

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday 17 January 2007

Session 2

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2007, Session 2

CONVENER

*Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (Sol)

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)

*Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)

*Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)

*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

*Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (Sol)

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

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Councillor Andrew Anderson (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Douglas Cairns (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education)

Graham Donaldson (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education)

Anna Fowlie (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Councillor Charlie Gray (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Terry Lanagan (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Bruce Robertson (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Roberts

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Education Committee

Wednesday 17 January 2007

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

Implementation of Teachers Agreement

The Convener (Iain Smith): Good morning, colleagues, and welcome to the first meeting in 2007 of the Education Committee. I wish you all a happy new year.

There are three items on our agenda, the first of which concerns implementation of the teachers agreement. The committee agreed previously to conduct a short inquiry into the reports by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and by Audit Scotland on the implementation of the agreement, which is known colloquially as the McCrone agreement.

I am pleased to welcome to our first evidence-taking session Graham Donaldson, the chief inspector for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, who is accompanied by Douglas Cairns. Unfortunately, Annette Bruton, who was meant to be here, is ill and unable to attend. We have also received apologies from Fiona Hyslop. I invite Graham Donaldson to make some brief opening remarks before I open the floor to questions from members.

Graham Donaldson (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education): Thank you, convener. I apologise for the fact that I am here instead of Annette Bruton. Annette led for us on the development of the report and my colleague Douglas Cairns was instrumental in its preparation. Douglas and I will jointly attempt to answer your questions.

I do not want to make a major opening statement and will not try to summarise this complex report, but I will make a couple of points by way of introduction. We will then be happy to answer any questions that the committee has. It is important for us to make clear at the outset that we recognise very much that this is a report on work in progress. We are dealing with a complex agreement that addresses many different aspects of the work of schools in Scotland and which was phased in over a five-year period. Our inspection covered the full period, but only towards the end of it did we begin to see the agreement's full impact.

It is important to set the report within a broader context. The teachers agreement enables things to happen, but it does not by itself make things

happen. We are looking at the extent to which the opportunities and flexibilities that are inherent in it are being put in place in a way that leads to improvement for young people.

I hope that it will be clear from reading the report that we did not expect simple relationships between the agreement and specific improvements in attainment, examination results and so on. That would be far too narrow and simplistic a way of interpreting the agreement's impact on Scottish education. However, we expected to see that the agreement was being used in ways that improve learning for young people, and the report cites many examples from across Scotland of where that is happening.

I can summarise what we found overall. As we say in the report, we were impressed by the extent to which the specifics of a complex agreement have been put in place, and to that extent we echo the findings of the earlier Audit Scotland study. We saw evidence across the country of instances where the conditions for learning, which are inherent in the agreement, have led to improvements in learning.

However, our conclusion is that, as yet, that improvement is not sufficiently widespread, and considerable work remains to be done to ensure that the opportunities that the agreement offers to Scottish education are fully exploited. That relates to the implementation of a curriculum for excellence and the further professional development of teachers. A key point for us in the next two or three years is the extent to which we continue to see the flexibilities used to implement significant change in Scottish education.

The Convener: Thank you. Does Douglas Cairns want to say anything at this point?

Douglas Cairns (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education): I have nothing to add at the moment.

The Convener: We will move to questions, then.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): Media coverage of your report seemed to indicate that the McCrone agreement had not worked because we had not seen improvements in teaching and, in particular, in pupils' learning outcomes. What do you think would have happened if the McCrone agreement had not been reached? Where would we be now without McCrone?

Graham Donaldson: It is extremely difficult to be confident about that. The situation at the end of the last century was nothing like as constructive as what we have seen during the implementation of the agreement. Undoubtedly, we have seen a more constructive environment between

employers and teachers in taking forward improvements in Scottish education.

The extent to which the improvements that we have seen would have taken place without the agreement is speculation. There are some interesting examples of significant improvements. One example is the probationer teachers scheme and the induction arrangements in it. Given the fact that we have had a huge influx of new teachers into the profession, the conditions that the agreement created are a vast improvement on what existed previously. One great hope for Scottish education is that that new influx of teachers will be the engine room for further significant improvement in education, and to that extent the improvements in the induction of probationers that were put in place by the agreement have made a significant contribution to creating the conditions for further improvement.

I am reluctant to speculate with any precision about what might have happened. However, it is undoubtedly true that, without the agreement, the environment would have been less constructive than it has been.

Dr Murray: There was an issue about the recruitment of new teachers, but there was also an issue about retention because, over some time, councils had not been able to reward teachers adequately for their skills and professionalism. Do you agree that, without the agreement, not only would we not have recruited as many new teachers but we would have continued along the road of teachers becoming demoralised and leaving the profession?

Graham Donaldson: There is certainly a strong possibility that that would have continued.

Dr Murray: There have been difficulties with the settlement in secondary schools with, for example, changes in the career structure, and the profession has found it more difficult in secondary than in primary. Will you comment on some of the problems that have arisen in implementing the agreement in secondary schools?

Graham Donaldson: The conclusion that you draw from reading the report is correct. It is evident that some of the changes that were introduced into primary education—particularly the advent of principal teachers in primary schools—are already making an improvement in learning. Secondary schools, however, are more complex beasts. We are seeing considerably more variety, across the country, in both the nature of the implementation of the agreement and the enthusiasm with which the teaching profession has responded to certain aspects of the agreement. In general, therefore, I agree with the conclusion that you draw. Douglas Cairns may wish to add to what I have said.

Douglas Cairns: I repeat what Graham Donaldson said. Management and leadership capacity in primary schools was enhanced significantly by the introduction of principal teachers. As Graham Donaldson said, secondary schools are more complex.

I return to your first question. There is now more flexibility than there was in 1999-2000, and schools and authorities are availing themselves of the flexibility to be innovative and creative in meeting the needs of learners. However, secondary schools are more complex organisations, so it is a wee bit more difficult for them to take advantage of that flexibility.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I have four questions. First, should not measures be introduced to assess the success or otherwise of the McCrone agreement in raising standards or in providing educational benefit for pupils? What can be done now?

Graham Donaldson: As I said in reply to an earlier question, it is quite difficult to untangle the agreement, which is complex, and to separate it from other developments in the education system.

Significant improvements in achievement should be being made, and the agreement should play an important part in allowing that to happen. However, the agreement will not in itself lead to that happening. It must be viewed alongside changes in the curriculum that are being considered in the context of a curriculum for excellence and a more relevant curriculum—one that is more flexible, that is more responsive to the needs of individual children, and that develops capacities in young people. The real test of the agreement will be the extent to which it allows such changes in the curriculum to bed in to Scottish education. Nevertheless, the early signs are encouraging.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My second question is about job sizing. In the report, you express concern about job sizing demoralising teachers—for example, promoted staff being downsized to a lower salary level—and fears that career progression might be adversely affected. I understand that there is to be a review of that, which I imagine will be generally welcome. I cannot speak for my colleagues, but I imagine that they would generally welcome that. Can you make any recommendations on that for the future?

Graham Donaldson: It is undoubtedly true that the job-sizing exercise caused some difficulties, which were partly to do with people's understanding of what lay behind it and their acceptance of the criteria that were used. Whether that was a one-off period of adjustment or whether it will continue to cause difficulties in morale

remains an open question. There were short-term difficulties, to which we refer in the report.

In considering any future job-sizing exercise, we would make a specific comment about the need for transparency in the process. Douglas Cairns may want to comment.

Douglas Cairns: That is one of the recommendations that we would make. Schools and authorities found it difficult to model different curriculum structures and job remits for senior promoted staff. Also, the process was rather cumbersome because they did not have full access to the weightings that were allocated to such things as management tasks, classroom teaching, liaison with outside agencies, and so on. We think that it would help the process if there was a bit more transparency in that respect.

We do not have a view on the appropriateness of the weightings, but given the fact that concerns have been expressed about them, it might be worth having another look at the weightings and involving all stakeholders, so that we can get agreement that they are appropriate.

In any job-sizing exercise, there will be winners and losers. Guidance staff were particularly concerned about how they came out of the weighting process because a lot of their time is spent working with agencies rather than in front of a class, and classroom teaching was given a particular weighting. However, if that apparent anomaly was addressed, classroom teachers, who spend most of the day in front of a class, would feel aggrieved because they would be the losers. It is not the case that everyone can be winners in such an exercise.

10:15

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Do you know what form the review might take?

Graham Donaldson: No. We are not involved in that. It is important to stress that job sizing is a matter between teachers and their employers. We simply consider the impact that it has on general morale. The specifics of job sizing are a matter for employers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Would it make sense to have a national review rather than local reviews between local authorities and their staff?

Graham Donaldson: That is a matter for the minister rather than a matter for me.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am sure that that is right.

May I ask about the audit of the impact on out-of-class activities? It has been suggested that there is little evidence on the impact of a 35-hour week on teachers' willingness to be involved in

such activities. Is that something that you, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities or the Administration could look into?

Graham Donaldson: The whole business of what we previously called extra-curricular activities will be a significant issue for Scottish education to address in the next few years. It is evident to HMIE and to me that extra-curricular activities are central to the extent to which the capacities that are inherent in a curriculum for excellence are taken forward by young people and they are allowed to develop those capacities. One of the big challenges in the implementation of the agreement in the next few years is the extent to which it will enable all children to benefit from less formal education rather than such education being discretionary, as it is now.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Could the Education Committee usefully keep that subject under review?

Graham Donaldson: It is certainly an important issue, and one that we will be looking at.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Finally, I have a question on reducing the administrative burden. You will be well aware that teachers express concern about having too much paperwork and bureaucracy. I understand that it is hoped that the administrative burden will be reduced. What more can be done?

Graham Donaldson: In the report, we pay tribute to non-teaching staff, who have had an impact on the issue. A combination of the increasingly good use of classroom assistants in both primary and secondary schools and the advent of business managers in secondary schools is making a difference to the issues of bureaucracy and paperwork in schools.

We need to continue to work at the issue. Sometimes, what is referred to as paperwork is a necessary part of someone's job. We need to ensure that appropriate records are created so that things are not purely transitory. However, other aspects of paperwork involve unnecessary duplication.

Douglas Cairns: We found that the impact of non-teaching staff is greater in primary schools. It is simply a question of scale. We point out that, where the addition of one or two full-time equivalent support staff is spread across a large secondary school that has 60 or 70 teachers, it is inevitable that individual teachers will not feel the impact quite as much.

However, it is also the case, as Graham Donaldson pointed out, that support staff have an impact on schools and help to support teachers in their work. The advent of business managers has been particularly important. They are senior

people who work in senior management teams and they often have good qualifications and experience in human resources, business, finance, or facilities and estate management. They have a big impact. Perhaps schools and authorities could consider building on their work.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (Sol): I want to return to job sizing and relate it to the creation of faculties in some schools. What impact will that have on the various ways in which local authorities structure their secondary school staff? Are some models better than others? Do you have any recommendation about the future for faculties in our secondary schools?

Graham Donaldson: That is one of the more interesting but nonetheless complex aspects of the agreement. It gives rise to much controversy, particularly when subjects that had their own principal teachers have become part of a broader faculty. We have examples of that being done well, but it is early days to make a detailed evaluation of the extent to which different faculty structures benefit what happens in classrooms. Faculties enable the grouping of management responsibilities in a way that allows best use of the management capacity in a school. If fewer people do high-gear management jobs, that could have a significant impact on development and learning in secondary schools.

The big question is what the relationship is between the responsibilities of individual teachers and those of heads of departments or faculties. Douglas Cairns will say a little about examples of a clear determination to use faculty structures directly in a way that is designed to address learning. Some are reluctant to see the demise of principal teachers, who are sometimes in very small departments.

Some examples are promising, but we cannot say definitively that the right way to go is towards some faculty groupings or a general move to faculty groupings. I believe that we should see much greater flexibility school by school. Before the agreement, the management structure in every secondary school was highly predictable and highly uniform. As a result of the agreement, it would be good to have appropriate mixes of subject principal teachers and faculty teachers working with deputy heads. That would mean considering the management of a school as a whole rather than giving a school a structure within which it had to work, which was the previous situation.

I hope—and this is the message that we give about the agreement as a whole—that the agreement is not seen as a one-off series of events. If the agreement is to have its real impact on Scottish education, people will have to continue to consider flexibility, to use the intelligence that

we are gathering about what works well and to be prepared to change structures and prepared for structures to evolve in the years to come as we have a better idea of best practice.

Douglas Cairns has more specifics about the faculty structure if you wish to hear them.

Ms Byrne: I want to explore the impact on guidance of the loss of assistant principal teachers. Management structures have changed, so guidance may be provided in some schools in a different way from the traditional way. Has that impact been examined, given that young people today need more input from guidance teams and so on?

In general, assistant principal teachers and principal teachers did the work to prepare all the Scottish Qualifications Authority materials and to make links with pupil support for concessions in exams, for example. Has a drop or an improvement taken place in the number of applications and in standards?

Douglas Cairns: In the report, we were careful not to take a black-and-white, right-and-wrong approach that said faculties good, subject PTs bad—or the reverse. However, we said that the authorities or schools that were moving to faculty structures seemed to have a sound rationale and appropriate aims. In particular, the structures that were being put in place seemed to be well set up to deliver a curriculum for excellence, which emphasises not just subject knowledge and understanding but cross-curricular aspects.

To an extent, much depends on the interpretation of collegiality in schools. I reassure the committee and others that, although the initial fear was that subjects were being grouped in combinations that were ad hoc and rather difficult to justify, we did not find much evidence of that. By and large, faculties have been formed by grouping together cognate science, social and technological subjects. We thought that it was perfectly appropriate for someone who was not a specialist in all the subjects to lead those faculties. Subject-specific matters such as writing tests and homework sheets depend on the collegiality of individual teachers and the extent to which they see themselves as an autonomous professional with a responsibility for such matters. By and large, we found that that was the case in faculties.

We found some good pastoral care practice in schools with a faculty approach. The number of teachers who delivered guidance had been reduced by and large, but the number of principal teachers had been increased, and those principal teachers had more non-contact time. Therefore, there were economies of scale. They would have perhaps half a week in which they would not be in front of a class and in which they could do their

one-to-one work and pastoral care with pupils, and liaise with agencies as part of an integrated approach to delivering pastoral care and guidance, and learning and behaviour support. Obviously, such initiatives are separate from the teachers agreement, but we found a lot of good practice. We did not find any detrimental effects on pupils as a result of the agreement hampering guidance.

Ms Byrne: The take-up of chartered teacher posts has not been as good as we might have hoped. What impact has the cost of the scheme had on take-up? Are there other reasons for teachers not taking up chartered teacher posts?

Graham Donaldson: First, I will make a general comment. Chartered teachers can potentially have a major impact on schools. The basic principle behind them is good, but the low take-up of posts has been disappointing. However, there could be a lag and the number of chartered teachers may significantly build up, particularly as younger teachers reach positions in which they feel that they can become chartered teachers. Perhaps the process is slow to develop.

A more significant question is what we expect of chartered teachers. I hope that the review that the minister has announced will directly address the various interpretations of what a chartered teacher is.

High-quality chartered teachers should be beacons for good teaching and learning in schools. They should mentor colleagues and exemplify the highest-quality teaching and learning in schools. Becoming a chartered teacher is not simply a reward for staying in the classroom, as it is sometimes naively presented to be. We should have higher expectations of the contributions that chartered teachers will make to the overall quality of learning in schools. I hope that we will move in that direction as a result of the review that the minister has announced. Examples of their contributions already exist, but the vagueness of the description of the role allows wide interpretation of its nature.

Ms Byrne: Are costs a factor?

Graham Donaldson: They probably are, but individual teachers must make individual decisions. Costs are undoubtedly a factor for some teachers. All of us must do our own current expenditure and future benefit calculations.

Ms Byrne: I hope that the issue will be considered as part of the review.

Have reductions in class contact time been fully implemented?

Graham Donaldson: Yes.

Ms Byrne: Have you seen any resulting impact on teachers being released for courses?

Douglas Cairns: In general, the continuous professional development aspects of the agreement have been a success. Teachers are glad to be entitled—if I can put it that way—to 35 hours of professional development. However, people find that if they do their CPD as an additional 35 hours outwith their normal teaching day, that means going to courses after a long day at the chalkface when they might be tired. Weekend courses are sometimes not appropriate.

Aside from that factor, and overall, CPD has been positive and successful. The types of CPD and development activities seem to be broadening. Teachers seem to be more willing to engage in activities; the attitude is not just the simple, “Send me on a course so I can learn how to do something.”

10:30

Ms Byrne: Is there any impact on national or local initiatives? Most teacher and staff development is now being done through CPD, in which there is an element of choice. Is there a way to ensure that teachers are trained thoroughly enough to deal with inclusion issues and additional support needs, with enough expertise provided in schools alongside CPD?

Graham Donaldson: One of the key things underpinning the agreement, and one of the key tests of its success, is the extent of genuine growth in professionalism among our teachers. They have the opportunity to grow as professionals throughout their careers, and the agreement is undoubtedly intended to create the conditions for that to happen. That requires individual teachers to take responsibility for their own development, which is an important part of the agreement. All of us, as professionals, have a responsibility to ensure that we are ready to do the job that we are required to do.

An important part of the agreement is ensuring that each and every teacher sees it as their personal responsibility to engage in development in a variety of ways. The agreement provides the flexibility for teachers to get credit for taking that responsibility and for doing things at their own hand that previously they would have found difficult to do. The conditions that the agreement creates are good for the professional development of teachers.

Over the course of the past two or three years, I have frequently attended and addressed courses outwith normal working hours—at weekends and in the evenings. The attendance of teachers at those courses has often been very impressive. I am not lacking in optimism about how things will go, but there is still all to play for, and we need to continue to progress that area of the agreement.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston (Lab)): What support and advice are you giving education authorities so that they can address that issue during the transition from the subject approach to the faculty approach?

Graham Donaldson: The report that we have just produced—which has a lot in it—is intended to provide examples of ways in which that is being done. As you will appreciate, in developing the report we identified a lot more practice, including good practice, than is cited in the report itself. We will discuss with the Executive ways of using that evidence to take forward the developments that have been taking place in the education system, and we are considering ways in which we can use our database to assist the process.

As I think you know, we have a framework of district inspectors throughout Scotland. Each local authority has a designated member of the inspectorate who works with it and acts as the point of contact between us and the authority. One of the regular features of the discussions that take place is the opportunity for the district inspector to talk to the director and other authority staff about precisely the sort of issue that you raise. Douglas Cairns is one of those district inspectors, so he might wish to say more about the process.

Douglas Cairns: Education authorities could explain their rationale a bit more clearly. We found that when teachers were suspicious of what was going on, it was just because they did not have the opportunity to become fully involved in debate and dialogue and to be briefed about the authority's intentions, including those for the transition arrangements.

Despite the generally positive context of local negotiating committees for teachers, which are doing very good work in heading off potential conflicts before they amount to anything, teachers were not, by and large, aware of the workings of those committees. I think that that has been a factor when it comes to communication. If communication from the local negotiating committees could be facilitated and if the rationale for structures, procedures and arrangements could be explained a bit more clearly, that would be a positive step.

Mr McAveety: Have there been any cases of substantial breakdown in that approach or of failure to achieve a sense of partnership?

Douglas Cairns: Such cases have been very few and far between. We came across examples of some sustained difficulty in reaching agreements, but by and large any major difficulties have now been resolved.

Mr McAveety: The briefing for members mentions that when the posts of APT and senior teacher were removed, the experienced teachers

affected could still be given additional duties. It also says that although some schools reached agreement with staff on extra duties that they would be expected to carry out in return for the increased salary—that is, the conserved salary—other schools were not successful in reaching such agreement, or did not try.

What do you do in those circumstances? Surely it is ridiculous that some authorities have done quite a lot but others have not. What is your view?

Douglas Cairns: One feature of the report was the extent of the variations between the ways in which education authorities carried out their work. Go-ahead local authorities that got to grips with implementing the agreement managed to get agreement on those difficult aspects. They were not really helped by the fact that the arrangements just set out what salary former APTs and senior teachers would move to. I apologise for getting technical, but they were initially moved to scale point 3 on the chartered teacher scale, which does not bring with it any commitment that the teacher would carry out leadership or management tasks within the school. Some authorities convinced those teachers to move to scale point 1 on the principal teacher scale. That scale carries the same salary, but it is a management scale so former APTs and senior teachers could be required to carry out leadership and management tasks. We thought that that was good practice, in that the schools and authorities got a return for the conserved salaries.

Mr McAveety: How many authorities have been go-ahead and how many have not gone ahead at all?

Douglas Cairns: The number of authorities that took the line of least resistance would be in the minority—it might even be a few.

Mr McAveety: What is a few?

Douglas Cairns: A few would be a handful at most.

Mr McAveety: And of that handful, how many are big authorities?

Douglas Cairns: I do not have to hand the analysis that shows which authorities were proving to be positive on the issue and which were not, but we could provide the information in a written submission.

Mr McAveety: That would be helpful.

What factors make something go ahead and what factors mean that it does not? What are the resistance issues and what are the drivers?

Graham Donaldson: That brings us to a key issue. Looking across our findings to date, there is a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum are authorities and schools that see the teachers

agreement as an opportunity to do things. They say that many aspects of the agreement allow them to do things that they want to do to make things better. At the other end of the spectrum are authorities and schools that say that the agreement is complex, that their energies will be spent simply on getting it into place as best they can and that they will think afterwards about how to use it to bring about change. There are two ends to the spectrum.

The factor that makes the biggest difference is whether authorities and schools see the agreement as an opportunity to take forward developments that they believe are important to improve learning for youngsters or whether they see it as something that is, in itself, complex and difficult to implement so their energies must go into implementing it. The whole spectrum is represented across the 32 local authorities in Scotland.

Mr McAveety: How much of the spectrum is shaded on the positive side and how much is shaded on the negative side?

Graham Donaldson: I think that it is shaded towards the positive.

Mr McAveety: So we are right in the middle.

Graham Donaldson: The critical point is that the spectrum is shaded towards the positive. We are looking at a work in progress and at a system that is moving. If we were to say that the agreement is now implemented and to stop making progress, the agreement would not have done its job. We are almost at a tipping point. We are at a point at which the agreement provides opportunities and we must maintain the momentum to ensure that it allows us to deliver the kind of changes that we need to make. We are going in that direction, but we cannot take the foot off the pedal.

The Convener: Given Douglas Cairns's comments, he is in danger of being poached by the Government's statistical service.

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): In previous reports, HMIE has emphasised the importance of leadership in schools. I gather from the witnesses' comments that there has been a change in structures and that they are beginning to see more flexible practices.

Has there been an increase in leadership capacity as a consequence of the changes that the agreement has brought about? If not, are there any barriers, such as a lower number of promoted posts? Is that a factor? We have some evidence that pupil indiscipline remains one of the main concerns of teachers on the front line. If we are to get support structures in place for classroom teachers, perhaps we need more senior teachers.

Graham Donaldson: We have emphasised for many years that one of the most important factors—if not the most important factor—in the quality of a school is leadership in the school. That includes not just the leadership of the head teacher but leadership throughout the school.

Our collective understanding of what creates high-quality leadership is improving. At one time, there was a tendency to think of leadership as the head teacher on a white horse, leading the charge from the front. However, we now understand that the best head teachers, rather than being those who are right at the front, are those who can get other people to work in different ways. There are all sorts of ways in which leadership can work effectively. In my answer to Mr McAveety, I mentioned the spectrum, and where one is on that spectrum is almost a barometer of leadership. The extent to which someone gives high-quality leadership depends on how close they are to seeing opportunities rather than problems in the implementation of the agreement.

Leadership capacity does not necessarily relate to the number of people in management posts. There is not a direct relationship between the two. In fact, the reverse could almost be the case. Once somebody is in a post, one is dependent on whether they make a success of it, whereas we should regard it as the responsibility of all members of staff in a school to take leadership roles. I believe that chartered teachers should take a leadership role in relation to learning. Under the agreement, there is potential to develop the notion of broad leadership across a school, because it provides the flexibility to identify particular people who can take on particular roles without necessarily having a stratified management structure.

That system of leadership is promising, but those who are involved need to have a sophisticated understanding of how to make it work. That is not simple, so the system requires high-quality leadership. However, in the past few years there has been a much greater emphasis—both in local authorities and nationally—on building capacity and building understanding of high-quality leadership.

For many years, we have reported serious concerns about leadership in about 15 per cent of primary and secondary schools. The test of what is happening now will be whether, in the next report on improving Scottish education, in 2008 or 2009, we will be able to report a reduction in that percentage. We hope that there will be a significant reduction.

Mr Ingram: Does the agreement facilitate improvements in leadership capacity, or, at the least, does it not put any obstacles in the way of progress in that area?

Graham Donaldson: It does not put obstacles in the way of progress. It provides opportunities, although taking up those opportunities will not be easy. It will require determination and a subtle understanding of how leadership operates in a school. However, the agreement gives those in management positions much greater flexibility, and if that flexibility is used well, it should lead to the improvements in leadership that we want.

Mr Ingram: You say in your report that we are a bit slow in reaching the target on support staff. We get a great deal of feedback on the problems of the mainstreaming agenda. Do you feel that we are moving forward fast enough in providing support staff—classroom support staff, in particular—to deal with the problems that we hear about regularly?

10:45

Graham Donaldson: Douglas Cairns will comment on the specifics of that, but my general message would be that early on in the phased implementation of the agreement there was quite a strong emphasis on getting support staff in place. Although that tailed off a little bit, it went up again towards the end of the phasing, and we are broadly on target to achieve what was originally intended—the provision of 3,500 additional staff in schools.

In the late 1990s, we published with Audit Scotland a report entitled “Time for teaching”, in which we identified many ways in which non-teaching staff could make a big contribution to learning inside a school, not by performing a direct teaching role, but by providing the context that allows the teaching to take place. As you suggested earlier, when youngsters exhibit challenging behaviour inside a school, having additional adults around to help deal with that behaviour is one way in which we can retain those youngsters in mainstream education. I believe that it is important to retain young people in mainstream education whenever we can. That is not always possible—there are situations in which it is essential that a pupil is moved into an environment that gives them time to calm down and regroup and which prevents them from interfering with the learning of other youngsters. Having additional adults available in schools to take on a behaviour support role is undoubtedly one way in which we can help with that. That is happening under the agreement, but it probably needs to happen more.

Douglas Cairns: I have one brief additional point. We found that there was also an indirect impact on support for individual pupils, in that the addition to a school's complement of general clerical and administrative assistants meant that they were able to do tasks that freed up not only

the teachers but other assistants to work more closely with pupils who required sustained support. In other words, there was a double dividend for pupils.

Mr Ingram: To follow up on that, do you think that we need to revisit the numbers? Is it a numbers game?

Graham Donaldson: I do not think that there is a formula whereby if we put in X additional staff, things will be fine. Much depends on the mix that exists inside a school, the nature of the children's needs and the nature of the teachers and the organisation in the school. From our point of view, what is needed is a case-by-case examination of what is happening inside a school. In some schools, the provision of additional staff would be the right way forward, but in others it would not. I would be hesitant about plucking a number out of the air and saying that the provision of another 500 support staff, for example, would make a difference. It is not quite as simple as that.

Mr Ingram: You point out that there has been a lack of monitoring of continuous professional development by education authorities. We get mixed messages about the understanding of additional support needs in schools. The understanding of how to identify and deal with dyslexia and autism, for example, is well advanced, but the understanding of other conditions is not. Ought not there to be management of the continuous professional development of teachers, whether at education authority level or at school level, to ensure that all additional support needs are covered by staff in school?

Graham Donaldson: My short answer would be yes; Douglas Cairns will be able to give you some examples. Continuous professional development is partly about the development needs of individual teachers and partly about requirements at school, local authority and national levels. The professional development programme as it applies to a particular teacher in a particular school can be quite specific, but that does not mean that we should just let 1,000 flowers bloom. Careful management and monitoring are required.

At school, authority and national levels, we need to capitalise on the key growth points and share those examples of good practice that can make the biggest difference. We need to ensure that effective practice is captured and brought to the attention of teachers by giving them the chance to experience such things at first hand. That requires careful management of continuous professional development at school, authority and national levels. A characteristic of our findings is that that is happening to a greater or lesser extent in schools and authorities across the country.

Douglas Cairns: Monitoring the impact of CPD is not a simple task because, as with the overall task, many factors come to bear. Our findings are that education authorities are improving the way in which they manage CPD. For example, some authorities are carrying out thematic reviews in which they look at one aspect of their provision and try to make the link between CPD and outcomes. Other authorities require some kind of follow-up activity from teachers to demonstrate how, three or six months down the line, their teaching or leadership has improved as a result of an activity that they carried out.

It is also worth pointing out that CPD works well when the discussion with the line manager, instead of focusing just on drawing up a wish list of activities in which the teacher would like to take part, is informed by an in-depth knowledge, on the line manager's part, of the individual's performance as a teacher, leader or manager. That is good practice. For the future, authorities should consider bringing together the CPD side with the staff review side as far as possible within the line management context.

Mr Ingram: Will the inspectorate push for such a change among education authorities?

Graham Donaldson: Clearly, ensuring that CPD is as effective as possible will continue to be part of our discussions both with authorities and in every school inspection.

Mr Ingram: Finally, given that we are coming to the end of the current parliamentary session, would you recommend that any incoming Administration revisit the McCrone deal to provide for outcome measures? In my view, a key overriding objective for our education system should be to tackle the performance of the bottom 20 per cent. Would you recommend to an incoming Administration that the way in which it deals with that problem should be tied to a new type of agreement, which we might call McCrone mark 2?

Graham Donaldson: I think that there is enough in our report to suggest that, although issues such as chartered teacher status need to be looked at further, the agreement in its current form needs some fine tuning to take advantage of the opportunities, rather than people negotiating a new set of arrangements.

I agree strongly that any incoming Administration needs to look long and hard at how we can improve the performance of the lowest attaining group of young people in our secondary schools. It is very important that we do that. We have big issues with literacy and numeracy in our schools that we need to address directly, although schools are addressing their responsibilities in that regard. A number of key things that any incoming

Administration will need to look at are identified in "Improving Scottish education: A report by HMIE on inspection and review 2002-2005", which highlighted the issues that we believe are important.

However, I think that the McCrone agreement contains sufficient flexibilities to allow it to play its part in addressing those issues. With some fine tuning, we can use the agreement as it stands, rather than negotiate a new agreement.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): All committees obviously have a tendency to concentrate on what more needs to be done rather than on what has already been achieved. In that regard, your comments today have been very helpful. However, like my colleague Elaine Murray, I was struck by the contrast between the positive findings that I read in your report and the comments about it that I read in the press.

Even if I take off my rose-tinted glasses, a cursory look at your report reveals that you have commented on the improved range of access to opportunities for continuous professional development and on the better use of information technology both in CPD and in teaching and learning opportunities. A major strength that you identified was the support and training for probationers. You also found a positive impact from discussions in local negotiating committees; increased flexibility in managing teachers' time; improved opportunities for teachers; a positive impact from the new principal teacher posts in primary schools; and emerging new management structures that allow for information sharing—there are so many points, I can hardly get them all out. For the record, do you agree that a lot has been achieved because of the McCrone deal?

Graham Donaldson: Yes—we say that in the report. We also say directly that the extent to which the teachers agreement has been put in place over the five-year period is impressive, given its scale and complexity. That is absolutely right. Schools in Scotland now are not the same as they were prior to the agreement. There is much less uniformity and much more opportunity for each school to engage in shaping the environment for learning in a way that takes into account its particular circumstances and tailors the professional development of the teachers to those circumstances. Undoubtedly, the agreement has had a major impact in that regard. However, if you asked me whether schools are now dramatically different places for children compared to prior to the agreement, I would say that I am less confident that that is the case. The test of the agreement is the extent to which, in schools throughout Scotland and for all children, the variety of benefits to which we attest in the report are general rather than specific.

By and large, there is a momentum that is taking us in the right direction. It is important for the inspectorate, the committee and ministers not to take the foot off the pedal. We must maintain the expectation that progress will be made, so that the agreement leads to improvements in every school and for all young people.

Mr Macintosh: That is an important point. All that we do, particularly in public sector reform, is about improving outcomes. We do not reform or invest for its own sake; there must be a return. However, it is not possible to improve outcomes for children without realising that it is the teachers who will take us there. There are some, the cynics—although Frank McAveety has left the room just now—who would say there is no such thing as a happy or content teacher. As the son of two teachers, I totally refute that and believe that it is a challenging but very rewarding job. Do you agree that, through the McCrone deal, we have gone some way to acknowledging and rewarding the professionals—the teachers—and that, by doing so, we have created a more content and happier teaching workforce?

The Convener: That is a challenging question.

Graham Donaldson: I am not sure that I can make a judgment about individuals' feelings or happiness. If we consider the situation externally, that probably should be the case, but it is hard to tell whether it is the case, because the situation will differ from individual to individual. To pick up on one of your earlier points, we said in "Improving Scottish education" that Scotland has a highly professional teaching force that does a good job. It is important for me to put that on the record, because sometimes what I say is presented in a way that appears to be knocking teachers. That is not the case. The report on the teachers agreement is not negative about teachers; it says that we have a highly professional teaching force, that the influx of new teachers into the profession can only be a good thing and that the way in which we are supporting the new teachers is to the credit of the agreement. I am optimistic about the extent to which we can make progress with professionalism in the teaching force. However, as I said, if we become complacent about that and think that the job is done, we will do a disservice to Scottish children.

Mr Macintosh: You have referred several times to what will be done in the next few years and mentioned some of the measures that you will have in place and the improvements for which you will look. However, my understanding is that there are no specific milestones left in the McCrone implementation. Is that correct?

Graham Donaldson: That is right.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): From talking to people in schools in my constituency, I

believe that the McCrone deal has changed the teaching environment. I hope that the issues that HMIE is raising will result in benefits for teaching staff. How do we ensure that that transfers to the young people and that improvements are made in the levels of numeracy and literacy? That is what we all—including the teaching staff—want to see. What do we need to do to take that step?

11:00

Graham Donaldson: That is a challenge for leadership at all levels in Scottish education. There is no one step that we need to take to make that happen. The current review of the curriculum—which I presume that any incoming Administration will go ahead with over the next two or three years—is one of the biggest opportunities for Scottish education that there has been in my professional career.

We must ensure that that rethink of what we are trying to achieve for our young people through the curriculum is allied to the flexibilities and opportunities that have been created in a way that continues to focus on what happens for young people. The danger is that we could get too bogged down in the processes and think of the processes as being enough instead of thinking about the outcomes for young people. Our report is very much intended to keep reminding us all of the importance of that. The teachers agreement has done some important things, but the ultimate test is what it does for young people. It is a question of leadership at all levels in the system—coming from the committee, the Executive and local authorities—and we will play our full part in ensuring that those improvements are made.

Ms Byrne: My question is on the issue that Marilyn Livingstone has raised, following on from Adam Ingram's points. I was leaning towards it when I asked about CPD.

One in 10 people in the community is dyslexic. Therefore, in order to eradicate illiteracy, the expertise to deal with dyslexia must exist at the chalkface. Through my question on CPD, I was trying to make the point that we do not want there to be too much choice and not enough well-qualified teachers who specialise in teaching dyslexic pupils. Every teacher will have children who are dyslexic in their class. However, we are not dealing with dyslexia as well as we could, so we must up the ante on specialist training. Initiatives must be put in place, as we cannot force people to pursue the teaching of dyslexic pupils as a specialism or an area to explore. How can we motivate teachers across the board to gain that specialist expertise so that we can move forward on the literacy problems that we face?

Graham Donaldson: I agree that we must not underestimate the expertise that is required to

deal with some of the specific learning difficulties that we are seeing in our schools. The implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 provides a context within which that can happen.

I take your point that we must ensure that there is understanding of dyslexia at classroom level. That probably means that every teacher must have an understanding of the specific learning difficulties that young people with dyslexia face and of ways of dealing with them. We cannot assume that the issue is always going to be dealt with in a specialised way by specialists in our schools. I agree with your line of thinking on that. An understanding of the issue must pervade our 50,000-plus teachers.

Ms Byrne: How can we ensure that?

Graham Donaldson: That takes us back to the need for managed continuous professional development. As I said earlier, there is a balance to be struck between what an individual teacher needs to take them forward and what the school and the authority believe that that individual needs in order to do their job properly. We must get the management of teachers' continuous professional development right, and I think that the current conditions allow us to do that better than before. If we get the management of CPD right, we can make progress on the issues that you mention—and there are others that we need to deal with.

The Convener: I have a final question. Your report talks about non-class-contact time in remote rural and island schools. Is there a specific issue to do with the provision of opportunities for reduced class-contact time and CPD in small primary schools, which may have just one or two teachers?

Douglas Cairns: That is an issue. In those situations, some authorities have been keen to roll up the non-class-contact time over a period longer than a week, because of economies of scale, so that a visiting teacher has to drive to a remote school only once a fortnight rather than twice a week. However, those authorities have found resistance to that idea within the local negotiating committees and the issue has not yet been resolved through negotiation at the local level.

The Convener: Are there any examples of good practice in that area? Have some authorities managed to work out good, flexible solutions to the problem?

Douglas Cairns: Yes. Some authorities have managed to secure agreement through the local negotiating committees that there can be some flexibility without in any way removing teachers' right to have non-class-contact time. They have secured a bit more flexibility in how that time is delivered and the period over which it is delivered.

The Convener: I thank you both for attending the meeting this morning and for giving us oral evidence on the report. I remind you that, if you could provide the written information that Frank McAveety requested, that would be helpful. We will have a short suspension while we change witnesses.

11:06

Meeting suspended.

11:09

On resuming—

The Convener: Our next panel of witnesses on the implementation of the teachers agreement is made up of representatives from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I welcome Councillor Charlie Gray, the convention's education spokesman and member of North Lanarkshire Council; and Councillor Charlie Anderson, who is from Highland Council. They are accompanied by Bruce Robertson from Highland Council, Terry Lanagan from West Dunbartonshire Council and Anna Fowlie from COSLA.

I invite the witnesses to make a brief opening statement, after which I will open the meeting up to members' questions.

Councillor Charlie Gray (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): I will make some very brief comments. I should point out that I am not only COSLA's education spokesperson but its spokesperson for the elderly, so I am sure the committee will be more indulgent with me than it would normally be. Secondly, Councillor Charlie Anderson does not exist; the name of my very close colleague is Andy Anderson.

We have largely welcomed the teachers agreement, which, given the unrest and discontent that prevailed for so many years in education, has proven to be one of the great milestones in the profession in Scotland. Moreover, we very much support the agreement's development by the tripartite organisation of the Scottish negotiating committee for teachers.

The Convener: I apologise to Councillor Andy Anderson for getting his name mixed up. I certainly do not mean to suggest that councillors are a bunch of Charlies.

We move to members' questions. It would be helpful, Charlie, if you could direct—

Mr McAveety: Which Charlie are you talking about?

The Convener: The one who is actually called Charlie. Charlie, it would be helpful if you could

direct questions to the panel members best able to answer them.

Dr Murray: My first question is similar to a question that I asked the first panel of witnesses. Where do you, as employers, think the teaching profession would have been if the McCrone agreement had not been introduced? What would have been the effect on pupils' education and learning outcomes? Some press reports have indicated that the agreement has not improved those outcomes.

Councillor Gray: Hindsight is a wonderful thing. The agreement was never meant to have any bearing on children's experience of school, although they would clearly benefit from anything that came out of it.

Had the agreement not been reached, the discontent and unpleasantness that I referred to would have prevailed; the quality of Scottish education would have dipped to an all-time low and we would have faced great difficulties improving it; and more teachers would have continued to leave the profession than would have come into it. The situation would have been dreadful.

Dr Murray: Such a situation would have had a serious effect on Scottish pupils' learning experience.

The HMIE report suggests that staff in some local authority areas do not have a full understanding of their local negotiating committee or its decisions. Is COSLA able to help education authorities ensure that teachers understand the new roles and structures?

Councillor Gray: COSLA is certainly doing that. When we began to adopt the principles set out by the McCrone committee, we were surprised—indeed, appalled—by the number of local authorities that did not have any negotiating machinery for teachers. Teachers had to be blocked in with the general negotiating machinery for all other employees. We were surprised by that, given that at the time specific legislation applied to the employment and use of teachers by local authorities. The authorities had not really worked hard enough to separate teachers out of the general machinery and to establish local negotiating committees for them.

Within a year, such committees had been introduced and many local authorities—and, in fact, COSLA—now hold and promote seminars aimed at bringing teaching members into local negotiating committees. Moreover, as far as specific subjects are concerned, the SNCT usually gives the local bodies material for discussion, and we have found quite a dramatic improvement in the way in which teachers have begun to exercise their rights within the local bodies.

Councillor Andrew Anderson (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): As far as Highland Council is concerned, the establishment of the local negotiating committee for teachers has been one of the most positive outcomes of the McCrone agreement. Previously, we had very formal meetings in which there was a lot of mistrust; now, before those formal meetings take place, we hold very informal meetings in which much of the work is carried out. I should also point out that the LNCTs like having some power to reach local agreements.

Dr Murray: Obviously, the committees have been very successful in areas such as Highland. Have any other aspects of the McCrone agreement been successful in certain areas? Can those examples of good practice be shared with other local authorities?

11:15

Councillor Gray: We are always discussing conditions of service; indeed, we have formed a small sub-committee that meets regularly to consider the issue. We are also on the brink of replacing the so-called yellow book, which is quite a new move for us. I should point out that we never discuss money or income, because the four-year pay agreement—which was an outstanding achievement in the whole of the United Kingdom, never mind in Scotland—has allowed us to focus discussions on the various issues that teachers are inclined to raise at those meetings.

Bruce Robertson (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): We cannot stress enough—and Parliament should not underestimate—the importance of the period of stability in industrial relations that has allowed these things to happen. It is perhaps an important legacy for the next Scottish Parliament and Executive.

The agreement's most important legacy is the introduction of the induction system and that really important group of new probationers. Some wonderful, outstanding and innovative work is being carried out in schools and local authorities with regard to taking on those new recruits to the profession; after all, the McCrone agreement was about recruitment and retention. We are ensuring that probationers receive an excellent and world-class—I am choosing my words carefully—induction into teaching. They will be not only the teachers of the future but, as Mr Donaldson said earlier, the school leaders of the future.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have three quick questions. First, there seems to be little evidence with which to evaluate the effect of the 35-hour week on out-of-class activities. Can local authorities or COSLA usefully review that matter?

Councillor Gray: Yes. We should remember that the teachers agreement was introduced partly

because, as a result of the discontent in the early years, extracurricular activities were—I am sad to say—done away with. Teachers would simply not help with Saturday clubs and so on. However, the situation is different now; teachers' enthusiasm for helping youngsters out of class has dramatically improved, and it might well be a good thing to review and monitor the matter.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On job sizing and career progression, we have been given to understand that the Executive is likely to review the chartered teachers scheme. The form of such a review has not yet been specifically set out, but would you and local authorities wish to be very much involved in it?

Councillor Gray: Yes, I think so. Bruce Robertson might comment on the chartered teachers scheme, but I believe that we would always want to be involved in such matters.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Is it a matter on which the successor committee in the next parliamentary session could usefully concentrate some of its activities?

Councillor Gray: I take it that you are referring to the chartered teachers scheme, given that you mentioned job sizing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: And career progression.

Councillor Gray: The SNCT has undertaken to review job sizing in the fullness of time. We will certainly do so.

Bruce Robertson: COSLA and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland very much welcome the ministerial announcement to review the chartered teachers scheme. As one of the original advisors to the McCrone committee, I am aware that the idea behind the scheme was to reward people financially and professionally for staying in the classroom. However, as the agreement has progressed, the move towards giving the employer and, indeed, the head teacher the entitlement to nominate someone for and to support them towards chartered teacher status has lost its way. That is why we welcome the review.

I agree that the successor committee in the next session of Parliament should keep an eye on the issue. Chartered teachers can create huge capacity in schools by, for example, delivering on some crucial cross-curricular areas of work such as health development. Indeed, I believe that there is real potential for building on the agreement and getting the most out of the chartered teachers scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In light of the review that is likely to take place, could there conceivably be an adjustment to the McCrone

agreement to take account of the concerns and morale of teachers?

Councillor Gray: Yes, indeed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My final question relates to an issue that constantly comes my way as a list MSP: teachers' complaints about the administrative burden. We are aware that a good deal is being done in that connection. What more can be done? Is that an issue that the committee could usefully keep in mind in the next session?

Councillor Gray: I imagine that it would have to, but so would the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities education forum. That matter is brought to us from time to time. Some kind of continuous monitoring would have to take place, but I have no idea how it would be done. There have been improvements in the administration of schools, and for that matter in education departments—they are not as big as they used to be. That is perhaps an issue we would have to discuss with the new education minister.

Bruce Robertson: We have a framework now. There is the Scottish negotiating committee and local negotiating committees. That is an important and useful framework for us. I visit schools a great deal and I speak to teachers a lot. Like the member, they advise me that they are concerned about the amount of administration in the system. There is a corporate responsibility on the Executive, on local authorities and indeed on teachers to try to reduce that to a minimum.

One of the more innovative practices that is beginning to develop is the use of information technology. As a teacher of some 17 years, I remember the laborious nature of taking the register every morning. There are electronic solutions for that now; there are electronic solutions to absence management and to reporting and assessment and so on. Although such innovative e-solutions will help, there is a collective responsibility on us all to try to remember that the main job of a teacher is to teach youngsters and develop their achievement.

Ms Byrne: I come back to a question we asked the previous panel about CPD and teachers' access to in-service courses that are structured to improve the quality of learning. I refer to the teaching of young people with additional support needs, such as dyslexic young people. There is an element of choice—subject teachers will look at their own subjects. We know that we have to pull up literacy and numeracy. What has been the impact of CPD? As teachers will have children with such difficulties in front of them every day, where do we need to go to improve teachers' awareness of those issues in the classroom?

Terry Lanagan (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): I heard what Mr Donaldson said, and I fully endorse his views on the matter. There is a balance to be struck between the needs and desires of individual teachers and the demands and needs of the service, the school and local authorities. It is important to stress that there have been vast improvements in that respect. We were talking about it earlier. When I first came into teaching, if you were lucky—if there were any courses for you—you were told what courses to go on.

One of the advantages of the teachers agreement is that we are now well beyond the idea that CPD is simply about attending courses. It is about teachers' professional development. A number of initiatives feed into that. There is the school development planning process, in which the school, and individual departments within the school, determine their development needs for the coming session. There is the professional review and development process, in which individual teachers feed into the whole planning process and decide what their own priorities are for the coming years. There is also the service planning process at local authority level. Where all of that is working well—I think that it is in most authorities—it comes together so that the CPD opportunities that are on offer to teachers and that they take up address the needs of the service.

Across the country, a number of important initiatives have addressed the issue the member raises—dyslexia and literacy problems. I refer to initiatives such as early intervention and targeting of the youngest pupils. There is a lot of good practice. One of our challenges is to learn from that and to ensure that a balance is struck between the needs of individual teachers and the service's need to address the needs of pupils.

Bruce Robertson: I can advise Rosemary Byrne of a really interesting initiative that addresses some of the questions that she put to the previous panel. We need to start in teachers' training year, during their professional development. You may know that Sir Jackie Stewart is dyslexic. He, the principal of the University of Aberdeen and the Scottish Executive have got together to introduce an interesting, innovative course that ensures that new teachers coming through Aberdeen receive specific training in dealing with dyslexia. I commend that approach to all universities.

Ms Byrne: I am aware of that good initiative—things are progressing—but there is no doubt that classroom teachers will have children with literacy difficulties in front of them every day, as one child in 10 has such difficulties. We need to make an impact at national and local authority level. School plans should reflect national and local authority

needs. Is there an impetus to look specifically at the issue and to ensure that quality development is on offer to teachers? That should be linked both to CPD and to local authority needs and plans.

Councillor Gray: Yes. Terry Lanagan mentioned early intervention. One of the good aspects of nursery education is that it allows primary school teachers to be forewarned a couple of years in advance that they can expect to receive a child who may be difficult. Most local authorities are moving towards training or already train teachers to deal with the issue. I know that my authority has done that with dramatic suddenness because of an apparent slight increase in the number of children with literacy difficulties.

I want to highlight another positive development that is happening, in a sense, off the record. COSLA's education forum meets two or three times a year, without a specific agenda, in a local authority area to pick up on some of the good things that are happening there. My previous visit, which took place a few months ago, was to the Highland Council area. On such visits we exchange views on how training might take place or be improved. We have been encouraged in that by the CPD co-ordinator whom the Scottish Executive appointed.

Ms Byrne: I have a quick question about the additional support staff—the classroom assistants—who have been put into schools. Are those people now in permanent posts in all local authorities? There was a problem with temporary posts, and changes in personnel were having an impact on children with additional support needs.

Terry Lanagan: The situation is mixed. In my authority, in the vast majority of cases they are in permanent posts. One challenge that all local authorities face at the moment is the issue of single status. We must continue to review the situation carefully. The pattern is probably mixed, but the presumption in local authorities is not that classroom assistants should be employed on temporary, short-term contracts but that they should receive permanent, long-term contracts.

Ms Byrne: Are we moving in the right direction? Do you think that, in a few years' time, the position will be firmed up and people will have permanent jobs, so that they can take advantage of all the training that is available?

Councillor Gray: Absolutely.

Terry Lanagan: We are moving in the right direction. Some support staff in schools—I use the term in its broadest sense, to include people such as home-school link workers—are funded through initiative funding, so funding is available only on a short-term basis. Offering permanent posts to staff is a problem when there is no guarantee that their

funding will continue. However, in my authority all learning assistants are on permanent contracts.

11:30

Mr McAveety: One of the issues we explored with the previous panel of witnesses was how we can ensure we get value for money under the new contract by maximising the use of the skills and experience of the staff who are at your disposal. One of the concerns was that some schools are not able to reach any real agreement about extra duties in return for the increase in salary. How do you tackle that at local authority level or through discussions with HMIE and ensure that we get value for money?

Councillor Gray: The SNCT encourages such agreements to be reached locally. As I mentioned earlier, we have had a couple of seminars on the subject and local authorities are encouraged to have local seminars too. There is a difficulty in that although we have an agreement on the number of hours teachers can work, we know that, because the job is vocational, they work far more than the agreement mentions. That is always welcome, but we are continually trying to ensure the best possible situation for teachers. It is sometimes quite difficult and the situation is rather patchy, but improvement can be seen in most areas.

Mr McAveety: One of the themes that were touched on—there was also a colourful definition of spectrums—was how to ensure a go-ahead approach to the agreement and how the opportunity it could open up is seized. HMIE indicated that there is a spectrum of approaches: some authorities are pushing the opportunities forward but others might be finding it a bit more problematic to tackle the procedure and might be worried about whether they can implement it easily. I got the impression that it was half and half. How can you encourage the go-ahead approach and ensure that it is in the majority?

Councillor Gray: That is our job in the education forum, which consists of representatives of all education authorities in Scotland. If that kind of information came to us, we would offer to discuss with the appropriate local authorities who they might go to if they wanted any help or advice.

Bruce Robertson: There are also opportunities to share the good practice that exists. Frank McAveety is correct: in the early days of the agreement, there was some difficulty reaching local agreements at school level. Earlier, I described the framework that we have now. One of the important things about that is the national agreement, which we did not have before 1999. The Scottish Executive, the teachers unions and local authorities are all signed up to a way forward. That is fairly powerful. If we find ourselves at an

impasse at a very local level, we can make different interventions at local authority or national level to break the impasse. That is an important legacy of the agreement.

Anna Fowlie (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): The agreement has been a huge change, which HMIE's report highlighted, and there will always be some resistance to any big change. There is resistance to the change at all levels, from individual teachers, probably up through local authority level and possibly even within the Executive, but the practice of the good individuals, schools and authorities is being shared through the work of the TAC team and LTS. Other people are learning from that, so I am confident that the pockets of resistance are gradually being broken down. There is a good climate of sharing best practice, which is also new.

The Convener: Could you say what the TAC team and LTS are, for the record?

Anna Fowlie: Sorry. The TAC team is the teachers agreement communication team, which sits within COSLA and is co-funded by the Scottish Executive and local authorities. It has been a really useful part of the agreement. LTS is Learning and Teaching Scotland.

Terry Lanagan: I will give an example of sharing good practice. I was nominated to come here by the ADES personnel network, which meets once a month. It includes representatives from throughout Scotland. Meetings are attended not only by heads of service from different local authorities but by representatives of the Executive, COSLA and the teachers agreement communication team.

Part of what we do each month is share best practice. We also discuss difficulties that have arisen in making progress, even if only one local authority has had a difficulty. The meetings are among the most valuable that I have attended in my whole career. The expertise that comes together in a room each month has a direct impact on the quality of our work.

Mr McAveety: You are saying that you have moved on a fair bit but that lots of support, advice and guidance are still needed. What will the timeframe be? When will you be able to say, "We're way beyond that stage now and are moving on?"

Anna Fowlie: I do not think a timeframe can be defined, but it would be shorter rather than longer. I cannot define it exactly.

Mr McAveety: But what is short and what is long? I am going on a philosophy course.

Mr Ingram: I want to ask about leadership capacity in schools and about the impact of the teachers agreement. Evidence suggests that

reduced class-contact time has worked well for classroom teachers but that some head teachers have felt extra pressures—perhaps because they have had to provide cover for teaching staff, using supply staff to support the reduced class-contact time. Teacher absences have to be addressed as well. Has reduced class-contact time caused problems?

Councillor Gray: I will ask Bruce Robertson to answer that, as he can speak from experience.

Bruce Robertson: You raise a number of issues; I will consider leadership first. The top priority of any new Executive and Parliament will be leadership. Half of our head teachers will retire within the next 10 years and we will have to be ready to deal with that turnover. The McCrone agreement has left us in a good position to do so.

There is more than one solution to leadership issues. We have now developed a culture and understanding of leadership in schools that goes beyond the head teacher or her deputies. In Highland we talk about “distributed leadership”; the class teacher is a leader in his or her classroom. That is important for us all to remember. A national leadership development programme could be founded extremely well as a consequence of McCrone.

Reduced class-contact time has been very well received—and rightly so—especially in primary schools. Teachers there required stability and equality with their secondary school counterparts. Reduced class-contact time has put some pressure on the system because of the undoubted need to recruit supply staff, but the number of new teachers has increased significantly and in August another record number will come in. That will help.

Local authorities’ trick has been to make a link to the curriculum. In Highland, and in many other local authorities, we have wondered how we can use the new teacher numbers, and the reduced class-contact time, to deliver a broader set of experiences for young people. As a consequence, we have 21st century specialisms in Highland—not the art, the PE and the domestic science that I remember from school, but information technology, sciences and modern languages. We have to make the link to the curriculum.

Head teachers have felt pressure, but let us not forget that head teachers are very highly paid professionals. The second-highest paid individual in my service is a secondary head teacher.

Mr Ingram: Those are interesting points. Some of the head teachers associations are looking to take on even more responsibility. For example, a general move is taking place towards devolved school management, and some head teachers want the responsibility to recruit staff in their schools, particularly to meet additional support

needs and the like. Do local authorities welcome or have concerns about such a development?

Councillor Gray: We take careful cognisance of anything the two head teachers associations say. We sometimes have to reread their comments three times before we understand them.

Head teachers already have a fair amount of leeway on the recruitment of staff, especially teaching staff. Most local authorities do not interfere with that. Some ambitions of at least one head teachers association are extremely far-fetched and I hope that our sensible new Parliament and Executive will take cognisance of that.

Bruce Robertson: We need to remember that devolved school management is founded in legislation. Very recently, the Scottish Executive sent a circular to all education authorities to ask what percentage of their budgets is devolved. Most education authorities devolve 90 per cent or more of their budgets. In most authority areas, head teachers have much control over the recruitment of staff. That is how it should be—I support that fully—but we need to be careful to ensure that head teachers and others in the school follow employment legislation. Sadly, that does not always happen.

Terry Lanagan: Until 18 months ago, I was a secondary school head teacher, although I was not the second highest-paid employee in the education service. I feel strongly that head teachers must have some autonomy and freedom to develop initiatives and to decide how money is spent, but the local authority’s support is essential—I do not say that just from my current perspective; I felt that when I was a head teacher.

Bruce Robertson mentioned matters such as advice on employment law. For all sorts of other matters, I frequently relied on local authority staff expertise for assistance. I counsel head teachers associations to be careful about looking for greatly increased autonomy. In areas of England, such an initiative has been implemented and it has resulted in wild disparities between the funding and resourcing of schools just along the road from each other.

Councillor Gray: The application of the new regulations on involving parents in schools will create some leavening. That will help considerably.

The Convener: No other members have questions, so I will finish by asking the question about rural schools that I asked the HMIE witnesses. Perhaps Andy Anderson is best placed to answer. Is delivering the reduction in class teaching time and the CPD programmes a particular problem in small rural primary schools, particularly those in remote areas?

Councillor Anderson: Bruce Robertson will talk about the technical side. Caution is always required to distinguish the headlines in the papers from what happens in reality. We have the same issue with recruitment. We might have a slight problem recruiting a teacher, which becomes a crisis by the time the information reaches the media.

Bruce Robertson: We have 32 local authorities in different circumstances. The authority that Councillor Anderson and I represent has the most diverse conditions, from large urban environments to the most scattered rural and island communities.

The McCrone agreement has given rural authorities and rural schools challenges, but it has also given them great opportunities. We need innovative solutions. One aspect that I very much welcome is the fact that a one-size-fits-all approach is not taken. The national agreement gives us flexibility.

One difficulty that local authorities in rural areas have is that they cannot always attract enough new probationers. I regularly counsel the Scottish Executive on its distribution mechanism for probationer teachers. That is one of the most important points for rural authorities that I leave the committee with.

We have also developed a set of e-learning solutions, through which more of the curriculum and staff and CPD development are available on-line. The internet and all related opportunities and solutions should be maximised by rural schools.

11:45

The Convener: There is another, "And finally." Lord James wants to ask a brief question.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The evidence that you have given this morning has been extremely useful. Is it your evidence, from your knowledge and experience, that enough prospective teachers are coming forward to meet the choices of pupils throughout Scotland arising out of the McCrone agreement?

Bruce Robertson: The Executive has given a commitment to increase teacher numbers to 53,000, and I suspect that that will be met.

If we go back to the fundamentals, we have to ask what the McCrone report and agreement was about. One subject was recruitment and retention. Teachers are now well paid and have a set of conditions of service for the 21st century, and there is a corporate responsibility on us all to ensure that we retain them in the classroom.

There are some pressures on choices from time to time in certain parts of Scotland—parts of the

north-east have experienced that recently—but I am confident that, with 53,000 teachers and the commitment to continue monitoring the number that universities are allowed to train, the vast majority of young people's choices will be met. Through e-learning, even greater opportunities exist now and will exist in the future.

The Convener: I am sure that Lord James will be pleased to know that two groups of student teachers have attended our meeting this morning, so people are entering the profession.

I am glad that we have managed finally to identify Andy Anderson correctly, and I thank Councillor Gray and his team from COSLA for giving us some very useful evidence this morning.

Councillor Gray: Thank you for your forbearance.

11:47

Meeting suspended.

11:49

On resuming—

Subordinate Legislation

Teachers' Superannuation (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2006 (SSI 2006/605)

The Convener: We resume with our second agenda item. No member has asked for a witness to be present, and I see that no member wants to comment. Are we agreed that the committee has nothing to report on the regulations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

European Commission Work Programme 2007

11:49

The Convener: We move on to our final agenda item.

Members will have in their papers a copy of a letter from the convener of the European and External Relations Committee and a paper from the Parliament's European officer highlighting the key areas of the Commission's work programme for the Scottish Parliament. There is little activity that relates to this committee's remit, but do members have any comments?

Mr Macintosh: The only things that I spotted that might be of interest are the European qualifications framework and possibly the European institute of technology and the Erasmus programme. However, I am not sure whether the Erasmus programme referred to is the international student exchange programme.

The Convener: I think that it is the student exchange programme.

Mr Macintosh: I would like the committee to be kept up to date with developments. I was expecting to see some more work on the development of the international baccalaureate, as there is a lot of general interest in that, but it is not mentioned.

The Convener: I am sure that we can ask the European officer to keep us up to date with progress on qualifications, which is important. If members are content, I will write to the convener of the European and External Relations Committee on those terms.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is extremely important that we keep a dialogue, because the bodies involved are going to be enormously powerful and probably have enormous sums of money to disperse throughout Europe. Keeping closely in touch can do no harm.

The Convener: Those comments conclude today's meeting. Next week we will take further evidence on the implementation of the teachers agreement.

Class dismissed.

Meeting closed at 11:51

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