

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 28 September 1999
(*Afternoon*)

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EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

4th Meeting

CONVENER:

*Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

*Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

*Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

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

*Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP)

*Ian Welsh (Ayr) (Lab)

*attended

WITNESSES:

Kelly Bayes (Principal Policy and Practice Officer, Barnardo's Scotland)

Bronwen Cohen (Director, Children in Scotland)

Margaret Doran (Head of Schools, Children's Services, Stirling Council)

Anne Houston (ChildLine Scotland)

Kay Tisdall (Policy and Research Manager, Children in Scotland)

COMMITTEE CLERK:

Gillian Baxendine

ASSISTANT CLERK:

Alistair Fleming

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Tuesday 28 September 1999

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:02*]

The Convener (Mrs Mary Mulligan): Good afternoon. I welcome the representatives of Children in Scotland who are joining us this afternoon. I will give them the opportunity to introduce themselves in a moment. There are two apologies: one from Karen Gillon and the other from Mike Russell, who has another meeting. Jamie Stone will be slightly late.

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): I would like to make a point of order before we begin. As you know, convener, I asked for the millennium final hour appeal to be put on today's agenda. Since making that request, I have contacted David Watt, the Scottish partnership manager of the New Millennium Experience Company—he will be attending the meeting at 3 pm. This morning, when I asked the clerks, I was told that, as his name was not on the agenda, he would not be able to talk to the committee.

Can I have some guidance about how that situation arose? Although we are talking about the appeal this afternoon, one of the most instrumental parties in that appeal in Scotland was not invited to address the committee.

The Convener: I think that there was a misunderstanding, Fiona—nothing more than that. I assumed—as did Gillian Baxendine, although she can speak for herself—that you were simply suggesting that the matter should be put on the agenda; I was not aware that you were asking for someone to speak on it. As I did not think that there would be any opposition to the children's promise, it did not seem necessary to have somebody to speak about it and David Watt was not included on the agenda. Unfortunately, because there is no space for him on the agenda, he cannot, under standing orders, be allowed to speak to the committee. However, it would be okay for you, having had an opportunity to speak to him, to say something to the committee on the matter.

Fiona McLeod: I have some points to raise when we reach the item on the children's promise. However, perhaps it would be better to postpone that discussion until the next meeting, so that we can invite David Watt to address the committee.

The Convener: The only difficulty with that is time. The next meeting, as I am sure you know, is next Wednesday, and we have invited members of the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff in School Education to attend—unfortunately, that meeting will be fairly full. The matter could not be addressed until after the two weeks of recess, which would be a little late. I would prefer us to deal with it today. I will give members the opportunity to make comments.

Fiona McLeod: Perhaps we could ask David Watt to send us a briefing.

The Convener: Yes.

Education Bill

The Convener: I am keen to move on, as we have people with us. I welcome our witnesses to the committee and ask them to make their presentation. Afterwards, committee members will be able to ask questions.

Bronwen Cohen (Director, Children in Scotland): Thank you very much indeed for inviting us to give evidence to this committee. We are delighted to be here.

I am Bronwen Cohen, the director of Children in Scotland. I have brought with me my policy and research manager, Kay Tisdall, who is sitting on my immediate right, and a number of our members. Our membership encompasses both voluntary agencies and the statutory sector. On my immediate left is Anne Houston, the director of ChildLine Scotland. On her left is Margaret Doran, the head of schools, children's services at Stirling Council. On Kay's right is Kelly Bayes, the principal policy and practice officer of Barnardo's (Scotland). That is our team. We will briefly introduce some of the main points that we want to highlight for the committee, to allow as much opportunity as possible for members to ask us questions. Members should have copies of the policy briefing that we sent to the committee.

The Convener: I think that members may only just have received that document, so most of them will not have had an opportunity to read it.

Bronwen Cohen: I realise that.

The Convener: If you want to expand on its contents, feel free to do so.

Bronwen Cohen: We will expand on it. We emphasise that we are delighted with the commitment that the Scottish Executive has made to placing children at the centre of the Scottish schools system and to introducing new education legislation. We believe that the Executive has an opportunity to prepare important new education legislation for Scotland, which is much needed.

The briefing paper outlines three major gaps—

themes—on which we want to address the committee. The first of those is headed:

“What is education for? Going beyond improving standards.”

We identify that the bill

“fails to incorporate key principles into law, including”—

and we emphasise this—

“international obligations to promote children’s welfare and to take account of children’s views.”

That is the first theme on which we want to address the committee—Anne Houston, from ChildLine Scotland, will expand on that.

The second of the themes is headed: “Making links between services.” In our view, the bill

“does not take a sufficiently ‘child-centred’ approach and does not ensure that inter-agency working is streamlined and supported”.

That applies particularly to special educational needs. We believe that there must be

“new duties for early years services and new planning requirements.”

That second theme will be addressed by the second member of our team, Margaret Doran, from Stirling Council’s children’s services.

The third aspect that we want to consider is an inclusive educational system. Special educational needs, we understand,

“will be considered by a separate consultation process”.

However, it is vital that this bill takes account of special educational needs. Kay Tisdall, our policy and research manager, will expand on that. Without further ado, I ask Anne to speak on the first theme.

Anne Houston (ChildLine Scotland): Thank you, Bronwen. I shall address the issue that is headed:

“What is education for? Going beyond improving standards.”

One of the contentious issues in the draft bill is the concentration on academic performance and on improving standards of academic performance. I do not suggest that that is not important and I want to make it clear that this is not an either/or situation. However, we approach the matter from the point of view that school is the place in which most children and young people spend most of their waking hours. They need to learn about becoming people and all that goes with that, as well as about academic subjects.

We would be pleased to see a reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We feel that the convention, and children’s welfare and the consultation of children, should be central to this bill. At the moment, children do not

seem to be as central as they could be.

Children and young people need to know about their rights. It is evident from the many thousands of children who phone ChildLine that children are not clear about their rights and there is no way in which children can access their rights if they do not know what those rights are. I accept that some children are not at school—that issue will be picked up later—but, for those who are, school is the place in which they can learn about rights and responsibilities. It is important that the bill should incorporate that ethos.

There is a question over how much should be legislated for. We are keen to promote the ethos of children’s participation and views. There is a lot of talk now about consulting young people and it is important that we train our young people in how to respond to the opportunities to be consulted. Children must learn in school how to do that, and must participate in decisions that are made in school and in the running of the school.

At ChildLine, bullying is the biggest issue that we hear about from young people. The children who expect things to be resolved are those who talk about schools with active anti-bullying policies, which the children helped to devise and which they are part of keeping alive. That kind of ethos needs to come through in this bill.

Unfortunately, young people are often seen as the problem, but they are part of the solution, too.

Those are the general issues that we would like the bill to address.

Bronwen Cohen: In summary—this is at the bottom of the first page of our briefing document—we think that the bill should amend section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to represent some of those goals and, in particular, to include key principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child relating to non-discrimination, children’s welfare and children’s views. If performance indicators are important in education, they must address the full range of those goals and not merely concentrate on literacy and numeracy.

Those are the key points on the first theme. Margaret Doran will introduce the second theme, which is about making links between services.

Margaret Doran (Head of Schools, Children’s Services, Stirling Council): The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and local authorities are committed to working with the voluntary sector. I welcome this opportunity to be the guest of Children in Scotland on this panel. ADES has been asked by Children in Scotland to consider in particular a model of joined-up service provision, focusing on child-centred approaches, inter-agency working, and early-years services. I was asked to focus on Stirling Council as one

model that can be considered in the context of some of the proposals in the draft bill.

14:15

For there to be a child-centred service, to which the bill is committed, education and care must be integrated—there should be no division. The starting point for child-centred services in Stirling was the political or committee structure, which was established in the shadow year of 1995. We had a children's committee, to which a director of education services and a director of housing and social services were accountable.

The political discipline of that structure ensured that officials were committed to child-centred, joined-up thinking and to the promotion of integrated working. Members were expected to produce, jointly, papers that indicated consultation with other services, agencies, children, staff and parents. We were expected to consult the student forum—representatives of which were elected to the children's committee—and the student councils.

Stirling Council recently reviewed the role of chief officials and the director of education was redesignated as director of children's services, a role that combines education services and children, young people and families in social work. We are developing a code of practice for joint working, based on what we have learned in the past three years plus. That covers joint staff development and training and a shared understanding on issues such as child protection, early years, special educational needs, vulnerable 16 to 18-year-olds and looked-after children, on which a joint policy has been developed with the health service and others.

Working together on policy papers is not the end of the matter. Local authorities welcome the new community schools initiative as a means of developing a shared understanding with children, young people, families and the community, but the bill should include greater evidence of national integrated approaches to, for example, quality assurance and early-years inspection. An artificial divide exists between education and care in relation to the inspection of early years and child care; it might be interesting to have children's inspectors instead of different inspectorate teams inspecting different aspects of this area.

The children first agenda is not just about structure. There must be evidence in national and local authority plans of aims that indicate a commitment to integrated education and care of the highest quality—we must have children first and child-centred approaches in all that we do. For instance, we commissioned research from Stirling University to seek children's views on the

effectiveness of learning and teaching in S1 and S2—that is an area that needs to be examined. We have responded to the views of children and young people, staff and others and developed policy in relation to that.

I would take children's participation even further. Children and young people should not be seen as passive recipients of services; they should participate actively. Children's empowerment is essential for their confidence and self-esteem. That can make a difference to all aspects of their lives, in and out of the classroom. That applies to child protection issues and to children with learning difficulties and children in poverty. We need to focus more on that.

I will say a wee bit about the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. What is missing in all this is the children's services plans, which provide a framework for integrated working with education, social work, the health service, the reporter to the children's service and housing agencies. The plans are informed by the needs and views of the voluntary and statutory organisations that are active in their communities. To address social inclusion, we need the evidence from those plans, which are in place to support children in need, children with special educational needs, children who are disaffected, children in poverty, looked-after children and children who require through care and after care. The draft bill does not recognise that child-centred agenda or take into account the wider legislative framework, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

On raising achievement, in the broadest sense, we could have a significant debate about the purpose of schooling when we consider the outcomes indicated on page 9 of "Improving our Schools". Schools cannot solve all the problems. For example, in Castleview in Stirling, which is a new community schools initiative area, 45.7 per cent of children and young people do not go into higher education, further education, training or employment. The schools cannot solve the problem alone; they need to work in partnership with others in order to make a difference to the children, young people, families and communities.

I will not say anything about attainment—I have run out of time. However, I would like to say that the challenge for the legislation is to identify local needs and to allow local authorities and others to work in partnership with health services and others to identify local outcomes. There needs to be flexibility. There will always be a commitment to standards and quality, but we want children to be effective people. They are the citizens of the future and we want them to be confident and creative and to have transferable skills. We must recognise that they are going not into a job for life, but into a life of jobs. That is the challenge, and I am not

sure that the bill addresses that bigger debate.

Bronwen Cohen: In summary, we feel that the bill needs to address more effectively the intersections between education and child care law. Its relation to the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 is not sufficiently clear. That leaves room for confusion over the definitions of children in need and of special educational needs within education law, and it leaves room for confusion over how the plethora of plans will work together. There is also confusion over issues such as the registration and inspection of, for example, early-years services. Children in Scotland's long-standing policy has been that there should be no artificial divide between education and care and that we should be moving towards an integrated regulatory system for early-years services.

The third theme is that of an inclusive educational system. Kay Tisdall will expand on that and will also present—at their request—the views of two groups of young people.

Kay Tisdall (Policy and Research Manager, Children in Scotland): Page 14 of the consultation paper "Improving our Schools" says that the Scottish education system should be

fully inclusive and should offer opportunities for all.

Children in Scotland welcomes and appreciates that. We would like that commitment to appear in the legislation. Our members feel strongly that it is not inclusive to divide off special educational needs from the bill. We have seen the Government's response to the Riddell report, aspects of which are very welcome. However, keeping the consultation separate will not ensure that this mainstream bill is proofed for special educational needs, which would ensure that it addressed the needs of all children, whether they are disabled, come from disadvantaged backgrounds or have different cultural or ethnic origins.

The Riddell report addresses a particular group of children—children with severe low-incidence disabilities. That group is very important, but it does not include the full range of special needs that the mainstream legislation needs to deal with.

What would it mean if we were to bring special needs into the education bill? Children in Scotland feels that the statement in the consultation paper should be right up among the principles that Anne Houston was talking about—we want an education system that is fully inclusive and that offers opportunities for all. We already have that in school exclusion guidance from the Scottish Office, and other United Kingdom legislation has similar commitments and we hope that Scottish legislation can take it on board.

The Scottish Executive's response to the Riddell

report is generally positive, but we suggest that its approach on a couple of the issues should be more active. The Executive says that the educational framework sufficiently represents children's views and caters for their welfare. However, we think that the bill should specify the principles that there must be due regard for children's views and that the children's best interest must be the primary consideration. That is already the case in the 1995 act, but we need to bring it into educational law.

In 1995, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child came down heavily on the United Kingdom Government because, under our present laws, children who are excluded from school have no right to appeal or to have their views heard—in fact, only their parents have that right. That is one example of something that we could change to ensure that the principles are established in law and therefore, we hope, in practice.

The Executive states that the reviewing and recording process for special educational needs is basically fine, but that is not the view of members of Children in Scotland. At our recent consultation, that statement caused such a flurry of interest that we have arranged another meeting in two weeks' time to go into the matter in considerably more detail. Research and practical experience tell us that, although well intentioned, the recording process is bureaucratic, takes a lot of time, and does not necessarily meet the needs of all children with special needs.

What would we find if we were to proof the mainstream part of the legislation? Let us take devolved school management as an example. Down south, where there has been more devolved school management, people are worried that children with special educational needs have been disadvantaged. How can a small school unit deal with an expensive child who may not show up well in the league tables? We should expand our standards and attainment goals to ensure that kids with special needs are not excluded because of such provisions.

Children in Scotland supports the global idea of social inclusion. We have an opportunity to create an education system that is at the core of children's lives and we must take on board the idea of social inclusion and proof any new legislation to ensure that it can provide for that.

What do children say? We have circulated a document expressing the views of some groups of children. I approached a number of groups and asked them what they would like to do in relation to today's meeting. It did not seem practical to have them along—and, to be frank, one young person said that it might be a bit boring—and there was not much time to get ready. Given concerns

about non-attendance, the head teacher and I also agreed that it would be ironic to take them out of school. Nevertheless, the children were happy to submit their views through me, and I have promised them that I will report back with members' responses.

Members can see that I have chosen two groups. One was an older group of young people with disabilities, who specifically wanted to look at mainstream schooling and have included some messages about that. The second group comprised children from primary school classes. We had so many picture responses that I felt that I had to choose just one from each group—although, if members want, I can give out all the pictures. Some strong messages come out of those submissions.

Those members who have studied other research and consultation projects will have noticed that we hear some of the themes again and again—choice on inclusive schooling, for example. Many responses concerned resources and called for more teachers in each classroom. Computers were also mentioned, as was equipment for arts and sport.

Another important issue that was mentioned is that of playgrounds and recreational equipment, which the consultation paper on education does not address. The children's responses—one tends to get such responses when one asks children directly—represent a challenge to me and to members of this committee. We have not yet put the issue of playgrounds on the agenda, but, if we are really listening to children and young people, perhaps that should be a priority in the bill and in our education policy.

Four pictures are attached to the document. The first three exemplify the children's views. The fourth one, about children being heard, was too good to leave out of the briefing. Children and young people are challenging us to ensure that their views are regularly and meaningfully considered in our work.

Bronwen Cohen: Finally, our briefing highlights some of the relevant statistics that we think members should keep in mind. That completes our introduction, but we will be happy to answer questions on a number of points.

The Convener: Thank you very much. We have until 3.30 pm before we go on to other items on the agenda. There is therefore an hour for people to ask questions and put their views.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Some important points have been raised. I am particularly interested in how we can facilitate child participation. This Parliament is supposed to be all about participation, but I have not read the blueprint on how we are to facilitate child

participation. Parents often say that they know what children need or that they know how to speak to children, but the papers and drawings indicate that there are many different ways of speaking to children.

Margaret mentioned the importance of a child-centred approach, but perhaps we need to teach adults how to work with children. It seems to me—do not shout at me for saying this—that we do not encourage children to be confident and stand up and say, "I don't like that. I think that's an awful idea." When I was a child, we were told to shut up—what did we know anyway?

How can we get away from that attitude? How can we build children's confidence to say what they think is important and how can we help adults to value children's views?

14:30

Fiona McLeod: I support what Cathy says. From the beginning, this committee has said that we want to involve children and consider how we can encourage participation. We questioned the ministers closely on that subject when they came to the committee, but I have to say that I do not think that their answers were very satisfactory.

I am pleased that Children in Scotland thinks that we have to train adults to learn that it is acceptable for children to participate, and we must understand how to listen to young children. I have only one slight criticism: it would have been nice for the young people to have been here this afternoon. We could have taken an hour or so of our time to work out how we could have made things less intimidating.

I am sure that many folk have received the UNICEF document "Put it to your MSP". I suggest to the committee that we do not have individual surgeries with children, but that we devote a committee meeting to children and allow them to come to us. It will be interesting to hear from you, the professionals, how we should go about that. We could keep talking—saying that we want to do that—but if we are going to be serious about communicating with children we must work out how to do it.

Bronwen Cohen: We agree with you. I will ask Kay to address that specific point.

The Convener: Can I check first that no one else wants to come in on that point?

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I would like to reinforce what Fiona said. Last week, I was at a youth awareness event in the Borders that was run by the police, where communication was precisely the focus of the event. I was there, as was the police chief and social workers and others. I have been a teacher

for 35 years and I was very aware that it was hard to give convincing answers to the children, although they asked perfectly reasonable questions. It was difficult to engage with what they really, really wanted. I am interested in how we do that. It is not just a case of bringing them in, sitting them around a table and talking.

Ian Welsh (Ayr) (Lab): I do not want to let that comment go by without defending generations of schoolteachers. Many of them promote a culture of listening and participation in their classrooms. I do not want to underestimate the trend over the last 15 years towards increasing participation in school structures for young people. Similar moves have occurred at local authority level and beyond, where youth participation structures have been set up. The youth parliament is a national example of that. I do not want to let the discussion continue without having it on record that there is a distinct trend with which Parliament must catch up. We must recognise good practice.

The Convener: Sorry, Ian, we were not trying to put you off, but even though we can all hear each other, we must have the microphones on, because the official report sometimes goes back to the recordings. That is why we were panicking a bit that your microphone was not on.

Kay Tisdall: I agree that there is emerging good practice and long-standing good practice that we must build upon and learn from. That should be an important principle in the education legislation, to progress this interest that many people have in education. There are many things for the committee to consider. Given that you are the children's committee, virtually everything that you do will relate to children and young people. Have you considered establishing a sustainable form of consultation? Part of our struggle today was that, although we were glad to come, we had 10 days' notice. It was difficult to ensure that children were informed, so that they could come.

If you establish a sustainable process, the committee could have groups of young people who become used to working with you. You would have to build a process, as they need information and feedback. As I am sure members are aware, people with excellent experience would be delighted to help you with that, including ChildLine, Barnardo's and Stirling Council. Fife, along with others, has been a leader in consulting with very young children.

I stress that Scotland now has a good tradition of consulting children and young people on policy, but it is on a one-off basis. We all consult young people on one-off issues. We must consider this more systematically and—this is the researcher in me—ensure that we get a full range of views. If we go to schools, we are not likely to talk to children who are not in school. It is important that we speak

to those children. Children will not say certain things in schools. If you have a sustainable approach, you could set up different groups in different ways to ensure that they are representative and there is diversity.

Anne Houston: I will pick up on some of Kay's points about training adults. One aspect of our work at ChildLine is to go out and work with adults to train them in communicating with young people. Time and again, we hear of the need for that, even from people who have been teachers for a long time. It is a different kind of communication and people are often quite deskilled. Some people will not require a tremendous amount of training, but it must help them to focus in the right way. That is vital as many people have those discussions with young people and find themselves coming unstuck if they have not had training.

Another point that is raised by some adults is that an almost inevitable conflict will arise, because the priorities of children and young people may not be the same as the priorities of the adults. There can be all sort of debates as to which ones ought to take precedence and in what situation. There is no hard-and-fast rule that says that we must always accept the priorities of the adults or those of young people. There are times when it will not be possible to do exactly what young people want done. Those adults repeatedly say to us, "How do we deal with that level of anger and frustration from young people? How do we feed back to them, when it has not been possible to do what they want, or where that has been adjusted?" We must listen to young people's feedback and be prepared to take the flak. It is often not possible to go along with young people.

I agree that there is a trend towards listening and there is evidence of really good practice. There is a question how that should be used, to help all of us who are struggling to cope with a change of ethos. Honesty is one of the things that children and young people who call us at ChildLine are constantly talking about. "If adults could just be honest with us, we could live with that. We might be angry or upset at the time, but we will get over it as long as people are honest." Children find it most difficult when issues have been flannelled or avoided, or they have been told that something will happen, and the opposite does.

Kelly Bayes (Principal Policy and Practice Manager, Barnardo's Scotland): Although it would be useful for children to come to the committee, it is also important that you go to them. You must be in their world and their environment. The children that we work with need the support of people that they know as it takes a long time to build up a relationship with them. We are working with some of the most disadvantaged, disabled

and vulnerable children who need a lot of time and support to communicate with us so that we can help them. You must visit them in their world.

People who have communication difficulties are the most vulnerable and excluded people. However, there are ways, perhaps using other agencies, to listen to their views. We are discussing not just those who can speak out with a little support but those who can never speak out, unless they are given very skilled support.

Bronwen Cohen: If it is of interest to the committee, we can provide further information on this. There is an accumulating body of material on practice in Scotland. I reinforce what Kay said about the need to be systematic. It is worth mentioning some of the experience in other countries that we could consider. For example, Denmark has a network of schools and day care institutions, which were established on a regular basis, and to which they went to consult on specific issues. That is one example from a lot of practices which could be drawn from and used.

Margaret Doran: I wonder if there is an expectation that every school should have a pupil council and that every authority should have a student forum, just as there is a young persons parliament.

Having representative groups is a good idea, but the challenge is to involve every child. To that end, we have had discussions with groups that have been excluded. We have talked to looked-after children about their experiences and have thought about how their views can inform the way in which policy is developed and implemented.

We should commit ourselves to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. That comes through in all our proposals, such as the draft bill and our policy statements.

Education and social work staff are being trained in how to listen to children. They are being told how to encourage children to record their views and are adopting methods such as circle time—something that is a bit like this committee—when everybody can talk about their feelings and their emotions.

The focus has to be on citizenship. Children should be encouraged to come along to the area forum. Fiona, a 10-year-old girl, came to an area forum in Stirling and, in front of 100 adults, said that the underpass in St Ninians, which is on her way to school, had flooded and she could not cross the road because there was no school-crossing patrol. The councillor who was chairing the meeting asked the officials to do something about that. Within 10 days, technical services had installed a pump in the underpass and the children are now able to walk to school safely.

Once children realise that they can make a difference in school and in the community, evidence shows that they actively take part.

The Convener: What you are saying is clear: we have to accept that there has to be a feedback from those whom we are consulting. That has to be an on-going process, and I believe that the committee is keen to take part in that. At some point, we will want to follow up on some of the examples of best practice that you mentioned.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I would like to apologise to our guests for being late. The A9 remains a challenge to me.

I want to ask what was said about a systematic approach. I agree with the idea that all groups of children should be included. I was involved in the highland youth parliament, a European Community initiative that was one of two youth parliaments in Scotland.

Last night, we kicked off the Caithness youth forum, which has stolen a lead in the region. It involves 13 to 18-year-olds and is deliberately broadening beyond school into other youth groups.

I would like to hear what you have to say about the suggestion that the mechanism that involves social work, the health boards and education might prove to be a vehicle for replicating forums or parliaments in local authorities. There are two dangers involved in that. One is tokenism: the youth parliament might be set up with a splash of publicity but be forgotten about a couple of years later. That is the situation that faces the highland youth parliament. The second danger is that only a few pupils from very large communities will be able to participate.

14:45

I want to get down to the nuts and bolts of the matter. Do you have any thoughts about a systematic approach to establishing youth forums in local authority areas? I want to get down to the nitty-gritty.

Kay Tisdall: I think that Mr Stone is asking some good questions.

Mr Stone: That is an historic first for me in the Parliament.

Kay Tisdall: I want to ensure that members are aware of the age issue. Mr Stone mentioned 13 to 18-year-olds and the youth parliament takes in children from 12 upwards. We need to think about younger children in different ways.

Youth parliaments and other youth forums are potentially very useful. We do not know enough about how well they work—that is a research

issue. We need to know more about good models. There are big questions about what power such parliaments have. In other youth parliaments in the past, young people have been turned off by the fact that the forum is a talking shop with no power. There are some examples from down south, and in Scotland too, of youth forums that have a small budget and some power, although that power is curtailed. That is a major issue.

We need to go beyond youth parliaments and youth forums. They serve a particular purpose and may be very good, both symbolically and practically, by involving a certain group of young people. However, to take a systematic approach we need to consider a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitatively, we must ensure that we have a wide range of children from different family and educational backgrounds. We have suggested that education needs a customer survey, which could be done through the general household survey. That would ensure that we involve a wide range of children.

I suggest that we set up a network—perhaps similar to the Danish model—which links certain groups who have said that they would like to be involved, such as this committee, that represent a range of children. That network could work with both children and adults to create a meaningful and sustainable approach.

Anne Houston: The other point to think about is the way in which young people communicate. Young people are very comfortable with a lot of the technology—much more than I am. Perhaps we should think creatively about user technology, particularly when we are trying to cover a broad geographic area.

The kind of anonymity offered by that technology—from the experience of the telephone service that we run—can give people the confidence to say what they really think. There are some issues that we need to approach creatively.

Fiona McLeod: We seem to be taking a much wider approach than the bill. However, the issue of youth forums is important and the committee accepts that.

In relation to the bill, we are too late to be terribly imaginative, but we could introduce an amendment to the bill requiring all schools to have a pupil council. We are thinking about school boards—should we be putting in something on those lines?

Margaret Doran: I do not think that I would propose that in a bill, but some form of good practice should be promoted. Children should be given citizenship opportunities, like the life skills that are identified on page 9 of “Improving our Schools”. Perhaps citizenship should be one of the core skills and young people could be given the

opportunity to participate in citizenship activities. That participation can be modified, whatever form it takes—pupil councils, buddying, area forums—but I would be concerned if that were to be fixed in law. Perhaps Bronwen and Children in Scotland have a different view.

Bronwen Cohen: We see little reason not to incorporate in the bill some of the basic principles relating to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It may not be possible to do that in total at the outset, but I see little reason why specific aspects such as listening to children and obtaining their views cannot be incorporated in some shape or form.

Children in Scotland is aware of some of the difficulties that can be involved in drafting bills in terms of rights. Those difficulties came up in relation to the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, and it managed to overcome some of those difficulties. We are firmly of the view that there is no reason why some of those principles should not be incorporated into the bill.

Kay would like to say something about school councils.

Kay Tisdall: The evidence we have about high school councils follows on from what I said about youth parliaments. The best examples work well, but young people feel overwhelmingly that they have no power and that they are not being listened to. Children in Scotland supports school councils in principle, but it is their quality and the powers that they have that are important.

We think that the bill should be amended to include the principle that all children in a school should have their views considered on every matter that affects them in school.

Kelly Bayes: It is also important to consider who supports such councils. Young people need support. They become involved in a youth parliament, but they are teenagers for such a short time and must constantly support younger children. That is about citizenship and participation. Education focuses very much on teaching and standards, but schools should be inclusive and should look at the possibility of other professions supporting children in schools.

It should not just be about a teacher who perhaps has the time to encourage some young people to be involved in the school council; it should be about reaching all children and allowing them to have a say in a creative and enthusiastic way. That need not just come from the teaching profession, but could come from other professions in schooling. Ideas about community schooling involve other professions.

The Convener: I am keen to move this on a little. Do you want to come in on this, Cathy?

Cathy Peattie: No. I would like to move on.

The Convener: If everyone is happy, we will move on.

Fiona McLeod: I am terribly concerned that we have had a long and full discussion, but that we will end up with nothing to show for it because we are not being specific.

The Convener: I propose that for the last five or 10 minutes we try to bring together what we have discussed and examine whether there are proposals that the committee wants to take forward. I do not want to lose out after the informative discussion that we have had.

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I want to move on to some of the specific points that are addressed in the policy briefing, and which relate to the education bill.

My first point relates to Anne Houston's comments. I was very interested to hear Anne's thoughts on putting education's purpose into context. That is an area in which the bill in its current form is deficient. It tends to isolate education and to examine it in a formulaic way. Some good points were made about incorporation of some of the principles of the UN convention on children's rights.

There is a broader concern that the bill as it is tends to view education in terms of measuring attainment against performance indicators. We have discussed this previously in the committee. There is a need to put education in a much wider context.

One of the commitments that was made in the partnership agreement between Labour and the Liberal Democrats was that business, civic and environmental education would be encouraged. It is important that we recognise that as well as producing children who can read, write and count, which is important, we should produce informed citizens. Does the panel have any views on whether there is anything that can be done in the context of the bill to encourage that approach rather than the narrower approach taken by the bill?

I have a couple of questions relating to the relevant statistics that are mentioned in the briefing paper. Those statistics are useful because they highlight the fact that most of the factors that influence educational attainment are external to the system. We must relate the system to some of the wider issues in society.

There is a statistic given on the number of children who are eligible for free school meals. I have a couple of questions on free school meals. The first is on the rate of take-up. You give the statistic of the number of children who are eligible, but evidence suggests that a high number of those

children do not take up free school meals. Why is that the case? Are there barriers to take-up that could be overcome?

Secondly, do you have a view on extending the entitlement to free school meals beyond the current entitlement, which covers only kids whose parents are on income support?

I agree with your comment that the majority of parents on school boards should be elected, which is very important if we are to reinforce the credibility of school boards. However, I wanted to probe a little on two statements in your briefing paper.

"Parental participation should be considered beyond School Boards."

I agree very much, but how do you think that that can be done?

"Parental choice provision should be rethought, to reflect their true status as 'parental preference.'"

Is that a comment on placement requests?

The Convener: I would like to throw in a question on the back of Nicola's point about school boards, and come back to something that Kelly raised. I am keen that those who choose to attend mainstream schools can do so, but special schools still exist. In my experience, parents with children at special schools find it difficult to take part in school boards, because of the impracticality of coming to meetings at certain times. That has caused some problems in the special schools sector, so how can we address the issue of involving those parents?

Cathy Peattie: My point is in the same vein and follows on from the ideas of active citizenship. Every school should do what is right for the children and families in its area, rather than just following a blueprint. If we are to do the things that we are talking about and that are in this paper, it is important that parents have a role. That role will be different, depending on where people stay. I am especially interested in social inclusion and in the experiments that are being done in community schools.

A lot of parents want to get involved, but for some of them the idea of going through the school gates can be quite scary. I do not mean that the reception that they get is scary—I am not saying that at all—but we have to break down some of the barriers and we have to encourage parents to participate, and help them to find the voice to support their children. You can do what you like at school, but when the child gets home a lot of that is lost, so it can be difficult to build on the work done at school to support the development of the child. I am interested in folks' views on how we can encourage parents to become involved, especially parents who would not naturally go

along to the school board, to the parent-teacher association or the jumble sale, but who would like to go along.

The Convener: There are a number of issues that you might want to comment on.

Bronwen Cohen: Yes, there are. Before addressing the first point about what could be done to ensure that the bill has a wider approach to education, I would like to commend the report that we co-authored with the Scottish Council Foundation, Children, Families and Learning. One suggestion in the report was that we should be looking less at standards and more at goals. The goal has been cited that children should arrive on their first day at school healthy, confident and ready to learn. In the report, we suggest that that would also be a good way for them to leave school. The report looks ahead to the medium and long term, but we feel strongly that the vision that we have of what the system should be like in 10 or 20 years' time should inform the framework that is offered by this bill.

Anne Houston: I should like to return to point 1 at the bottom of the policy briefing, about amending section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to represent the key principles and goals that Bronwen talked about.

There is much evidence about the issues that concern children and young people at school over and above academic qualifications. Undoubtedly, exams and academic qualifications are one of the main issues that concern children and young people; I would not want to comment on that. However, there is plenty of evidence that other issues concern them. We need to ask how much needs to be legislated for, because there are many issues, and those issues are different in different schools and areas.

That takes us back to the need for the bill to establish the principles and ethos that will encourage schools to work with their young people and parents on the issues that affect their area. Preparing for citizenship is important, but there must be flexibility, so that schools can tackle the problems that affect them specifically. The bill should not impose constraints.

Bronwen Cohen: The issue of parental participation and choice was raised. Margaret might want to comment on that—I know that Kay does.

15:00

Margaret Doran: We want a commitment to involving every parent and every child. Representative groups are important, but the challenge for them is to engage and involve the wider body of parents. That goes back to pre-

school and the integrated family support work that is done by community workers, social workers, educationists and educators in the early-years service. They seek from the earliest stages to engage parents in the education and care agenda.

Also important is the commitment, through new community schools and community learning plans, to adults' achieving their potential and being involved in the education of their children. A representative school board is not enough.

The point was made that parental choice needs to be rethought and parental preference considered. The majority of board members should be parents, but parents might want to involve others in working groups, for example. I know that in several places parents have encouraged the voluntary sector or children to become involved in sub-groups associated with the school board.

We must recognise that there are many ways of engaging more parents in the classroom or in workshops. However, we also need to recognise that many parents do not have the childminding facilities that would enable them to come to the school and that others do not like being at meetings.

Kelly Bayes: The bill should also take into account other local policies, such as children's services plans. Many local authorities have strategic plans for support services—education must be integrated into them. If parents are to attend parents evenings or meetings of the school board, they need support in the community. That involves other services apart from education.

Kay Tisdall: There were many questions, so I will try to keep my responses short.

Nicola Sturgeon asked how the bill could improve wider attainment. It would help if the principles were set out at the beginning of the legislation and if cross-agency were built in. The plans should be explicitly co-ordinated and there should be a framework that makes sense to the poor local authority that is trying to balance education with other sectors. The bill should also co-ordinate with the 1995 act. Practitioners are not helped by conflicts between different pieces of legislation, although such conflicts can be resolved.

Increasingly, performance indicators are leading education. We need to ensure that they do not offer perverse incentives. If there is to be greater emphasis on performance indicators, we must come up with more innovative indicators—qualitative as well as quantitative. They could include school councils and frameworks within which children's views can be expressed.

On parental participation, we mentioned earlier

that children and young people could raise issues that challenge us as adults. That is a challenge for schools. We talk about parental participation, but how far do we expect parents' views to challenge the way in which education works? We should take that into account.

Although we rightly encourage parental participation, we must remember that some children have parents who, for whatever reason, are not active. Our policies must not disadvantage those children. The key to expanding parental participation—as with school councils—is not to focus solely on school boards. As a general principle, we advocate parental participation as part of a holistic approach to education.

Finally, we were asked to expand on what we meant by parental preference and choice. Some parents associations gave Children in Scotland detailed accounts of the changes that they want in the terminology. A parental request can be refused because it might require a teacher later on, and it can be difficult to project future needs in cases in which children are moved from area to area. There are questions about that, and it was Children in Scotland's view that that provision would not be helpful and might constrain parental choice.

Bronwen Cohen: Nicola also asked about the take-up of free school meals; I think that Kelly can answer that question.

Kelly Bayes: I am not sure exactly what the take-up is. We know about eligibility for free school meals, but the take-up is much less than it should be because, despite people's best efforts, it is still considered stigmatising. The provision of free school meals could be extended to children from families that are eligible for the working families tax credit, and that might be a way of addressing poverty in schools. We ought to consider it along with wider aspects of policy, rather than as a purely educational issue. We do not have exact figures for take-up, do we?

Bronwen Cohen: No, but we know that there are significant issues in relation to take-up. One way to address the problem is to look for a less stigmatising approach, and I guess that the working families tax credit offers the potential for doing that. If one takes a wider view of education and of learning, school meals and the way in which children eat and talk to one another at meal times become rather more important than they appear to be if one takes a narrow approach.

Ian Welsh: I have a number of peripheral questions to ask before I focus on the main part of Children in Scotland's case.

First, qualitative indicators for social inclusion are operating in schools, but perhaps not strongly enough. As Kay said, we must emphasise that in the bill, so that there are no perverse incentives.

I do not support school boards and I do not believe that they have brought much to the Scottish agenda over the past 10 years. That might be a controversial statement, but there are wider issues of parental participation and school boards make the focus of the debate very narrow. We need to engage parents in a broader way.

I was interested in what Margaret Doran said. The Stirling approach was different from that of the council on which I served, where we integrated education and leisure. I wonder to what extent we will be able to move towards a national integrated approach without addressing the structure of Scottish local authorities. I also wonder who has the mettle—I almost said another word there—to address further structural change in Scottish local authorities over the next few years.

I chaired the policy and resources committee that drew up the children's services plan in South Ayrshire; there is no doubt that education and social work started off as relatively unwilling bedmates. They had to be drawn quickly, strenuously and sometimes tortuously to the conclusion that they needed to work together. That was at local level. I wonder whether the same issue is reflected in the bill.

One of my concerns—and the committee has heard me mention this before—is the way in which the Scottish Executive remains unreconstructed. This bill, laudable and commendable as Nicola Sturgeon said it is, is narrowly focused on education. It seems that it has not benefited from joined-up thinking in the drafting process. That reflects the unreconstructed nature of the Scottish Executive, as opposed to the integrated work in local authorities. Although I welcome the Riddell committee report, the way in which we look at that is a matter of separation and not integration, which is regrettable.

The bottom line for Children in Scotland, however, is that there are huge gaps in the bill in regard to children with special educational needs. That is what it is saying, and we will all need to go away and think about that. I intend to introduce at least one amendment on children with special educational needs, and we should look at a range of responses on that. The bill is not proofed for special educational needs and that is one of the tasks that we will need to address as we go through pre-legislative scrutiny.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I was interested in what the witnesses were saying about how we could expand performance indicators—it is part of point 2 on the briefing paper. Could you say more about that, because it is important for the way in which the bill is drawn up? I would also like to echo Ian's point about the flawed basis of the bill. Your list of principles might be a valuable contribution to the bill.

Mr Stone: Ian got to the heart of the matter. I became concerned when Fiona McLeod asked what happens next. That is an important point. For example, citizenship is linked to modern studies, which in some schools has been cut back because of budget problems. We can talk about bringing in the parents and about all the other worthy initiatives that have been suggested, but the heart of the matter is—and this is a horrible word to use—the prescriptive nature of the bill. There can be all sorts of fine intent, but authorities—depending on their nature—might choose to disregard that. We have all seen examples of authorities where social work—Ian touched on this—does not talk to education or to culture or to leisure.

To what extent does Children in Scotland think that tweaking of the bill will be necessary? Ian has given us notice that he will frame an amendment. I am of that mind, too, on similar issues to the ones that Ian mentioned and on the youth parliament. What are your thoughts on changing things in law?

15:15

Bronwen Cohen: I shall address the latter point, first, then I shall bring Kay in.

There is every opportunity to improve the bill. It is also important to look beyond the bill to other opportunities to improve the education system. Important as it is, the bill is only one element of what needs to be done. I would not like to think that what you are involved in is just tweaking—I would like to think that there is an opportunity to influence the bill positively.

Particularly, I would say—actually, I am not going to say that. I was going to say, “If you did only X,” but it would be counterproductive to say that. If principles were incorporated in the process, that would be a major aspect of what could be achieved.

Kay, do you want to take up the first point?

Kay Tisdall: Yes. Kenneth Macintosh made a precise point about what some of the indicators could be.

I have already mentioned that children's views can be both qualitative and quantitative. To try to ensure that all of us—including schools—are listening to children, one thing that could be required is a biannual customer survey. Schools could be required to consider doing that—probably not by themselves, as that would be problematic. They could consider bringing in a voluntary organisation to do that. The idea is a bit mechanistic, but to get the schools' response to that would be the beginning of a framework for it.

The new community schools might provide another model. There is much evaluation, and

they are working on their performance indicators and trying to get a holistic view. Perhaps lessons could be learned from that, on matters such as health and the take-up of free school meals. Some schools issue tickets, and it is then obvious that the child has free meals. There are different ways of doing that.

A problem with the new community schools evaluation, at least in the draft paper, is that performance indicators will be largely quantitative. There is an issue of how we can reward schools that have the qualitative performance indicators that Ian Welsh talked about at a national level, if we are to be led by such indicators. That would be a start. At Children in Scotland, we are having further meetings to try to get more detail.

I want to talk about the principles if I may, convener.

The Convener: Yes.

Kay Tisdall: Cheers, convener.

I was somewhat cynical about where we would go with the principles in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, in which all of us were quite involved. It is only as good as practice on the ground, is it not? When I go out and train people, I am interested in how they talk me about those principles. I always wonder whether I should tell them that, in law, they do not apply to a particular aspect. The idea of children's views is taken seriously.

Members of Children in Scotland have said, among other things, “We would not mind if more time was taken over the bill to get it right, to take account of special educational needs and do a good job.” However, some changes, such as those that we are talking about, would go a long way.

Margaret Doran: I want to say a few words about performance indicators. The key performance indicators that are currently reported by each council—for education services, as an example—to the Accounts Commission are the five to 14 levels of attainment. Those levels of attainment have been proven time and again to be neither valid nor reliable. There is an issue if those levels are used as a key indicator of performance in primary schools, in particular, and for years S1 and S2 in secondary schools.

Another ridiculous key performance indicator for special educational needs is the time that it takes a teacher to complete a record of needs. That has nothing to do with the quality or involvement of the child. The time that it takes to complete such a record is the only key performance indicator for children with special educational needs. The exam performance statistics are more robust, but we must examine seriously how success is indicated, particularly in the five to 14 age group.

If the Scottish Executive is committed to social inclusion, the question must be, "How do we know that its measures are working?" A lot of money was put into the early intervention programme because we were committed to children's achievement through early intervention. According to last week's edition of *The Times Educational Supplement*, research shows that the more advantaged children are doing better, but who is tracking the most disadvantaged and vulnerable youngsters? That challenge must be faced. Crude statistics are not enough: we need to go deeper. As Bronwen said, we need to spend more time addressing that issue.

I should like to pick up Ian's point about integrated working. I do not think that one service configuration has the answer, but the training issues of those who provide services to children and young people in families must be addressed. That relates to training institutions, such as those that provide teacher training. Why is not training integrated, such that trainees work and train with the health service and social workers? Some of the development work in our authority involves work shadowing and job exchanges across the health, social work and education services.

Training and shared understanding is one way to address the matter, but another is to take a task-focused approach, such as on health promotion in schools, so that people work to a model that examines all the local performance indicators to see whether they are achieving success, and to determine whether they are involving children, young people in families and communities.

The other area that requires task-focused training is that of looked-after children. Some of the children were most concerned that health, social work and education services should work together and examine joint approaches to the needs of looked-after children. Those concerns are not reflected in the bill. The problem with the focus being solely on education services is that it does not take account of the integrated education and care agenda. A child-centred approach needs to take account of that agenda. That does not necessarily mean addressing structures; it is a way of thinking that should be reflected at national and local level.

Bronwen Cohen: In relation to early years, the bill proposes a statutory duty to provide pre-school education but specifically makes it clear that it is securing pre-school education because the Scottish ministers are committed to diversity of provision. It is not clear why it would not be possible to propose a statutory duty to provide something that was wider than pre-school education, for example, early-years services that offered the opportunity to socialise, play and learn

in a happy, healthy and safe environment. That is probably too wordy to put in the bill, but it encompasses what most people who work in early years want.

One of the issues in relation to the interface of the bill with the wider subject area is what is required in relation to children's services. Some of those interface issues arise in regard to schools, but others arise at either end of the age range. The current concept of pre-school education does not meet the needs of many local authorities, such as Stirling Council. It does not represent what we will need in early-years services in five or 10 years' time—that was a slightly impassioned addendum.

The Convener: It was noted.

Fiona McLeod: I want to pick up on what Margaret said about looked-after children and the integration of training across services. Does not the Scottish Executive have a contract for that?

Margaret Doran: There is some national advice on that matter. The research of the Scottish Council for Research in Education influenced it: it links educational attainment, the life chances of looked-after children and the effect of exclusions from school. There are quite a few statistics. It is correct to say that something is going on nationally.

We developed a policy based on that research and tried to address the research problems that we have. One of the problems is that there can be some difficulty in obtaining information from schools on who their looked-after children are. Some of the looked-after children do not want people to know that they are looked after, which is one of the challenges. In addition, there are issues around children who are looked after in the through-care and after-care sector, and the difficulties that they face. It is a huge area, on which we need a policy directive. We are committed to seeking children's views on what they need—they shape what we do.

The Convener: I am aware that we have six minutes left on this item. Are there any burning issues that members want to raise?

Ian Jenkins: The second part of the discussion has been tremendous. The witnesses have made suggestions that affect the legislation. On the ethos, there are tremendous issues that cannot be covered in the bill but which we must air, as we have done today. I worry about the first part of our discussion because I suspect that we will end up not telling people the truth, which is that we do not have time to consult young people, as the committee should. I fear what Fiona is saying: we will end up having said good things without being able to implement them.

Fiona McLeod: We must.

Ian Jenkins: I know that, but we need to be practical and to recognise the limits—the time available to us, who we are and where we are. Whether we go out or bring people in to talk to us, there are time limits, if we are talking about this session of Parliament and the long term. We should not be telling people fibs.

The Convener: Would the witnesses like a minute or so to sum up their position?

Bronwen Cohen: I reiterate that we have set out specific amendments and provisions that we feel should be incorporated in the bill. The bill is an opportunity to establish a framework whereby we can improve the system in Scotland. A much wider approach needs to be taken to education, and the commitment to what has been called joined-up thinking or a child-centred approach needs to be replicated in that framework. Currently, that is not the case, but if we incorporate some of the principles in order to have a wider definition and re-examine some of the issues, we can make the act really effective.

We will be happy to help in any way that we can, by providing further information. We can distribute information that we brought today on, for example, services for young children in Denmark and Sweden. I am sure that our members will be happy to help in eliciting the views of children and young people. I do not think that that is necessarily an insurmountable problem, although I take the point that has been raised about needing to ensure that it is a meaningful process.

Unless my colleagues wish to add anything that I might have forgotten—which is always possible—that is all that we wish to say. I thank the committee for inviting us to give evidence.

The Convener: Thank you.

I want the committee to spend the last two or three minutes discussing how we will progress this item. It has been a useful discussion and several points have been raised and questions answered, but other questions arise on the back of the discussion.

About four areas arose from the discussion, on which I would like more information. We might want to examine in more detail a number of the reports and papers mentioned by the witnesses. The first of the four areas that I noted was how the committee should handle consultation with children, both on the bill and generally. That includes how we take into account the needs of children with special needs and of children who have been excluded from the education system, who might be less approachable or more difficult to contact directly. How do we get over those difficulties? We would like further information on

that.

The second area is citizenship and the matter of expanding on the bill and including responsibility. The third is children with special needs and the fourth is looked-after children and how we relate to them. Was there anything else?

Cathy Peattie: Another area is performance indicators and how we measure success. The softer indicators are just as important as the other statistics.

Mr Stone: Last night, people in Caithness asked me who would pay for all this; I touched on the issue of resources. By encouraging a holistic approach including health boards and so on, one might be able to do something without radically affecting present budgets. Where there is a will, there is a way. We have a duty to consider resources, otherwise, as Fiona said, we are in danger of producing nothing.

Fiona McLeod: We are in danger of talking but not achieving.

15:30

The Convener: We are all keen to ensure that we do not do that and that we cover as much as we can. If we are happy with those headings—nothing is exclusive—I will ask Gillian Baxendine to speak to the people on this afternoon's panel and our researchers and to report back to the committee. The committee will then meet and take those issues forward.

Consultation will be difficult if we do not make progress soon. Are members happy for me to speak to Gillian about that during the week, so that we can bring some proposals back to the committee? Next week's meeting will be fairly heavy, but we can circulate something to members and take the matter forward from there. Is that acceptable?

Members indicated agreement.

Mr Stone: Henry McLeish and Jim Wallace launched the Scottish youth parliament with a great fanfare—it is laudable and splendid. Should the bill not be put to the Scottish youth parliament?

The Convener: Gillian thinks that that is going to happen. I will let her answer.

Gillian Baxendine (Committee Clerk): My understanding is that Peter Peacock said at our previous meeting that the youth parliament will get a chance to consider the bill.

Fiona McLeod: He said that, but he did not give us a date. When is the next meeting of the youth parliament?

The Convener: We will say that we are keen for the youth parliament to consider the bill and that

we want to know when that will happen.

Once again, I thank witnesses for attending this meeting. It has been very useful and I look forward to taking our work on this forward.

Children's Promise

The Convener: The second item on the agenda is the children's promise. Fiona wants to say a few words.

Fiona McLeod: It is important that every member of this committee signs up to say that their last hour's pay in the millennium will go towards supporting children in Scotland. The list of the charities to which the money will go includes some very reputable Scottish charities to which, I am sure, all of us will be happy to contribute.

The committee should ask every MSP to do it. We should set an example, but we should expect everyone to follow our lead. This is a public way in which we can be more than the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, but can be the committee that is here for children.

The New Millennium Experience Company will be helped if we sign up soon, if we do so together and if we give the matter a lot of publicity. One of this committee's roles is to bring items to public's attention.

I am happy to say that Alex Salmond has signed up for the millennium final hour appeal.

Ian Welsh: That rules me out.

Fiona McLeod: One party leader is signed up; we have to get all 129 MSPs.

The millennium final hour appeal is part of the children's promise project. I do not have a lot of information on it; I would have liked David Watt to come and talk to us about it. We might want to have a written briefing on the children's promise project. I know that there was talk of setting up a working group that would include an MSP from each party and staff from the Parliament.

We are a brand new Parliament with everybody looking at us all the time. We have wonderful opportunities to do positive things and, as the committee that deals with children, it behoves us to lead the way on an issue that affects children.

Many people ask how the improvement in Scottish education bill will improve Scottish children's lives. The millennium final hour appeal is one small thing that we can do that will improve Scottish children's lives. I implore everybody to sign up. Let us, as a committee, put the appeal to the Scottish Parliament.

The Convener: I am sure that all members of the committee will want to sign up. My apologies to David Watt for the fact that he was not included

on the agenda—which was as a result of a misunderstanding. If he has additional information, it would be useful for him to write to us with it.

It is a good idea to invite MSPs to join the appeal but we should not forget the Parliament's staff.

Fiona McLeod: How would we involve them?

Gillian Baxendine: We would ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body to make it a wider initiative.

The Convener: Gillian will write a letter and that will go forward.

I suggest that we extend the appeal to all members of staff. A good way to get publicity for the event would be to extend the invitation to the members of the press who have become our daily companions.

Fiona McLeod: At 8 o'clock next Monday morning, I am going to the Grosvenor hotel for a meeting on this matter. Should I tell the press then?

Mr Stone: The Grosvenor hotel is in London.

Fiona McLeod: I mean the Glasgow one.

Nicola Sturgeon: The convener should issue a press release to publicise the appeal and encourage members of the public to get behind us.

Fiona McLeod: Could we have five minutes at the beginning of a meeting soon to allow the NMEC to bring us a big form to sign? We could invite the press and all sign one big form. That would mean that it would be in the next day's paper.

The Convener: We will arrange something.

Ian Jenkins: How much will it be?

The Convener: I was asked that but nobody knows yet.

Future Meetings

The Convener: The next item is the programme for future meetings. Do you want to introduce this part, Gillian?

Gillian Baxendine: All members of the committee probably know that the various parties in the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff in School Education have been invited to the next meeting. Members also wanted to take evidence on the bill and, because there will be limited time for that, I have written to all the organisations that were identified, asking them for written submissions. When they have been received, I will circulate them and the committee can decide who it wants to take evidence from.

The Convener: What about the provisional programme for future meetings?

Gillian Baxendine: The only firmly agreed item is that the committee wanted to invite Mrs Brankin. We hope that she will be able to attend on 9 November.

The Convener: We will circulate the provisional dates for future meetings as soon as we have them, so that members know what is happening and can decide their diary. Members will remember that we agreed at our previous meeting that the extra meeting would be rotated so as to ensure that it did not clash every time, as it has for Mike Russell this afternoon.

We will give as much notice as possible. If the provisional dates cause any problems, members should let me know as quickly as possible. We will try to juggle the programme to accommodate as many people as possible.

At our previous meeting, it was suggested that we visit community schools. I suggest that we do that in the first week after the recess and that we break into groups of three or four and visit a number of community schools, rather than 11 of us—plus whoever—all going to the same one and overwhelming it.

Nicola Sturgeon: I agree with that. My only amendment would be to suggest, as I did at our previous meeting, that we do not visit just community schools. It may benefit us to visit other types of school.

Cathy Peattie: I agree. I also want to ensure that when we visit community schools we do not speak just to teachers.

The Convener: That is very important. The nature of community schools is that more than just teachers are involved. We want to get the views of all those involved, even if that means hearing about the difficulties. That would be just as useful as hearing how well the schools are working.

Cathy Peattie: It is important that we go in to find out what is happening and what the problems are, for example, with the multi-agency approach to working. It is early days for many community schools and we want to see things as they are.

The Convener: Is everyone happy with that? Okay. Thank you for your attendance.

Meeting closed at 15:42.

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