAveety: They are excluded.

Ms Alexander: Indeed. It might be helpful if you could expand a little on the opportunities that are available to you or that you can give to children and which might not be available in a mainstream setting. You talked about providing for 109 kids at the moment. I had hoped that you would expand on the potential of the role of the independent sector in providing for some of the most excluded kids. What should be on the committee's agenda in respect of considering policy on the role of the independent sector in providing for kids who fall into the group about which we are talking today?

Tom McGhee: Those kids have had a big-time raw deal in the past. They have been excluded and their parents have been inarticulate and sometimes unwilling to voice their concerns about the education that has been delivered to their kids. Some of the time, the kids fall off a cliff into projects that are not HMIE inspected, where they do not have the full choice of subjects and where they are not taught by teachers.

Spark of Genius is different—it is unique. Other places do the same thing in England and other areas, but we are different in that we have firm boundaries and very upmarket learning centres where much of the teaching is driven by online materials and computers, which allows the teachers to spend quite a lot of time working with

young people on their personal and social development skills. They are given pretty much the same range of subjects that they would get if they were still in mainstream, but with a much higher chance of achieving standard grades and other qualifications that lead to good further education places or university careers. That is a niche that has not been explored before for those young people; the process could be spread to other places.

Ms Alexander: You pointed out that you are inspected by HMIE, as happens to all independent schools. Of course, the difference between you and other independent schools is that in other schools the parent is the purchaser of the education whereas, in your case, the purchaser of the provision is typically a local authority. You touched on finance and the fact that provision such as you offer is likely to be more expensive than putting someone in a techie class, as you described it. What kind of policy do we need to make it easier to purchase the sort of provision that you provide, to make it more widely available?

11:15

Tom McGhee: Our partners are local authorities. In common with other people in the sector, we are paid by local authority education departments. However, they have financial pressures on them and, if they pay us they have less to spend on other things in education. We have kicked around the idea—which may be anathema to local authorities—that a proportion of the education budget should not be made available to local authorities but should be a centrally held resource to be made available in different ways to organisations such as ours and other types of organisations that are HMIE inspected. That would be useful. I have written to the Minister for Education and Young People about that on a couple of occasions, but it has not quite worked out.

The Convener: It is asserted that your way of working gains results whereas someone else's does not. Right Track makes the valid point that it is the distance that is travelled that we have to talk about. We are dealing with a particularly selected catchment group that has particular background issues; therefore, it is difficult to compare their achievements with results in higher examinations or something like that. Nevertheless, it is important that we get a feel for whether we can measure or identify broadly whether Right Track works well, whether Fairbridge is better than other organisations' various approaches and so on.

The Right Track submission talks about pupil attendance improving substantially and the Fairbridge submission says that a third of the young people with whom it worked returned to full-time education, but I do not think that the Spark of Genius submission goes into quite the same detail. Can you give the committee some guidance on your success or failure in this realm? Even one child or one young person being saved from drop-out and put back into the main stream is a success. What are the criteria by which you would measure your success?

Una Chrystal: All our young people are referred to us via their last known school and in most cases they have been excluded. Their attendance rate will have fallen below 20 per cent and there will be a number of other reasons or causes for their referral, mostly involving classroom disruption. Forty per cent of our young people are currently on supervision orders and 70 per cent of them are known to social workers. That gives you an idea of our client group. The retention or attendance rate in our projects is about 80 per cent.

The Convener: That is the young people's attendance rate with you, as opposed to the rate when they move back.

Una Chrystal: The figure represents attendance at Right Track projects. We have 250 places throughout Glasgow and Lanarkshire, and we have waiting lists in Glasgow for the new session, which begins in August. Eighty-five per cent of our young people either progress to further training or, depending on their age, return to school. The 15-year-olds can also enter employment on leaving school. Throughout the summer, we try to keep the links going by re-engaging our young people in arts programmes at three locations in Glasgow. That gives them somewhere to go and something to do, and it allows us to keep the link with the young people and their families.

The Convener: Is any forward tracking done to find out whether the young people are unemployed three months after leaving you, or whatever?

Una Chrystal: Yes. They are tracked for up to a year after they have left Right Track. We also have aftercare facilities that any young person who has been on Right Track's books can come back and use.

The Convener: What does the tracking show?

Una Chrystal: It basically displays sustainability; that is, that the young people are still in training or employment.

The Convener: Is a report or any kind of evaluation produced, which you would be able to let us see?

Una Chrystal: The young people fill in a positive outcome pro forma. Those are all kept together.

The Convener: Do you have any material that you could share with the committee, concerning outcomes?

Una Chrystal: Yes, we will do that.

The Convener: Thank you. That would be useful.

I ask the same question of Gary Daniel. I am sorry to labour the point, but it is important.

Gary Daniel: Fairbridge sees educational attainment as a yardstick for measuring the majority of pupils, and we offer a way in which those who experience difficulty in school can re-engage with the mainstream school environment. We should measure education using more than attainment of specific qualifications, although mainstream school is by far the best place for young people to develop and grow in a safe environment.

Instead of removing young people, excluding them or placing them in additional resources, Fairbridge in Edinburgh offers a programme whereby young people come along for fixed periods, after which they have an extended period of support that backs up what is offered by the staff in their school. In effect, we try to support young people to remain in mainstream schooling.

In Glasgow, we do something different. We offer a service for young people who have been identified by educational psychology services as being people who will never return to school. The Glasgow programme offers accreditation through ASDAN—the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network—and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. However, in Edinburgh, we have focused on what the local authority, parents and young people want, which is for young people to be in mainstream schools, rather than removed and taken elsewhere which, it could be argued, is a form of exclusion.

Tom McGhee: Spark of Genius is judged on our HMIE report. There are a couple of things in it that we have to do, some that we have done and others that we are working on. HMIE is, and should be, the ultimate arbiter on education matters in Scotland.

The Convener: What does the report show for your organisation in terms of sustainability of mainstream education in the longer term or job opportunities later in life?

Tom McGhee: Gary Daniel is absolutely right that it is difficult to return many young people to mainstream education. We have only about a 5 per cent success rate with that, because of the nature of the young people's issues and the fact that they tend to prefer what we do. However, SERIS—the Spark of Genius East Renfrewshire inclusion service—which we run for the council there, is a completely different ball game and does not involve off-site education at all; instead, we have recruited high-quality teachers who carry out people-centred work in schools. If we are looking for proof about whether our work benefits young people, we must begin and end with HMIE, as with any other school in Scotland.

The Convener: The committee would be interested in whatever follow-up information you can give us on that—perhaps we could have a copy of the HMIE report.

Tom McGhee: Sure.

The Convener: I am sorry to take a bit of time on that issue, but it is important.

Ms Byrne: Both Right Track and the Aberlour Child Care Trust have mentioned engaging with young people—

The Convener: Sorry, Rosemary—we will come back to that. I thought that you had a supplementary question on the present issue.

Ms Byrne: I thought that you wanted to move on.

The Convener: No—Ken Macintosh has the next question. I will come back to you.

Mr Macintosh: My question, which continues the theme, is on an issue on which we have touched in many questions and which came out particularly strongly in Tom McGhee's comments on dealing with excluded pupils. There are parallels between that issue and the mainstream approach to additional support for learning. Before all the policy changes in the past 10 years, pupils with special needs received fewer hours of education, were excluded from the curriculum, took fewer examinations and were encouraged to pursue vocational routes in a way that treated the vocational option as second best. Tom McGhee's comments echoed many of those points.

Like the convener, I am struck by the fact that, although the programmes have a number of good ideas that are clearly working in different ways, measurement and assessment are issues. Do we assess the needs of the most difficult and disruptive pupils? Do we measure how many hours of education they receive, how many exams they sit and the number of challenges that are put to them? Is evidence on those matters gathered from throughout the sector? I would not want to impose a one-size-fits-all solution, but is an evidence-based approach being taken, either through the pupil inclusion network or HMIE?

Tom McGhee: Do you mean generally in Scotland?

Mr Macintosh: Yes. Spark of Genius, Fairbridge, Right Track and other organisations are obviously pursuing successful programmes to motivate pupils, but there does not seem to be one source of information that can be used to assess all the programmes.

Tom McGhee: HMIE assesses us all, as it should. HMIE considers the minutiae of programmes and everything that we do that relates to education of young people, including pastoral work. HMIE can close a school down if it is unhappy with it—it is the ultimate judge.

Mr Macintosh: Does HMIE assess pupil motivation as a theme? Although HMIE is now expanding into considering support for autism for example, it takes a school-by-school approach. Therefore, each school will stand or fall on its own merits. There is not a comparative approach across the sector.

Tom McGhee: HMIE has a tool called "How good is our school?", which is one of the best tools that we have found in the world. It asks each school and each education department—it covers not just schools but education departments and indeed whole authorities—to self-evaluate from the bottom up, covering every aspect of education, including pupil motivation and attendance, for which evidence and genuine proof have to be provided. That is why HMIE does an incredibly useful job. We have to be on our toes. We have to prove that we provide good education; if we do not, HMIE will shut us down, which happens from time to time.

Mr Macintosh: What do you think about bodies such as the pupil inclusion network Scotland? Other frameworks exist to share and develop best practice. Are they working, do they work for you and are you part of them?

Tom McGhee: We work towards ensuring that we are regarded as the best school in Scotland at what we do. A lot of other organisations that Spark of Genius knows about are invited to join such networks; sometimes we do not know about them but hear about what is in the pipeline. Organisations spring up and exist for five or six years but then do not seem to be around anymore. Often the information that we get is contrary to what we know is happening on the ground. We measure ourselves against the main points for action and the strengths in our school, as does every other school in Scotland—ask any teacher. We do not think that things should be different for the most vulnerable and excluded young people.

Mr Macintosh: I ask Una Chrystal and Gary Daniel to talk about HMIE as the body that should be compiling and comparing information and evidence across the board.

Gary Daniel: HMIE is important and relevant for schools and those young people who can function in a school environment. HMIE inspects all schools from which children are referred to Fairbridge in Edinburgh. Those inspections cover all the provision that the schools make for the young people who are about to be excluded or who are excluded. We are a separate programme and provide something specific and unique. The education department in Edinburgh has supported us for a number of years. The HMIE inspection of the Glasgow Fairbridge project and the activ8 programme is welcome and appropriate. Part of the reason why HMIE does not inspect us is that we are not a school and we are not educators as far as attaining qualifications is concerned. If we were, we would be HMIE inspected, which we would welcome. We do something different, which is about returning young people to mainstream schools, having supported their development, their resilience and their ability to cope with a difficult school environment. I will not go into the reasons for young people needing such support, but they are real. It is valuable that a range of supports can be provided. School does not work for all young people and there needs to be alternative provision for those for whom it does not work. However, that alternative provision has to complement and support school; it cannot exist on its own. It is absolutely pointless for young people to come out of school for two days a week, but it is extremely powerful for young people to come to a project that works with their educators.

Una Chrystal: As I said earlier, our young people are still on the roll of their last known school. The results of our project are fed back to that school as part of its inspection. We work with North Lanarkshire Council and Glasgow City Council and are funded annually, partly through them and partly through the European social fund. That is about to change, as our new service level agreements are coming into force. I do not know whether they will change the inspection criteria, but we welcome the service level agreements.

Mr Macintosh: I have a final question for Tom McGhee. All the young people with whom you are working are at the most disadvantaged end of the spectrum and are the most excluded, or self-excluded. What about pupils who are unmotivated or demotivated but who are not being excluded? How do we reach them? I put that question to Tom McGhee in particular because his school is clearly not for them, and his school's approach cannot really address their needs. However, are there lessons from the Spark of Genius approach that could be transferred to that cohort of pupils?

11:30

Tom McGhee: One of the big tricks that we have learned has been to use online learning and information and communications technology with young people. One of the principal methods involves the use of computers in the course of well-crafted lessons. That model has been kicking around for a long time. Half of my background comes from that world—from Philips and other

providers on the continent. That is a useful and powerful tool, as it allows teachers both to teach a wide range of subjects and to spend a lot of time concentrating on the young person's social development issues, which brought them to us in the first place. That powerful method works only if it is done in the right way, if there are enough PCs that actually work, if they are in the right place and if the young people are properly committed to using them in the right way.

The other tool involves working with families in a pastoral sense. That work could be transferred to a mainstream environment if changes were made to the way in which mainstream education operates. Potentially, that would require more resources to be made available.

Ms Byrne: I would like to ask Right Track about the motivation of disaffected pupils. Its submission mentions, among other things,

"Working in small groups (max 1:8) … Consistency of staff … Providing frequent 1:1 support"

and

"A flexible curriculum".

I am interested in the ratio of staff to pupils and engagement with young people. Some teachers and other professionals recently came to the Parliament and we had some very interesting discussions. One thing that emerged was the need to be able to engage with young people. Sadly, because of the level of staffing in mainstream schools and the stretching of guidance teams, there is not the opportunity to provide the very thing that Right Track can provide.

I would like to hear your view on how mainstream schools could enhance their support to young people, for example by reducing class sizes and by having more staff available to engage with young people on a one-to-one level where that is necessary. I see that gap as being one of the major issues. I would like to hear the views of all the witnesses, starting with Right Track.

Una Chrystal: Our ratio is 1:7, or 1:8 if we are really stuck. I cannot really comment on mainstream schools, although there is obviously a resource issue around classroom sizes, teacher numbers and so on. With our young people, a 1:7 or 1:8 ratio has proved to be about right. In addition to having trainers, we also have support workers. In some cases, they act like classroom assistants and deal with particular needs, such as literacy or numeracy problems. The young people concerned may be removed and have one-to-one tuition. That is a luxury, however. The funding for the high ratio of staff to pupils is provided predominantly by the European social fund, but that is probably not relevant in the school setting.

Gary Daniel: The ratio for the course that we run is 1:4. There is a maximum of 10 young people on a course, with three instructors who deliver such courses as community, recreation, independent living and work skills and employability. The young people respond well to such individual attention. I often tell young people that there is nothing wrong with attention-seeking behaviour. We all need attention from time to time. If someone is in a group of 10 with three instructors, it can be pretty much guaranteed that they will be included and supported throughout whatever it is that they are doing on a given day.

Tom McGhee: There are 25 to 30—but usually 25—young people at the very most in a learning centre, with at least half a dozen staff. There are also regular visits by senior teachers and management. It would be fantastic to have smaller class sizes in mainstream education. We are living in the real world, however, and it would probably be a big trick to pull that off.

Ms Byrne: When you are able to reintegrate young people or when you do a shared placement with a young person, is it an issue that, when they go back into mainstream education, they do not get the same level of involvement? Are you able to follow through with some one-to-one or small-group work with them and keep up the level of attention that is provided? That is obviously an important factor.

Gary Daniel: We support young people in the transition back to mainstream education by offering follow-on support until the young person, the parents and the teacher think that it is no longer needed. The support tapers off as young people reintegrate or start to feel that they have moved on and no longer need to come to Fairbridge. We offer tailored support; we do not just drop the support.

Una Chrystal: We have a similar approach. We reintegrate young people slowly, with support. They might attend only for an hour a week at the beginning, but their attendance might build up to become a part-time or a full-time placement. We have not had as much success in reintegrating young people in full-time school as we would like to have had. If a young person goes back full time, they usually go to a different school.

Tom McGhee: I would be fascinated to see Gary Daniel's statistics on how many people have been successfully reintegrated into the mainstream. We find that that is the hardest thing to pull off, by a long way. Many of the young people with whom we work do not have the skills to reintegrate successfully into a normal mainstream environment and they tend not to want to do that anyway. Unfortunately, they sometimes play up in the mainstream environment so that they can stay with us full time. We do not regard placement with Spark as exclusion; we regard it as the most inclusive form of education for our young people in Scotland.

Ms Byrne: Do you maintain links with the mainstream school?

Tom McGhee: We do that as much as we can. It is difficult. Many dedicated teachers are interested in pupils who have left the school, but it depends on the school and the people. The situation is quite good in that regard in Ayrshire, where a few people maintain close links with the children who leave, which is nice.

Fiona Hyslop: The relationships between programme providers, educationists and young people seem to be a theme. You try to tackle issues to do with self-confidence, self-esteem and self-control. To what extent are the relationships between the programme providers and the young people more important than the content of the programmes? Everything seems to come back to small classes and relationships. Where does the educational aspect fit in? Is the educational aspect integral to projects or does it sit alongside them? If the small groups and the relationships are the key to success, can the content of programmes vary?

Tom McGhee: It is not just to do with relationships and small numbers. Relationships might be established between four or 10 young people and their trainer, even though the young people are running about the learning centre with their skip hats on, smoking and swearing when they want to and doing whatever they want to do. We call those projects "walkabout projects". Young people might well want to go to a project like that five days a week—they might think that it was the best thing that had ever happened to them.

We certainly do not support that approach. Our philosophy is not just about relationships; it is about positive relationships and setting boundaries for young people. We believe in letting young people know that we will not tolerate negative behaviour and that they can have the same future as anyone else has, if they work for it. However, our philosophy is at variance with certain others that are around in Scotland.

Gary Daniel: With the greatest respect to Tom McGhee, I think that it is the school's job to provide boundaries for the young people who can respond to such an environment. We work with young people for whom a range of support strategies have been put in place and we offer them something different. When they come to us, they can start to make connections between their behaviour on a Fairbridge course and their behaviour in school. If a young person comes to us for two days a week and attends school for three days, our development workers can ask them, "Why are you managing here, but not at school?" We can start to explore some of the reasons why school is not working for them. We try to increase their self-awareness and their ability to cope with the school environment and we point out and challenge the unacceptable behaviours that they exhibit in school in a way that a teacher who is confronted by a huge class of pupils with a variety of needs and levels cannot. We enable the young people to make those connections and consider how they can maintain what they do with us when they are at school.

Fiona Hyslop: Convener, I am having difficulty hearing some of what the witnesses are saying because of the noise that certain colleagues are making.

The Convener: That is a valid complaint. I ask members not to have private conversations.

Fiona Hyslop: The issue that we are dealing with is key. Other witnesses have told us that vocational training and so on can be more valuable for those who are not as excluded as the pupils with whom you are dealing. I am taken by what you said about the fact that judgment calls are being made about what pupils are capable of. However, one strong message that I am getting is that it is possible for someone to be as excluded in mainstream education as they are in an outside environment. Each of our witnesses today is taking routes that are different to what is perceived as being the mainstream route.

There is a question about whether every project will cater to every group. We talk about young people as if they are an amorphous mass, but they are not. Do you see differences between different groups of young people? Could you answer that with specific reference to gender issues? We have not explored that much. Do you perceive there to be a difference in the experiences of young girls and young boys? The provisions that we are talking about are expensive and people have to make a judgment about what to do with young people. Given that early intervention is the key, do you see any differences between the approach that would be taken with girls and the approach that would be taken with boys?

Tom McGhee: We would all agree that most of the young people who we deal with have social, emotional and behavioural problems, which is what has caused them to be excluded or to decide to exclude themselves. At Spark of Genius, about 15 per cent of our young people are girls, which is in line with the national statistics on that type of exclusion.

You touched on expense, which is probably the main point. By most standards, the provision that we provide is expensive. The other way in which these young people are usually dealt with is not at all expensive or is free to the authority because it can access European money. That is a big determinant in the decision about where those young people will go. You have to pay for quality education, otherwise young people will not get it.

Fiona Hyslop: What is the gender balance of the group with which Right Track works?

Una Chrystal: The group is predominantly male: the balance is around 60 per cent male and 40 per cent female. As a result of the client profiling exercise that we conduct to determine why the young people have been turned off school, we know that 70 per cent of the young people have issues with teachers, 20 per cent have problems with bullying and 10 per cent have a known learning difficulty.

Fiona Hyslop: Do you see a difference between the things that young girls and young boys respond to best?

Una Chrystal: Absolutely. Girls are far more mature.

Fiona Hyslop: We need to explore this issue because we might be able to use knowledge that you have gathered about the behavioural differences between the genders to ensure that we are able to intervene at an appropriately early stage in mainstream education.

Is the experience at Fairbridge different?

Gary Daniel: No—the gender balance is about 80 per cent boys and 20 per cent girls. Males and females respond differently at different times. I also point out that the way in which young people are referred to projects varies and that some projects appeal more to referrers than others do. There might be 20 young people in a school who would benefit from a project, but the referrers prioritise those young people based on what they think certain young people would get the most out of.

Fiona Hyslop: The key issue seems to be the identification of the need for intervention, the referral and the reasons for referral. I see that our witnesses all agree.

The Convener: Do the projects just receive people or do they have some input into the identification of people who would benefit from them?

Tom McGhee: Spark of Genius retains the right to refuse a young person. We have a strict and lengthy referral procedure that involves a number of referral meetings, a full risk analysis of the young person that will define a baseline for their IEP and home visits. Right at the start, we work with parents to get them to agree with what we intend to do. We do not get them to sign a written contract or anything because we do not think that that works particularly well but we want to get them on board before we accept a young person. We take nearly all of them anyway, but we do not tell them that at the start. They have a six-week review period, at the end of which we finalise their IEPs. Thereafter, there are regular review periods, which involve meetings with educational psychologists, the referring school—if it is still involved, which, usually, it is not—social workers, any other relevant professionals and the pupil and family.

11:45

Dr Murray: You all identified celebrating achievement as being important for raising self-esteem and motivation. However, a couple of weeks ago we had quite scathing evidence from some of the teaching unions, whose members did not like sticking smiley faces on jotters or what they considered to be backslapping ceremonies. How do you celebrate achievement with young people in a non-patronising way that they find valuable?

Tom McGhee: I agree with teachers in that there are far too many award ceremonies and too many qualifications that are given for simply turning up and doing the most basic things. Such qualifications become meaningless—there is research kicking around that proves that.

We want our young people to turn up and be there all the time. They are not given an award for that, because it is expected of them. They should be there to be educated and work hard, and we consider the reward to be the qualifications that they get: standard grades, higher still qualifications and a place at a further education college or university.

Dr Murray: During the process of building somebody's self-confidence, how do you recognise their improvement?

Tom McGhee: We work with them really closely, with good teachers who build strong relationships with them—we have a little bit more time to do that because we use ICT a lot and quite imaginatively—but we do not give them meaningless awards, because that is pointless. Children quickly recognise such awards for what they are; they realise that their friends are getting intermediate 1 or 2 qualifications, while they are sitting with a shiny qualification that tells them that they turned up to the project for three weeks in a row—that is no big deal.

Una Chrystal: Our young people also work through Scottish Qualifications Authority core skills, which are probably the qualifications that they would be doing at school up to intermediate 2. Therefore, achievement is in qualifications as well as in the fact that they are turning up and taking some responsibility for themselves. We have award ceremonies, but they are based on the achievement of qualifications.

Gary Daniel: Tom McGhee is right that we should get as many young people as we can

through as many qualifications as possible, but I disagree with him in that that is a big deal for the young people who are furthest away from being able to imagine attaining qualifications one day. Although we might expect them to come along and show up, they often do not expect that of themselves and we should be careful about imposing our expectations on them. We can ask them to come along, we can involve them and give them as many opportunities as possible and, when they are ready for those boundaries, we can put them in place. However, if we set the bar too high, they sail under it and disappear at 16.

The Convener: That is an interesting point on which to conclude. I have been to one of the Fairbridge award ceremonies and can confirm the enthusiasm with which the awards were greeted. I cannot speak about the long-term effects, but the awards were certainly welcomed and supported.

If, after consideration of the matters that we have discussed, any of you has anything else to add, get back to us by all means. We have asked you for some documentation on outcomes. Thank you all very much for attending.

We will take a five-minute break before we hear from the next panel of witnesses.

11:48

Meeting suspended.

11:54

On resuming—

The Convener: I am aware that the acoustics in the committee room are not as good as they might be. I am not sure whether the problem is a technical difficulty or extraneous noise, but I certainly had some difficulty in hearing people. Moreover, as Fiona Hyslop pointed out, one or two conversations were taking place simultaneously.

We move on to our next panel. I welcome Alan Locke, senior adviser on education support from Renfrewshire Council; Kelly Bayes, the head of policy at the Aberlour Child Care Trust; and Steve McCreadie, service manager for Crannog, who is also with the Aberlour Child Care Trust. I think that you want to give some introductory comments. Is it ladies first?

Kelly Bayes (Aberlour Child Care Trust): I was going to make a few key points but, owing to time constraints, I will just let Steve McCreadie say a few words.

Steve McCreadie (Aberlour Child Care Trust): I thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to present evidence to it. Our written and oral evidence reflects the learning across Aberlour and, more specifically, within the Crannog service over the past seven years on how to engage and motivate some of the most challenging young people who are repeatedly excluded from education.

The track record of the service is supported by independent evaluation over five years. The committee has received some of those documents. More important, the evidence that we present today is rooted in the views and the voices of young people. We spent some time over the past few weeks gathering views from young people for our submission to the committee.

My oral evidence complements the written submission. I would like to spend a few minutes outlining key issues in three areas. The first is what young people think makes a good teacher; the second is what motivates young people; and the third is what we have found to be effective. I will stick to broad brush strokes and allow the detail to emerge during questioning.

What did the young people think makes a good teacher? There are no great surprises. They said that a good teacher was someone who listened to them. They also said that a good teacher was a person who made them want to do their best. Other indications of good teachers were people who love being a teacher, who are good at explaining things, who have rules that everyone knows and sticks to and who enjoy young people—young people are sensitive to when teachers genuinely enjoy teaching and genuinely enjoy being with young people.

What motivates young people? There is no great difference from what motivates us—the same factors that motivate us to be here today are largely those that motivate young people. They include rewards and incentives, as well as recognition and praise.

It is important to identify young people's interests and strengths and to build from there. It is also important to identify different approaches for different people and to recognise that different people are in different positions at different times. Another factor is having a range of subject areas spanning academic and vocational education.

There should also be different ways of learning, as young people learn in different ways and have different learning styles. Those different ways of learning might best be supported by activities, by theoretical and academic work, by vocational work, by cognitive skills programmes or by experiential programmes. Our written submission mentions an enhanced curriculum and partnership working between us and schools—we mention specifically the work that we do with Stranraer Academy.

What have we found to be effective? Staff who have good engagement skills and want to do the

work are crucial. We have found that individualised programmes that include social skills and educational attainment and that set challenging but realistic targets are effective.

The use of multidisciplinary teams is also important, as we know that the young people require support from a range of sources in order to be best engaged. Partnership working is fundamental. It is relatively straightforward to remove the young people from mainstream schools and to educate them elsewhere, but what is much more challenging is to forge effective partnerships between young people, their parents, their carers, schools, social services, health services, the children's panel and others to ensure that those young people are supported in their communities and have the best chance of inclusion in mainstream education.

It is important to address immediate concerns. If someone is hungry, cold or worried that they or their family are unsafe, they are unlikely to be able to learn. We must address those immediate concerns.

We must also keep communication open between the young person and the school. The committee heard earlier about home-school links and about keeping that dialogue open. Less formal means of communication can be used. We are piloting work around the family group conferencing model, which is a much less formal way of ensuring that there is partnership between schools and families.

In summary, the vast majority of young people—even those who are excluded repeatedly—value education. They want to learn. Our task as adults is to ensure that those children and young people who are least able to access education have the best chance of doing so.

I close with an invitation to all members of the committee. Undoubtedly, if you reflect on your life, you will remember people who inspired and motivated you and who called on you to be more than you thought you could be at the time. When you think about what those people did and who they were, you will find the clues to motivate our young people—by which I mean all our young people.

12:00

The Convener: Thank you.

Alan Locke (Renfrewshire Council): Thank you for inviting me to the committee this morning. Renfrewshire Council is committed to including all young people in mainstream education. Our submission details a range of motivators that we use to encourage the pupils in our schools to participate in learning. The committee will recognise a number of common motivators that are used in schools and authorities across the country, including individual target setting, personal learning planning, celebrating achievement and promoting positive behaviour. Other motivators reflect a more local response to the challenges that we in Renfrewshire face in motivating some of our young people.

We recognise that education takes place not just in the classroom or school, but in a range of settings, including the community and home. We have taken a number of steps to try to harness those possibilities, such as the use of better neighbourhood services funding and mainline funding to establish learning neighbourhoods across Renfrewshire in order to deliver community learning and development activities.

We have used resources to establish the family support service, which supports young people in the mainstream setting and which, by clustering schools, helps to support pupils through the integrated community schools agenda. We are also looking to develop an extended support team concept in all our schools, which would allow a multidisciplinary approach to be taken to help pupils who are not achieving their educational potential. Some schools have accessed youth justice pilot moneys to support disaffected young people and to maintain their mainstream education place through the provision of alternative education programmes.

All those initiatives recognise the value of pupils' learning experiences outside school and the important role that those play in raising pupils' self-esteem and motivation. Our submission provides a number of other examples of the positive steps that can be taken inside and outside school to increase the motivation of pupils. I am happy to discuss those further with the committee.

The Convener: Thank you.

Mr McAveety: You may have heard the questions that I put earlier on the importance of home-school links. How valuable have you found those links to be in Renfrewshire and at what level can they be developed? Are we talking about a basic level at which all families have contact with the school as a way into more involved contact between home and school? Are we talking about identifying youngsters who are academically able but who are not achieving as well as they could, or youngsters whose behaviour is difficult and who require support?

Alan Locke: We recognise that a range of interventions is necessary for some families and children to support the child in mainstream education. Some of the lower-level interventions would be at the early transition stages. We ensure that, through funding streams such as sure start,

we link into the transition between pre-school and primary 1. Home-school visitors or teachers are released so that they can visit all children who are about to attend a primary 1 class.

That work is not always done in the home; sometimes it is done in the nursery, because that is more suitable for the parents, families or carers. That level of work is done by the home link workers and is organised through the family support service, which has four teams that cover all schools in Renfrewshire.

We take a multidisciplinary approach, in which not just home-school teachers, but home-school workers, assistants and attendance support officers are involved. Again, the level of work will depend on the level of intervention that is required. Some of the interventions focus on family group work. They tend to be planned through a system that we call the extended support team, which is a team of multidisciplinary staff who know the children and family in an area well. They make decisions on the kind of support that is most appropriate.

Other kinds of family support links would come at the transition between primary and secondary school. Again, that is often a crisis point. A number of our pupils at secondary 2 and secondary 3 also have difficulty in sustaining their behaviour and attendance. We have a range of support that we can bring in at that point.

Mr McAveety: So the core of resources is probably focused on the early years. I am thinking about a pupil at, for example, mid-secondary age who has perhaps not exhibited weaknesses in earlier years. What do you do if someone suddenly, in their third year, requires interventions?

Alan Locke: There is a range of interventions, some of which involve considering alternative curriculum provision. We are committed, where possible, to maintaining the hook-in with mainstream education. For years 3 and 4, where there are sustained difficulties either in achievement or behaviour, we would consider not necessarily a separate provider but linking in with a partnership provider. We have a fairly developed scheme called new directions, in which we have a link with Reid Kerr College in Paisley. The scheme is not about the pupils having separate vocational education, but about them taking some vocational subjects in the college while continuing with their core subjects in the mainstream school. We feel that it is important that, where possible, pupils maintain their links to their local school and are not taken out of the system. Once children are taken out of the system, it is difficult to bring them back in.

Dr Murray: The response to my question to the previous panel on the celebration of success was interesting. The Renfrewshire submission says that success and recognition are powerful motivators. You celebrate achievement in the widest sense and you give a number of examples. When Aberlour Child Care Trust was talking about extra-curricular activities, I noted that those can be seen as rewards. I wondered whether you use that type of participation to recognise and reward people for success in their achievements. I wanted to invite your views on the comments that we heard a couple of weeks ago from the teaching unions that smiley faces and back-slapping ceremonies are not very helpful in motivating young people.

Steve McCreadie: Young people and families know when reward, recognition and praise are authentic. They would quickly recognise if any of those ceremonies were simply back-slapping and phoney. The question is which currency we are dealing in when we reward success. Is it the currency of the labour market and a determination to have qualifications that can be measured—for example, a certain amount of standard grades and highers? Alternatively, is it exemplified by the 14-year-old who was given a certificate—meaningless in the currency of the world of work—for recognition of some hard work that she had done on a project? That was the first certificate that she had ever received and the fact that she received it in the presence of her mum made an enormous difference. That currency works well if we are talking about what motivates young people and families to improve their learning and to engage. The answer to your question depends on how we want to measure success. You are right—if there is anything that is guaranteed to rile a young person, it is something inauthentic and phoney. We need something that is genuine and we need to ensure that we recognise people appropriately.

Alan Locke: There are a number of reasons why we are committed to recognising achievement. Education is not just about academic achievement; a range of skills can be parcelled up in ways that do not focus on standard grades or highers. For example, within our better neighbourhood services activities there is a strong commitment to engaging young people in sports activities. A number of those young people will take a coaching certificate. The skills required to be a successful coach include leadership, dissecting the learning experience into small, teachable areas and the ability to work with one's peer group. Those are important skills and we think that it is important that we recognise them.

More generally, people have made negative comments about celebrating achievement by back-slapping. Something is not an achievement to a young person unless their peers recognise it as an achievement too. That is one of the key areas that we have been working on with schools

and young people. There is no point in a 14-year-old receiving a good attendance certificate, because their peers do not recognise that. However, their peers recognise success in a DJ-ing competition, in football or in another sport. That builds up their self-esteem and is more likely to engage them in the learning process. We are committed to doing that.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Your submissions were valuable, because they answered virtually all the questions that could be asked. However, I would like to know how you think initiatives to boost self-esteem can be maintained throughout the school year.

Alan Locke: One way in which we encourage schools to do that is through weekly assemblies. That succeeds only if teachers are also committed to attending assemblies. In a secondary school, it is difficult for all staff to have a feel for what is happening in the community and in young people's lives. Attending school assemblies at which recognition is given to achievements not only by pupils, but by the community, builds up the self-esteem of the learning community.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: You mentioned school assemblies. Am I right in thinking that they are not held in all schools but that you would encourage them to be held for the purpose that you have just mentioned?

Alan Locke: Yes. Assemblies might not involve a whole school, but meetings of groups of pupils are held every week in our schools. We are not necessarily talking about 1,200 pupils attending the same assembly. We are talking about year groups or subject groups within a year.

Kelly Bayes: Our submission refers to one model for assessing self-esteem, but a range of assessments exists. It is important constantly to assess individual and group self-esteem and to work on that. Self-esteem can shift with age. Very young children—pre-school children—may have a strong sense of self but not of belonging, whereas an adolescent might feel the opposite. Self-esteem has different elements. It needs to be constantly reassessed.

The Convener: I do not want to lose the mainstream point that Alan Locke touched on. He said that the policy of East Renfrewshire—

Alan Locke: Renfrewshire.

The Convener: I am sorry. Alan Locke said that Renfrewshire Council's policy was to encourage children to remain in the main stream if possible. It is reasonably clear that Aberlour deals with the situation from a different orientation. When it is necessary to take young people out of the main stream, does that cause problems that add to the burdens that you must face?

Steve McCreadie: We in the Crannog service work closely in partnership with Dumfries and Galloway Council, which shares Renfrewshire Council's view that we should work in the vast majority of situations to support young people in mainstream education. Of course that has challenges. We heard from the previous panel about some challenges of integration.

The service that we provide is primarily part time. Young people who are struggling in mainstream education are removed for part of the time but maintain at all times their links with their originating school. We seek to support that as much as possible. Of course that has challenges. We need to consider how to continue the professional development of teachers, social workers, our staff and those in a range of agencies in managing the differences and the tensions.

It is possible to reintegrate those young people and to ensure that interventions are made at a time that reduces the risk of exclusion. Alan Locke is right: once young people are taken out for a prolonged period, it is incredibly difficult to return them. The evidence is that that is happening to some young people earlier in their school career. When we remove young people who are aged 12 or 13—or even those in primary school—from mainstream education, we set different wheels in motion. We need to retain those links—that is supported through legislation and social policy—and to maintain an integrated approach.

12:15

Ms Alexander: I will follow up the point about the size of the cohort that is involved. With the previous panel, I was shocked to discover that the threshold for participation in the Right Track programme is 20 per cent attendance or below. A pupil is not really participating in mainstream education if they attend school only one day in four. In fact, if they attend a mainstream school only one day in three or less than 50 per cent of the time, it is clear that the school is not working for them.

An interesting question for the committee is how we think about those people who attend between 20 per cent and 50 per cent of the time. Do our witnesses have any idea of the size of cohort of pupils who participate less than 50 per cent or less than 25 per cent of the time, either in Dumfries and Galloway or in Renfrewshire? If not, perhaps the clerks could pick up that issue and give us a sense of the numbers involved. I suppose that what lies behind my question is the fact that we want to hold kids in mainstream education. For how many kids is that approach not working in your respective authorities?

Alan Locke: Obviously, I cannot give you the exact figures. However, after reviewing what has

happened over the past year, we have developed the new directions model, which is based on providing services in partnership with another provider instead of purchasing a full service from them. That allows us to keep in place certain support systems for young people—such as family support services or the school's behaviour support services—and it means that, instead of simply handing away all responsibility for those young people and losing the support systems that people have worked hard at building up, we can maintain a link with them.

Ms Alexander: Is there a threshold of attendance at which people move into the new directions programme? Would attending less than 50 per cent of the time, for example, make them eligible?

Alan Locke: No. Young people's ambitions should not centre on going into Spark of Genius or taking up alternative provision. However, we do not want to be seen as a place for failures. As a result, we sit with young people and discuss in detail their preferred options. That also forms a part of the personal learning plan.

Ms Alexander: So there might be a good reason why someone who attends school less than 50 per cent of the time does not participate in the new directions programme. For example, you might think that the programme does not suit them or they might not want to participate. I am simply trying to get a handle on what happens to the cohort of people who do not attend if they do not opt into a programme such as new directions.

Alan Locke: That is a difficult question. At that point, those young people would not be attending school, which means that we would have to follow another model. After all, by then, we would have considered all the available options and brought in further support in the form of the new directions programme. If that approach was failing, the matter would have to come back to the extended support team, which would then consider other options. For some young people, residential school has become an option. It all depends on how extreme a young person's difficulties are. For example, a small number of young people who come from incredibly chaotic backgrounds or have incredibly chaotic lifestyles are difficult for any institution or set of workers to support. We have to consider the best possible match for those young people.

The Convener: I wonder whether we can get some statistics on the matter from Renfrewshire Council in particular and whether the Scottish Parliament information centre can come up with anything. In its written submission, Fairbridge has said that, in Scotland, 5,000 young people play truant every day and 1,000 more miss school because of temporary exclusion. Given the number of schools in Scotland, those figures did not seem particularly high. However, I presume that that disguises the fact that pupils might come one day and not the next and so on.

Fiona Hyslop: We could get some published statistics on that matter.

Ms Alexander: Picking up on Ken Macintosh's point, I wonder how we ensure quality of provision in the whole cohort. The HMIE regime takes things school by school, but one school might be doing very well by the 95 or even 98 per cent of its pupils who attend but might not be doing terribly well by the 2 per cent who do not attend. As things stand, that might account for only 2 per cent of the school's assessment. Presumably for the people who work in this field, irrespective of the service that they provide, it would be helpful if there were some quality assurance for the cohort group. Although we might not be aware of these issues at the moment, we will certainly examine them, because they might help to assess what works well and what does not work so well. In addition to making school-by-school assessments, should HMIE carry out cross-cohort examinations that are similar to those that it carries out for additional learning needs?

Alan Locke: In Renfrewshire, apart from the HMIE inspections, we undertake a three-yearly review of all establishments, which includes partner establishments, although I am not sure how closely they are targeted. We help them to moderate their self-evaluation, to ensure that it is realistic. We give that support, but the process reassures us because ultimately we must provide value for money—that is not a nasty comment, because value for money is to do with the additional value for the child that extra resources can generate.

Steve McCreadie: The proposed joint inspections by HMIE and the social work services inspectorate might be more helpful, particularly for the cohort of young people that Wendy Alexander describes, for whom a range of agencies tends to be involved in providing care. HMIE is good at evaluating schools on a school-by-school basis, as Wendy Alexander indicated, but we need comprehensive evaluation programmes that address the perspective of the range of agencies that are involved. How success is measured from a social work perspective is probably different from how it is measured by an individual teacher or family, or from an education or health perspective. Evaluations need to become more sophisticated.

Useful pointers are available to us. There is a substantial body of academic evidence on what works for young people and on the particular educational requirements of looked-after children. The inspectorates have a body of knowledge, as does the Scottish Commission for the Regulation

of Care. There is much evidence, but we need to apply it to that cohort and we should start to consider what different authorities do. The Executive's pupil inclusion network will consider the role of voluntary sector organisations in the provision of educational opportunities for young people, which is welcome.

Mr Macintosh: Tom McGhee suggested that there was not a level playing field in relation to funding for activities that might help excluded and demotivated pupils. His implication was that cost sometimes governs the choice of support that is put in place to help such pupils. In other words, cheap provision in mainstream schools is more attractive than programmes such as Spark of Genius or European-funded or voluntary sector programmes. What is the local authority perspective on that? Is there a level playing field, or are some programmes disadvantaged by the way in which they are funded?

Alan Locke: You raise a difficult issue. We have found that the most expensive programmes and interventions are not necessarily the best ones. We must consider cost and acknowledge that the more we spend on external provision, the less money is available to support young people in schools. We have to strike the right balance. We always try to focus on the individual young person, which is why we developed extended support teams.

You ask whether there is a level playing field. We have different contracts with a number of private providers, obviously because different costs are associated with the programmes that they deliver. We have tried to focus on programmes with which we can work in partnership, which allow young people to work with their mainstream place as well as with the specialist provider.

Mr Macintosh: I am sure that you do not make decisions based on the cost of programmes. Tom McGhee runs a specialised and expensive school, so cost is an issue for him. However, do local authorities find the issue problematic? Would you welcome work by the committee on the issue?

Alan Locke: It would not be particularly helpful to ring fence a large amount of money for specialist provision, because schools would just use it very quickly.

Mr Macintosh: I was not sure about Tom McGhee's solution, by the way.

Alan Locke: The difficulty is that the more specialist provision one makes, the faster it will fill and the less inclusive schools will be. People will start to say, "Well the school's not really for us, because he or she fits the criteria, so we should move them out." When we move young people totally out of mainstream provision, whether for health or mental health reasons or because of behavioural problems, that is really a last resort. There can be a whole range of reasons, but we try to retain children in mainstream provision for as long as possible.

Mr Macintosh: I would like to ask Steve McCreadie and Kelly Bayes about that. When you are arguing on behalf of a child for access to the best educational provision, do you find that funding streams create imbalances?

Kelly Bayes: Generally across our services, we always try to work with the local authority to come up with the best package and to get value for money. Funding is always an issue; we all want more of it. Alan Locke is right, however, and we would not want to say that we have access to a pot of funding because we are specialists. It is a question of what is best for the children in the local community, and that should be mainstream provision with whatever is needed in addition. In Dumfries and Galloway, Steve McCreadie has been working in partnership with the local authority on funding.

Mr Macintosh: I imagine that funding is an issue at every single level in education, but my question is more about lack of equity and fairness. Is a voluntary sector programme funded to the same extent, or in the same manner, as a specialist school or an additional support worker from the education or social work department? I want to know whether there is equity across the board.

Kelly Bayes: One of the issues for the voluntary sector is often the true cost of the service. That is an issue that runs not only through education but through all services. A service that is being provided has to be costed accurately and paid for. If, for example, there is a cost-of-living increase in the pay of local authority employees, the increase should be the same, rather than less, in the voluntary sector. As long as that can be dealt with, we do not find that there is a great deal of difficulty and we do not say that we need to be treated specially or dealt with differently from anybody else.

Steve McCreadie: What makes a difference is having stability, so that when we are providing a service we can recruit and retain staff and are not dependent on short-term funding, for example. The voluntary sector is often subject to close scrutiny and evaluation, and rightly so, and we welcome and encourage that culture within our own service, which includes a best-value element. As well as being preferable for a whole variety of sound welfare reasons, community-based options that retain young people in their communities are also more cost effective than residential provisions. Those two considerations sit together, but we need to be clear that priority is given to the

welfare reasons why young people are supported in mainstream provision and in their own communities, rather than being placed in more expensive residential provision elsewhere, unless that is absolutely necessary.

On the question of there being a level playing field, I certainly do not want to comment specifically on Tom McGhee's point, but recruitment and retention and the stability of service provision are the important issues. It is also important to ensure that what funding is available is not ring fenced for special provision. I agree with Alan Locke that if all these places are created, they will undoubtedly be filled, and there are drivers within schools that will fill them very quickly.

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): Perhaps it is just me, but I have not really got a great feel from this morning's evidence for what is best practice out there. The statistics on attainment for looked-after children in schools are abysmal and show no great sign of improvement. We have also had recent HMIE reports on integrated community schools that suggest that those schools promised more than they have delivered. Do you have a model of best practice that you are working towards, or can you give me an idea of what a best-practice model that draws on your experience would look like?

12:30

Steve McCreadie: I think that we can. We have made some evidence available to the committee, and we can follow that up with independent evaluation reports spanning five years from three different perspectives. We can record some improvements for young people who attend our service, but it is easy for each service provider to claim that they have the best model. The challenge is to find principles to underpin those models that can be transferred and made applicable elsewhere. That requires providers, authorities and voluntary sector organisations to work effectively together.

We know, from research by academics, some of what works. We know that we must invest heavily in helping the young people to acquire engagement skills and social skills. We must ensure that they have the emotional and social capacity to engage in education, and we must provide education in a way that is meaningful to them. We must also measure their progress effectively. All of that is known, but the trick is how we put it into practice in a complex world in which different agencies have to work together across a range of boundaries. Nevertheless, there is a lot of evidence around and we know what works. It is not hard to identify it in research, but it is hard to put it into practice and sustain it.

Alan Locke: We have been focusing on the achievement of the lowest-performing 20 per cent and we are making major strides forward on that. Some of that progress is down to the steps that schools are taking to ensure that young people turn up for their exams. The lowest-performing 20 per cent are the ones who are most likely to come from more chaotic backgrounds. The household is not organised around the standard grade exam being held on a particular morning, and it is sometimes easier for the young people just not to appear. Schools now have staff in place to ensure that that does not happen. They have a good suspicion about who might not arrive and they arrange for those young people to be collected and brought into school. The young people are also offered additional support before the exams to ensure that they perform to the best of their ability. The difficulty is then in maintaining that, so that those standard grades are translated into highers at a later date.

Although the HMIE report "The Sum of its Parts?" said that integrated community schools had not met all their targets, it recognised that a pilot that had been running for three years would be unlikely to have an impact on some of the targets, especially on attainment and the number of highers that are taken. By that point, the young people were 17 or 18. There is still a lot of work to be done on integrated community schools, and it is recognised that the resources are not being supplied by the other partners to achieve the original target of every school becoming an integrated community school. There are not enough social workers for every primary school, and so on. However, as HMIE recognised, if we cluster nursery or primary schools around a secondary school, we can start looking to deliver the integrated school agenda because, at that level, the providers and partners will come on board. We are trying to take forward a range of things and share them with others. I hope that this morning is a way of doing that, too.

The Convener: Do you have another question, Adam?

Mr Ingram: No, I just wanted Kelly Bayes to have the opportunity to say something.

Kelly Bayes: I have not got much more to say than what has already been said. We have demonstrated—as, I am sure, have others—that outcomes are not purely about educational attainment. There is a range of outcomes that are to do with pupil motivation: remaining in the community; socialising; achieving Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network awards and those kinds of things; improving relationships at home; reducing offending; and reducing risk-taking behaviour. There is a range of outcomes that school can contribute to, and models that

various people are trying are showing that. The difficulty is that pupil motivation is often considered to be about educational attainment only. We must recognise that pupil motivation is about lifelong learning. It is not just about passing exams at school but about successfully gaining employment and a whole range of things.

Ms Byrne: That leads us quite nicely back to relationships and the need to be able to work with young people one to one and in small groups. The Aberlour Child Care Trust submission talks about fostering positive relationships and I am interested in Renfrewshire Council's positive support strategies, including six to eight-week blocks of

"groupwork and individual support … with solution focussed outcomes."

I am interested in how you are able to provide those things in mainstream settings, given the number of staff required.

Alan Locke: In Renfrewshire we already staff our schools at just over 5 per cent above the standard, so we have additional staff within our schools to provide additional support. We have also used new moneys from the Scottish Executive's better behaviour support for schools. In every secondary school there has to be at least one behaviour support teacher and a behaviour support base. Sorry, I did not catch the end of your question.

Ms Byrne: I asked about your ability to provide a focused solution.

Alan Locke: We recognise that more of the same does not work. We are timelining intensive support from the family support team or from attendance officers or link workers, which is why we get the six to eight-week timeframe. A personal learning plan is attached to that. If there is no change within eight weeks, extending the time by another eight weeks will not necessarily make any difference. It is a case of taking it in stages and reviewing the situation at the end of each stage, which is why there is a six to eight-week timeframe for each piece of action.

Ms Byrne: Would you move on to a different strategy if the current one was unsuccessful?

Alan Locke: It would go back to the extended support team, which would recognise that there had been a failure in the strategy, or maybe that the strategy just needed to be tweaked and more support given. It is also about listening to the young person's view of the strategy, because they may see that changes would be helpful or would encourage them to participate.

Ms Byrne: Would you take young people out of the curriculum?

Alan Locke: We do that in a number of places. We are using youth justice pilot moneys in two of our schools to run a project called reachout. There is an issue with disaffected young people—particularly boys—and modern languages in year 2. They know that they are not going to take French any further, so some of the classes become a nightmare. We are working with those disaffected young people, local community workers, local sports staff and schools to develop alternative curriculum provision during that timeframe. It focuses on personal and social development, community service and community activities.

Ms Byrne: Do you have difficulty staffing those initiatives with community workers, which I know can be an issue in certain areas?

Alan Locke: We are finding it very difficult indeed to recruit community learning workers. It is about examining who can provide additional support within the area. The important thing for these young people is that the person is somebody whom they can engage with—the person's professional background does not matter. It is about having somebody who cares, gives the young person opportunities and recognises them for who they are.

Ms Byrne: Steve, would you comment on the importance of engaging with young people and your ability to do that?

Steve McCreadie: It is critical. I agree with a great deal of what Alan Locke said. We also need to recognise that different people have different roles to play. Given the size of their classes, there are limitations and restrictions on the ability of classroom teachers to forge the kinds of relationships that sometimes are required. However, it is entirely within the power of a classroom teacher to build respectful, trusting, open and engaging relationships with a substantial number of pupils.

We need to recognise the complementary roles in relation to young people who have more difficulty and who are more challenging in classroom situations. That is where other individuals from outside come in, be they sports workers, home-school link workers, Crannog workers, social workers or whoever. There is a task of mediating, translating and often arbitrating between the different demands, to persuade a young person that they should stick in and be there and engage, because there is value in that. That might require a good cop, bad cop partnership. It is critical that that partnership is understood, so that there is someone who can engage with the young person who is more difficult and persuade them where they should be and where they can link in. They can pave the way for dealing with the inevitable fallouts when those occur and repeatedly reconnect and go back.

Kelly Bayes: Earlier, there was a discussion about ratios, which are a factor—we cannot get away from that. Obviously, there is more chance of engagement in smaller classes.

We also need to consider the ethos and attitude of schools. Schools and individual teachers have a role to play. Young people often say, "I go to school and they don't even say hello to me." If a person walked into work and nobody said hello to them, they would not feel particularly good. As well as other people coming in and playing their part, attitudes and atmospheres in school settings are an issue.

Fiona Hyslop: I was struck by what Steve McCreadie said about people knowing what needs to be done. We know what must be done from Alan Locke's evidence, but the trick is in the delivery. What are the key barriers to delivery either with respect to council provision or for service providers accessing provision?

Steve McCreadie: There is a range of barriers. There should be closer co-ordination in the provision of children's services; closer working among education services, social services, health services, children's panels and others; particular initiatives in schools to ensure that there are more flexible opportunities for young people to engage in learning; more diversity in the curriculum, learning styles and learning approaches; and available community-based facilities that can pick up young people when they fall out and which can help to reconnect them at critical times. There are also key intervention points, such as at the transition from primary school to secondary school, and at different points during the child's secondary career. We seem primarily to be talking about secondary schools, but there are other issues that relate to primary schools. However, we should consider the differences between secondary 1 and 2 and between secondary 3 and 4. Different intervention models can be used.

Alan Locke: I support what has been said. We should also ensure that everybody remains signed up to the inclusion model, which can be one of the most difficult things to achieve. Low-level annoyances—whether disobedience, buildings or staffing problems—affect the ability of people to continue to engage in the inclusion process. In Renfrewshire, all the senior managers go out from headquarters to schools on in-service training days to talk about the broad inclusion agenda rather than specific educational themes. They talk about how to maintain inclusion in our schools.

Fiona Hyslop: Paragraph 4 of Renfrewshire Council's submission identifies examples of effective teaching approaches and learning styles. When we were in Lanarkshire, we heard about collaborative learning, but I was a wee bit concerned that different learning styles, for example, seem to vary according to when and where they are used. It should be borne in mind that many educational approaches—such as curriculum alternatives—have been available for a long time. Have you seen differences from school to school in how effectively they have taken up the new opportunities, even in your council area?

Alan Locke: There are differences from class to class and from subject to subject, but steps have now been put in place to address the matter. We have just reached an agreement with the local EIS association on monitoring the teaching and learning process in our schools. A detailed process now exists and schools' senior managers will be engaged in monitoring teaching and learning and the pace of learning in our classes. The issue is not only about finding out how good an individual teacher is but about sharing good practice.

Fiona Hyslop: I do not know whether we should focus on Renfrewshire—experience of implementing good practice probably varies not only from school to school but from class to class in other council areas too. How can we get effective partnerships to make the most of the opportunities?

Alan Locke: I was referring to styles of teaching. Different teaching styles are appropriate to different teaching situations and different subjects and styles will vary from class to class and from school to school. On improving standards to ensure that best practice is maintained, our council is bringing in new policies on monitoring teaching and learning and the pace of learning, and we expect our policies to impact on quality throughout the school. If such policies are adopted, when a school assesses itself under the indicators in "How good is our school?" it will have strong evidence to back up awarding itself a 4—which is "very good"—for teaching and learning.

Fiona Hyslop: So the self-assessment of schools that there will be with the new style of inspections should identify issues and help to roll things out.

Alan Locke: Yes.

Fiona Hyslop: I take it that that work is in progress.

Alan Locke: It is. The policy is just being put in place.

The Convener: My supplementary question may be obvious. You talked about low-level indiscipline and so on in schools, and there is a lot of fuss in the papers about discipline problems and teachers being demotivated. I assume that the most effective strategies for dealing with the negative aspects of discipline are the pupil and

teacher motivation strategies that we have been talking about. Is it fair to say that there is a direct inverse relationship between the two issues?

Alan Locke: Yes. The issue is also about respecting one another and not focusing on negative comments in newspapers, which derive from their agenda to sell. We need to consider the good things that are happening in a school and focus on them.

12:45

The Convener: Do those measures impact directly on discipline? For example, do they affect the extent of the more significant trouble from children with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties or of the low-level indiscipline that you mentioned, or are they different issues?

Alan Locke: I am not really aware of what the differences are. Sometimes, the issue is a wee bit about the history of the school. In our area, major changes have been made to the catchment areas of several schools because of the rationalisation programme. If a school has always had a particular type of catchment area and it is then expanded to be more reflective of the whole town, there will be a difference. Some schools take time to come to terms with that and need additional support. Young people need support too when schools merge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will ask a slightly loaded question, if I may. Do you agree that, for teachers to infuse pupils with inspiration, encouragement and enthusiasm, it helps enormously if they are not overloaded with too much bureaucracy, form filling and trivia? I have been given evidence by a head teacher that teachers have the capacity to encourage and inspire children, but not when they have to do too much form filling and are totally overloaded with work. Is that a fair comment?

Alan Locke: Yes. We should have one planning process, not layers and layers of the same planning. As was suggested earlier, there should be a central plan with additions to it, rather than plans being rewritten.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: How can the system best be simplified to help teachers inspire pupils?

Alan Locke: Do you mean in planning matters?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am talking about reducing or simplifying bureaucracy.

Alan Locke: One difficulty is that many funding streams and initiatives, whether in relation to bursaries or the requirements of health officials, require different forms of accountability. Different pieces of information are sought from schools for different reasons, or, in many cases, the same information is sought, but in a different format. Schools tire of that, which is why in many new schools we have moved away from personal learning plans to personal learning planning. Some individuals already have a plan for their education in the school, so it is not helpful to keep introducing additional plans on top of that. There should be an extension of the one plan, because nobody likes repeating the same process.

The Convener: That opens up a wider issue, but we will bring the session to an end with that. I thank the witnesses for their attendance. We would appreciate it if the witnesses got back to us on the one or two issues on which we asked them to do so. We would be happy to hear from you on any other issue.

Before members rush off, we still have to deal with item 4 on the agenda, which is a brief look at issues that arise out of today's evidence, to help the clerks as they move towards drafting the report. One clear high-level issue that has arisen is the desirability of mainstreaming where possible.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Further to that point that the convener has raised, could I ask the panel to do a short paper on it? If there is a huge class that has some children who have been subject to antisocial behaviour orders, a lot who are of middle-ranking ability and some who are of enormous ability, how best can a teacher deal with that?

Alan Locke: One issue is to ensure that teachers have a range of support and that they are never isolated. They should not have to deal on their own with the sort of scenario that you describe. Typically in our schools, we have specialist behaviour support teachers, family support members of staff—who are also described as home link workers—and a senior management post that involves responsibility for behaviour and behaviour support in the school.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, but—

The Convener: Sorry, James. With the greatest respect, let us not open up the evidence session again. We have finished with the witnesses. We could go on for ever on that issue. I thank the witnesses again for their attendance this morning, but I do not think that we should start opening up other issues. We should return to the issues that arose from today's session and discuss where we are going.

There is a high-level issue about the desirability of mainstreaming strategies as far as possible. It is obvious that there are things to learn from the projects and voluntary sector organisations that play their part, but there is a downside to taking people out of mainstream teaching, even though that is sometimes necessary.

Ms Byrne: I do not disagree with that, but we should be careful to emphasise that a small number of people will need to be removed from mainstream settings for reasons that are worked out clearly and carefully by the professional people who are involved. That will be the case, and we should not dismiss that in any way.

Fiona Hyslop: I agree.

The Convener: I do not disagree with that.

Mr Macintosh: I agree with Rosemary Byrne's view, but I do not think that it is quite what you were suggesting.

The Convener: I made a slightly different point. In an ideal world, we would want people to be dealt with in the main stream as much as possible. Some children do indeed have to be taken out of mainstream settings, but that is a last resort.

Fiona Hyslop: That is not the point. We need to have a debate about the matter. Your point is judgmental, but I do not think that we have the scope to be judgmental. Everything that we have heard shows that there is a spectrum. The approach for the majority of pupils may be centred on mainstreaming, but that should not be to the exclusion of other systems.

The Convener: I did not say anything of the sort.

Mr Macintosh: The pupil inclusion network Scotland is just starting up, but we heard about the importance of trying to find a way to evaluate best practice across the spectrum. It is clear that there are lots of examples of organisations that are making a difference for young people, but they are not being compared with each other. Some of them are achieving great things in developing social skills and some are developing educational attainment, but they are being measured in different ways. That is the most important point that emerged.

The Convener: There is a need for research that takes account of those different situations.

Mr Macintosh: Indeed. We also need structures to be put in place. HMIE is an essential body but, as Wendy Alexander said, it does not produce comparative evidence across the board because of the way in which it works. Good practice or bad practice can be lost in the middle of an inspection because it is drowned out and not highlighted. It is clear that HMIE is concentrating on additional support for learning, which is a key area for it to develop.

I would like to hear more about the pupil inclusion network. We heard that it is being set up, but—

The Convener: We got the impression that it is not off the ground yet.

Mr Macintosh: It is obviously not off the ground yet. Tom McGhee was quite dismissive.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I strongly agree with Ken Macintosh, but my worry is that best practice is interpreted differently in different schools. I would be most grateful if it could be left open to the witnesses to send in a paper on what they regard as best practice, if they think that it is appropriate to do so. There could be considerable controversy on the matter, because what works in one school might not work in another school. There does not appear to be unanimity and agreement on the point.

Ms Alexander: There is an issue about best practice and incentives or perverse incentives to fund certain types of provision, but that does not meet the accountability point, which is the responsibility of HMIE. It has emerged clearly that we need to ask HMIE about the accountability for the provision of education to the most excluded group and how we move forward if that is not monitored on an all-Scotland basis. There is also the issue of what represents best practice and how to spread it. It would be useful if HMIE could talk to us about how it—or whoever else—is accountable and how that is monitored.

The Convener: You will have your chance on that next week.

Ms Alexander: We heard that pupils are not all the same, and the idea that excluded pupils are all the same is self-evidently nonsense, so perhaps we need to explore the possibility of the pupil having a role in selecting from a menu of available alternative provision. That might be one way of holding some excluded pupils in the system and dealing with some of the perverse funding incentives.

The Convener: There is also a need to avoid sinking projects in evaluation reports and bureaucracy. We need to get the balance between that need and getting meaningful information out of projects. Although people say that there is no single solution—I am sure that that is right—some solutions must have better track records than others. It should be possible to get a feel for what approaches work better than others for the catchment area and groups that we are talking about.

Mr Macintosh: Another point that has come up today and in all our evidence-taking sessions is the importance of teaching. We started from the premise that motivated teachers are the key to motivating pupils, which is almost a truism. We need to explore how to promote good teaching practice and help motivated teachers, although I am not entirely sure how. Perhaps it is a matter of exchanging good practice. Teacher motivation has emerged as the most important factor that

everybody picks on, so I cannot help feeling that that needs to be flagged up and that we need to have a structure that rewards good teachers, directs resources towards them and addresses demotivated teachers as a way of reinvigorating and creating a positive school ethos.

Ms Byrne: A few things have come to the fore today: early intervention, home links, the ability to engage with parents at crucial stages and the ability of school staff to engage with young people in one-to-one and small-group settings. I would like to find out how well local authorities are resourced to enable them to implement those approaches, what schools have established home-link teachers with funding for the long term rather than the short term and how much progress we are making in those areas. We could do with some evidence or a paper that would give us information on that.

The Convener: It would certainly be helpful to have a snapshot of that. It would be too big an operation to get complete figures, but we could get a snapshot of the level of support. Underlying all this, I fear that, because we tend to be shown the best practice when we visit schools, we might be missing out on what happens in typical schools.

Ms Byrne: Yes, we want to know how many schools are able to provide home-link teachers and how many are able to bring more staff in to support young people.

The Convener: Parity of esteem was raised, as was the possibility that vocational education might be the answer. We did not dig down into those matters in our questions, but the discussion at least raised the question whether the subject matter that some children and young people were given was the right one across the board. There are some assumptions that underlie that.

Ms Byrne: Flexibility was felt to be more important.

13:00

Mr Macintosh: What we heard today was echoed in our school visits. Two schools that we saw that were good at practising vocational education both said that they started off by providing vocational education for some disruptive children and that it did not work at all, but that when they provided it for children who would most benefit from it, it was a fantastic programme. In other words, vocational education is not the solution to motivating pupils; it is a separate topic.

We did not go into the setting of education, although we talked about further education colleges. One of the reasons why further education colleges sometimes work as education settings for school pupils is that the pupils are there voluntarily, are treated as adults and do not wear school uniform.

The Convener: It is the same with voluntary sector projects as well.

Mr Macintosh: Exactly. In other words, what makes them effective is the setting, the environment and the pupil to teacher ratio, but not all of that is translatable into a mainstream school setting, which is the essence of our inquiry.

The Convener: That echoes Wendy Alexander's point about choice. Something about the young people's ownership of their life choices on education is beginning to peek out.

Fiona Hyslop: It comes back to self-control and autonomy. Everybody who uses best practice is trying to encourage self-control and autonomy, whether through individualised learning opportunities or other different experiences. That is obviously a seam of practice; the question is how to maximise it with limited resources in the main stream.

The Convener: There is sometimes a hint of an attitude of "We will do this with young people" as opposed to a more co-operative approach. It is difficult to put one's finger on it, but that is an issue. The rights of children under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 come into it.

Fiona Hyslop: I am conscious that our witnesses are still here and that they might want to go.

A lot of the evidence on teacher motivation is about what is motivating and incentivising, but disincentives and demotivation are also an issue. They might not necessarily be attached to pupil motivation. They often will be, but other evidence touched on the fact that external circumstances might impact on teacher motivation, and we have not addressed that.

The Convener: We heard about the impact of leadership in schools and the ethos and value systems of schools. That is complemented by other evidence that we have heard.

Fiona Hyslop: Those are the positive aspects. I am saying that we should reflect slightly on the bias.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We should consider the theme of teachers as role models and their not being put under too much pressure unnecessarily.

The Convener: That is a good theme on which to finish. I appreciate that we have gone on a little bit today, but it was a useful meeting.

Meeting closed at 13:02.

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