EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 21 June 2000
(*Morning*)

£5.00

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by The Stationery Office Ltd.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office is independent of and separate from the company now
trading as The Stationery Office Ltd, which is responsible for printing and publishing
Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body publications.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 21 June 2000

Col.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS 1183
COMMITTEE BUSINESS 1226

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE
21st Meeting 2000, Session 1

CONVENER

*Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
*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)

*attended

WITNESSES

Heather Anderson (Equity Group)
Fernando Almeida Diniz (Minority Ethnic Learning Disabilities Initiative)
Nancy Hansen (Equity Group)
Drew Hunter (Equity Group)
Dorothy McDonald (Equity Group)
Sophie Pilgrim (Minority Ethnic Learning Disabilities Initiative)
Khushi Usmani (Minority Ethnic Learning Disabilities Initiative)

CLERK TEAM LEADER

Gillian Baxendine

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

David McLaren

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Festival Theatre

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Wednesday 21 June 2000

(*Morning*)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:06*]

Special Educational Needs

The Convener (Mrs Mary Mulligan): Good morning. Welcome to the Festival Theatre for yet another meeting.

This morning's business starts with further evidence for our special educational needs inquiry. I welcome members of the Equity Group to the committee.

I will ask Drew Hunter—who has indicated that he will lead—to make a statement, which should be kept short so that there is plenty of time for questions. I will then open the debate up for members' questions. If members have questions for a specific witness, they will identify which witness. If they do not, witnesses should feel free to chip in with any comments that they feel are relevant.

I remind people to ensure that mobiles are switched off—they interfere with the sound equipment.

Drew Hunter (Equity Group): We were not sure how long we were going to have, so we have each prepared a little presentation. We will cut them down, because we realise that the questions are the most important part of the meeting.

I am secretary of the Equity Group, a small but growing group of disabled people, parents with disabled children and other interested supporters. We got together because we have a shared commitment to inclusive education. The aims of the group are to establish the legal rights of children with special educational needs to mainstream education with appropriate adjustment and support; to promote entitlement to inclusive education as a civil rights issue; to gather and spread information about good practice in inclusive education in Scotland and internationally; and to help schools, parents, children and communities learn together how to achieve and sustain inclusive skills for all.

Committee members should all have received copies of our submission and our newsletter.

The Convener: Yes, we have.

Drew Hunter: I will hand over to Nancy Hansen.

Nancy Hansen (Equity Group): It is a great pleasure to be at the committee today. I am vice chair of the Equity Group.

I am here for very personal reasons. Education has been the defining element of my life. I am a product of inclusive education, which I experienced long before that was trendy. I escaped segregated or special education at the age of 10. I always refer to that as emancipation day, because it was the big moment of my life. I would not be speaking to the committee today if that had not happened to me.

On a personal note, this is the first time in my academic career—I am now studying for a PhD in human geography at Glasgow—that I have not felt that if I do not get it right I will be sent back to special school.

I am currently on educational leave from my post as a research analyst with the Canadian Government. My academic experience since leaving segregated education has been excellent, which does not mean that the experience has not been full of challenges. The experience has given me the skills and ability to interact effectively with my peers, to gain social skills that I would not have had and to have employment experience and acquire skills that I guarantee I would not otherwise have had.

Many of us who have gone through the special education process experience it as educational apartheid—one does not get the same quality of academic challenge as one would in an integrated system. A lot of that apartheid is fuelled by fear, prejudice and lack of knowledge and expectation.

If what I say seems a bit over the top, I ask members to think back to the 1870s when a group of radicals wanted to experience university education at several well-known and highly respected universities south of the border, which shall remain nameless. However, that was not thought to be appropriate for women, because they were not thought to have brains that were suited to university education. It was thought that their brains were too small and that the education process would damage their reproductive systems and make them hysterical. It was thought that if women were to be allowed entry they would have to be in segregated classes to ensure that mixing with the male population would not make them hysterical—they would be chaperoned at all times by special helpers. I do not know why, but that struck a chord with me. It is also interesting that although women were able to study at those institutions, no degrees were conferred on them until 60 years after the initial admissions. I hope that inclusive education can move along a little faster than that.

Dorothy McDonald (Equity Group): I come from the isle of Bute. I am the parent of two daughters: Jill, who is 10 and Nina, who is six.

My aspirations for both my children in relation to their education are similar to those of most parents in the room. I want them to receive a good quality education and to be able to socialise and make friends with children of their own age. I want them to be able to participate in the everyday activities that go on in our local school and community. I want them to get the qualifications that they will need to enable them to work in their chosen careers as adults and to grow up as self-confident young women who have a positive contribution to make to our society.

My educational aspirations for Nina are no different from my aspirations for Jill, just because Nina happens to use a wheelchair and has speech difficulties. However, within the education system, my experience as Nina's parent has been different from my experience as Jill's parent.

When Nina was a baby, my main concern was that she received input from the various therapists and professionals that she needed to help to improve her mobility and speech. Everyone talked about the importance of early intervention. In many ways, schooling was the last thing on my mind. I was too busy concentrating on the things that Nina could not do and on trying to help her to do them.

When I thought eventually about Nina's education, special school became an option because I had been told that in a special school Nina could have daily access to speech therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. Classes would be small and geared towards Nina's level of attainment; adult to child ratios would be high and the building would be totally wheelchair accessible.

I fully understand why a lot of parents choose special educational schools for their children when the alternative is often an unwelcoming and inaccessible mainstream school. The prospect for the parent of having an endless struggle is too difficult to bear. However, we live on the island of Bute, so for Nina to attend a special school she would have had to live away from home at the age of five. She would have lost daily social contact with her family and friends and she would have ceased to be a full-time member of our community. Our choice was easy to make. Most children with disabilities who live on Bute go to the local mainstream school because of our location, so that was where Nina would go. That was not only because that was what we wanted, but because the local authority had to make it work.

10:15

I could go through all the problems that we have had at school, although ours is a good school. We have had continually to lobby our education authority to provide the essential supports that Nina needs. I will give the committee one example. Before Nina started school—bear it in mind that this is a school in which there were already disabled children in wheelchairs—I had questions about wheelchair access, which both the school and the education authority considered had been addressed adequately by the provision of external ramps around the outside of the school. It was not acceptable to me that disabled children had to be taken outside in all weathers every time they moved from their classrooms to other parts of the school.

I felt that I had no option but to campaign to obtain for my younger daughter what my older daughter and every other able-bodied child in the school took for granted—when they went to the dining hall, the gym, the computer suite or to the library, they could do so internally. They did not have to be taken away from their classes early so that they could put their coats on and go outside to be carted all the way round the school to get to another part of the building. I have campaigned for that and changes have been made, but more are needed and more money is needed to fund the necessary adaptations to the primary school and the secondary school on the island.

My experience has been very frustrating and, from what I can gather from other parents of disabled children who are in mainstream schools, I am not alone. However, I would hate for members to think that my experience has been wholly negative—it has not.

Nina is in the best possible place for her at the moment. She is in an ordinary class in a local school and she is simply getting on with being a six-year-old. Primary 2 has a pretty hectic schedule and—on top of reading, Heinemann mathematics, circle time and national tests—Nina has somehow to fit in occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech therapy. How do we do that? It can be done only if the people who are involved are prepared to be creative, to work collaboratively with one another and to include parents fully in the discussions.

I am pleased to be able to say that, at present, the two most important people in Nina's school life—her class teacher and her special needs auxiliary—are two of the most committed, thoughtful and resourceful people I have come across. They make inclusion work because they are willing to adapt what they do in the class and in the school—whatever that may be—to include Nina in absolutely everything. They also include me by talking to me and asking what I think would work. I do not feel that they regard me as a nuisance or a threat, unlike some other parents, who feel that strongly.

I will conclude by giving a simple example of how inclusion is made to work in Rothesay Primary School. At Christmas, primary 2 had to lead the school assembly and every child had to participate. The children all sat on benches and when we—the parents—arrived it was not immediately obvious whether Nina was present, although I thought that she was on a bench with the other children.

The children had to stand up one by one and say something to do with Christmas. As they went on, it became obvious to me that, at some point during the round of 28 children, Nina would participate. She has poor speech and quite often people do not understand what she says. I was beginning to get a bit nervous, thinking, "What will she say?" I assumed that Nina would not stand up and that she would just sit on the bench. When it came to her turn, the two little girls on either side of her helped her to her feet and a balloon miraculously appeared from behind her. Nina said, "I can hit a balloon," and hit it. Then the two children next to her helped her to sit down again. I was touched by that—"balloon" was one of the words that Nina could say really well and she said it clearly. It was not obvious to anybody else in the audience that she has speech difficulties.

I spoke to Nina's teacher and her auxiliary afterwards and they said, "Oh, we were really struggling when we thought about this assembly. We did not know whether to get Nina in her wheelchair. We did not know whether she could sit on a bench." She can sit on a bench quite easily, but they did not know whether it would be best for her, for safety reasons, to stay in her wheelchair. What swung it for them was that, during the practices, Nina's best friend said, "I'm shy—I'm scared to stand up and speak," to which Nina had replied, "Come on. Everybody's doing it." Her friend said, "If Nina stands up and speaks, I'll stand up and speak." The teacher and the auxiliary told her that she would have to help Nina and that is what happened—the children helped her, and she stood up and spoke. The teacher and the auxiliary chose what she would say because they knew that she could say it. They adapted the activity, involved the other children in it and made it work. Nina was totally included in that assembly.

We need people who are willing to make things work. Fortunately, we have those people at the moment. As I said, my aspirations for both my children are the same and my expectation is that, if Parliament ensures that the right kind of support is provided for disabled children in mainstream schools, those aspirations will be realised.

Drew Hunter: I will try to be brief. I was born in Dunfermline in Fife in 1971. I have spina bifida and carry the label of someone who has a physical impairment.

I graduated in 1992 from the University of Stirling with a Bachelor of Arts degree in history with politics. I began my education at the age of four, when I attended the local special nursery in Lochgelly. During that time, I was seen by various specialists, speech therapists and educational psychologists and I underwent numerous tests. Both my parents were adamant that I should have the same rights, opportunities and life experiences as other kids, such as my brothers, my sisters and friends. After many months of fighting with doctors, psychologists and local authorities, I was finally given the green light to begin my schooling in a mainstream class.

I went to Foulford Primary School in Cowdenbeath, which was a new school with a young and enthusiastic head teacher whose attitude and fundamental belief was that all kids belong together and who welcomed me with open arms. He was also vociferous in his views that the necessary support should be made available to me so that I could carry out my day-to-day activities and play a full part in the class. He persuaded the local authority to employ an auxiliary. As time went on, I used the auxiliary less and less, but the auxiliary become invaluable when I was nine and had to go into hospital for a major operation. I was away from school for three months, during which time the head teacher was adamant that I should not miss anything. Therefore, he sent work home with the auxiliary and I got my lessons on a daily basis

Heather Anderson (Equity Group): What a bummer. [*Laughter.*]

Drew Hunter: I am grateful for that now, but at the time I did not think that it was quite such a good idea. It meant, however, that by the time I got back into the class, I had missed very little and was able to take up where I had left off.

At the beginning of primary 6, my dad changed employment and we had to move up to Nairn and then to Banchory. Again, it was effortless. We had strong support from head teachers, although there was a bit of conflict with the local authority, which wanted me to travel 20 miles to another school that had a special unit. However, the head teacher was adamant. He told me, "You're coming here—I'll sort it out with the local authority." That was great. I then spent six years at Banchory Academy, where I gained the O-grades and highers that I needed to get into university.

Why do I believe that I was successful? I believe that I would not have got into a mainstream school had it not been for the constant efforts of my parents to secure for me the best possible start in life. Without their constant willingness to question and challenge deep-rooted beliefs and assumptions, their suspicion of the views of specialists and their strong belief in something that they felt should be the right of all children, I am sure that I would have moved from the special nursery into a special school. The part played by individual head teachers, teachers and some local authorities was equally important. Those who had a positive impact on my life shared a common belief that all children belong together and that diversity in educational settings benefits all children. They had the foresight to view inclusion as an opportunity to promote and celebrate diversity.

I firmly believe that, had I missed the opportunity to go to a mainstream school, I would not have gained the qualifications that are necessary to go to university—I would not have obtained my Bachelor of Arts degree. That would have meant that I would have missed out on some of the happiest times of my life. It is unlikely that I would have got a steady job—certainly not one that is challenging, fulfilling and rewarding, that helps me to grow and that allows me to do the things I want to do and live the way I want to live.

If I had attended special schools, I do not think that I would be speaking to you today—it is as simple as that. I have friends who have similar impairments to mine. I went to university and have been able to fulfil many of my dreams while many of them went to special schools or to special units in a mainstream setting and are deeply traumatised by their school experiences. They have been labelled and segregated from an early age and their life experiences and opportunities to play a valuable role in society have been unfairly limited.

Was my experience all positive? No. I may have gone to the same school as my brothers, sisters and local kids and attended the same classes, but I was excluded from many school outings. I did not get to go on the school exchange trip to France. I missed out on after-school community activities, in which the majority of kids take part. As a result, I often felt frustrated and left out. Many of the social skills that children develop through play and interaction seemed to develop much later in my life.

When one looks at the whole picture, I guess I have been fortunate. My experiences do not match those of the vast majority of people in this country who have been labelled as having a disability. However, I have experienced some of the barriers that are faced by the majority.

At present, for instance, there is no integration strategy. Integration and inclusion throughout Scotland are discretionary, conditional and temporary. They depend largely on the area in which the person lives and the beliefs and values of individuals, from educational psychologists to head teachers and teachers. Many people like me have to prove their suitability for inclusion in a school from the outset and spend much of their time and energy at school trying to justify their inclusion. Often, if someone cannot keep up or appears to be struggling, they fear that they might be sent back to special school. Choice is also limited and my family experienced that. My parents were forced to relocate the family in an effort to match resources with need.

Inclusion is about more than being in the same building; it is about being with others, sharing experiences, building lasting friendships, being recognised for making a valued contribution and being missed when you are not there. Inclusion is not an issue of geography. Yes, we need buildings to be made accessible, but change can happen only if people have accessible minds. We need to realise that it is a fundamental right of all children to be educated together. We all need to realise that today’s children are tomorrow’s future. We need to work together in partnership to secure that future.

Heather Anderson: My job was to come in and summarise the evidence. I am assistant secretary of the Equity Group. We started the group because there was no other group that we could join. No one was promoting inclusive education, but everybody was promoting the status quo. We have a completely different mind set about what is possible, what people are capable of and what their role in society is. We feel passionately about those things.

We know that there is geographical discretion in Scotland—inclusion is a lottery. The reaction one gets to a request to be included in mainstream education depends on where one lives. As Dorothy McDonald said, it is Hobson’s choice. Transport and support are available in the special sector, but very little of such provision is available in the mainstream sector.

10:30

There are many battles. We know that the rate of inclusion through integration is slower than the rate of climate change. In the past 13 years, there has been no increase in the number of kids going to mainstream schools. A lot of them are segregated in the playground and in units in mainstream schools.

There is an enormous lack of expectation about what is possible. In places such as Newham, where inclusive education policies have been adopted, children who had been labelled as severely disabled or handicapped or as having severe learning difficulties are now passing exams. In spite of hundreds of years of segregation, discrimination and lack of expectation, we know that the human spirit prevails and that enormous achievements are made—individuals in individual places do individually brilliant things.

We know that there are many myths about what disabled people are capable of and who they are, which prevent change from happening quickly. We could discuss that at length, but the main point that we want to make is that the idea of integration is based on a lot of myths. The idea of integration is based on the belief that people who are different deserve to be kept together as a separate group. It is based on the belief that people have to get ready and must prove that they are entitled to be part of the mainstream and that as long as they can fit in, they will be acceptable and permitted to stay there. Inclusion is firmly based on the belief that all children have a right to attend a school, that they all belong there and that a school is for the children in its area, not for the children who suit the criteria of the school.

We know that inclusive education has nothing to do with resources; it is about philosophy and belief in what is possible and about where children belong. We know that the cost of continuing to fund a two-tier system and having a parallel track that children can be sent to is extremely expensive, both during the children’s time at school and for the next 40 years of their lives. Children who come out of the special school system tend to go to day-wasting centres. They tend not to have employment. They tend to do a lot of van therapy and do jobs that are unpaid and live in residential group settings. They tend not to have a life or to have equality of opportunity.

Inclusion should not be about the absence of struggle. Trying to help people to play a part and contribute is a constant struggle, constant challenge and constant journey. Inclusion is about the presence of justice. It is about saying, “This is what we believe to be right.” We have managed to do that for women and, in part, for people from other cultural and ethnic groups. It is now time for Scotland to say that we are going to do it for the kids who—for whatever reason—twirl round three times before they sit down, do not communicate using words, cannot lift a foot three inches off the ground or find difficulty walking along a darkened corridor. Those children belong in our schools.

We could ask people who have decades of research experience to come to Scotland at a week’s notice to talk about how they include children and how they help them to be part of schools. There is no lack of knowledge—it is about having the will, the belief and the faith that that is the right thing to do.

The Convener: Thank you. I will open the discussion up to members of the committee.

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I have two questions, both of which are quite general. It is clear from your evidence that you do not believe that enough is done to make inclusion in education a reality. That is something that has come across in quite a lot of the evidence that we have taken for the inquiry. For example, yesterday we visited a school in Stirling that had a special unit for children with autism and Asperger’s syndrome. One of the teachers made what I thought was a very telling point, which was that for some children even mainstream school is only a halfway house to inclusion, because the resources are not available to provide support. Also, for many children, access to mainstream schooling is not available at their local school, so inclusion is not genuine.

My first question is; what more can central Government, local government and schools do to make inclusion more of a reality?

Heather Anderson: A lot of the work that we do means that people must realise that the human services industry’s raw material is people. It needs people who have got something wrong with them. The special needs sector is, therefore, also an industry that needs kids who have something wrong with them. It is a growth industry. If we continue to fund a separate system, which finds things wrong with children and uses that as an excuse to keep them apart from other children, we will continue to run a very expensive system and we will always have somewhere to put excluded children.

As part of the national strategy we must—as well as propping up the two-tier system, if that is what we decide to do—fund inclusion. This is about taking positive steps to make inclusion easier, instead of allowing exclusion to continue to happen at the rate that it does. We know that the resources are often not financial—the children are the real resources in a school. Children are not born prejudiced; they learn it. There is plenty of research about kids in nursery schools who try continually to make friends with and involve disabled kids, because they do not know that they are not meant to do that and have had not been taught that the children have something wrong with them.

There are huge resources in schools that we can tap into if we want to create an inclusive culture and climate. We need to think about different ways in which to teach and educate kids, so that all the children in a school benefit.

Dorothy McDonald: We need to find out what good practice there is around the country, where schools are making it work and how they are making it work.

A year ago, my daughter's auxiliary told me that she really wanted to find out how to give better help to Nina. She asked where she could go to get the training and who she could speak to. I replied, "Margaret, you are it." She is dealing with Nina, an individual child. We have to treat children as individuals, but there is also something of a paradox: the very fact that children are in mainstream education means that there cannot be a centre of excellence in every mainstream school. If all the children went to mainstream schools, all schools would expect at some point to have children with disabilities. Everybody would have to make that work. We need to find out what is going on elsewhere in the country and which schools are making it work.

On physical access, there were a lot of difficulties in making the school building properly—and I mean properly—accessible. I was told before Nina started school that it was impossible to make the necessary internal changes in the building. If I had just accepted that, which is what parents before me had obviously done, the school would not have the two lifts that it does. The only reason that that was done was that I really pushed for it: I said, "Let's think about this laterally. You say it's not possible—you prove it." They could not prove that it was not possible, because it was possible.

Many local authorities do not seem to have the expertise. They do not seem to have the knowledge. I suggested that the authority needed to commission an independent access audit. It did not seem to know what that was or whom to approach to get the information.

Some of the initiative has to come from the Executive. I know that £12 million has been given to improve inclusion and access. If that money is simply given to local authorities to spend as they want, there is no guarantee that it will be spent properly. Guidelines have to be issued, specifying how that money should be spent.

Nancy Hansen: I want to reiterate that it is frequently thought to be a good thing for a disabled child to go to a mainstream school. However, it is equally good for the non-disabled kids. I received a lot of positive feedback from people in similar situations to mine. The classmates learn much from the disabled child—it has been a very positive experience for them throughout. The challenge is what makes it interesting.

Nicola Sturgeon: My final question relates to something that Heather Anderson mentioned. I was struck by Nancy Hansen's description of feelings of emancipation on going from a special school to a mainstream school. Last week, we heard evidence from a young deaf boy, who described almost identical feelings when he went from mainstream education to Donaldson's College for the deaf. I do not think that he would have disagreed with anything that you are saying about the right of a child to have inclusive education. He would have argued that inclusion demands some choice. Would you agree with that? Do you think that there is a place for special schools? What support should they get? You have said that there should be more funding to promote inclusion in mainstream education. Should the support for special schooling continue? Do special schools, in their own setting, do enough to promote inclusion?

Heather Anderson: The Equity Group campaigns for people who want their children to be in mainstream settings to have an entitlement to make that happen. We are not taking away anybody's rights. We are not telling people that they should not have the choice of sending their child to a special school. We completely understand why parents who are faced with huge anxiety about where their four-year-old or five-year-old child should go often choose the most comfortable and safest option. We would say that those parents are perhaps not being given an opportunity to make an informed choice—they are not told where that choice finishes. We would argue for more information about the outcome of that choice in the long run.

Inclusion cannot be imposed on anybody; it can only be achieved with people. Our line is that, if people want to be included, they should be supported in that—in playing a part and making a contribution. If people see good things happening as a result of that, they will choose an inclusive rather than a segregated route. That is the only way in which things will change. I am not advocating the closure of one system or option; we have to invest to make inclusion work. An awful lot of resources currently go into the parallel system.

Inclusion in the mainstream sector is underfunded and under-resourced. There are no forums in which people can share ideas or discuss how to get down to the nitty-gritty of a particular child in a particular situation. The Parliament can take many strategic decisions to assist such discussions. We were wanting to get kids to come up with inclusion policies for their own schools. Lots of positive things can be done that are not about taking away the rights of another group of parents, who are making their choices based on their best options.

10:45

Dorothy McDonald: My daughter went to a special nursery on the mainland one day a week, which involved a 60-mile trip. It meant a ferry journey and it was the middle of winter. Parents on Bute with pre-school children have to do the same—the children go over to the special nursery on the mainland one day a week. Our experience of that special nursery, which is attached to a special school, was very good. The staff were very good, and I learned a lot as a parent. It helped Nina an awful lot.

The children from Bute go back to a mainstream school in Bute. I think that they are quite well equipped going into that mainstream school, having had the experience of the special nursery. It would perhaps have been better if the staff from the special school had somehow been funded to come to Bute one day a week, so that they could help the teachers in the mainstream school to find out how to work collaboratively.

I do not like the idea of Nina being taken out of the class for physiotherapy, although I know that it has to happen sometime and that there have to be compromises. It was suggested that certain small exercises could be done with the children. Those exercises would be good for all primary 1 children for the first five minutes of the school day, and could include breathing and stretching exercises. They could have been included in classroom activities, which would have benefited me and other children. This is about using our imagination and trying to take the best from the special school system, and from the good people in it, using their talents to promote inclusion in the mainstream sector.

Heather Anderson: The most recent statistics from the Alliance for Inclusive Education in England say that, if someone gets caught in the special school system, their chances of getting back into the mainstream sector are 1 per cent. Once someone is in the system, it is very difficult for them to get out. The younger the child, the more pressure there is to put them into the parallel system, either when they start primary school or go into secondary school.

Nicola Sturgeon: I know that you are not here to argue against one system, but I want to ask whether you think that part of the reason for what you say is that some people feel that the specialist system benefits them more than mainstream schooling. I think that that is most striking in the case of deaf children, who feel excluded in a mainstream setting. They feel that being in an environment where everybody around them speaks their language is much more inclusive than being in a mainstream school.

Heather Anderson: People feel excluded if they are not being included—being physically present is not enough. In Newham, there are schools where signing is part of the day-to-day activity. There are ways of including people so that they know that they are part of the school; there are ways of excluding them so that they feel that they are not. Presence is not sufficient for inclusion; inclusion takes hard work. Until we get better at that, people are going to be harmed.

There is a difference between choosing to be with a group of people because of a common interest and being segregated on the basis of a category. We all meet people with whom we have common interests and with whom we enjoy being, but we are not told that we have to live with those people all the time and go to the same day centre every day. People meet because of common interests and they should not be bracketed together because of an impairment.

The Convener: As many members want to ask questions, I must ask them to be brief.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I have lots of questions. The more evidence I hear, the more questions I have. Your comments about being inclusive make a lot of sense. I have real concerns about the system, the interim arrangements and the damage that they can cause. Like Nicola Sturgeon, I have been visiting schools and I have been to places where mainstreaming seems to be starting to work and to others where it is clearly not working. Teachers do not seem to be ready and there is little evidence of the good practice that Dorothy McDonald spoke about. Nowhere has been identified as a place where people can go to get some of that good practice. There is no space to allow teachers to plan and prepare for kids. As far as I can see, parents have not been involved. I firmly believe that parents know their children better than anyone else does, but that does not seem to have been acknowledged in the schools that I have visited.

I am concerned about how we can move children without doing a lot of damage in the interim. I know that sometimes that is the risk that we must take, but we must remember that the kids are in the middle. Last week, Mark Macmillan from Donaldson’s College convinced me that we need the college and that we need that kind of expertise. It might be important to link that expertise with provision in other schools. There are all sorts of dilemmas and I am not sure that the evidence that I am hearing is helping me to resolve them.

Nancy Hansen: At the Educational Institute of Scotland annual general meeting in Dundee, I spoke at a fringe meeting on inclusive education. It was good to be there because our aims are mirrored in the disability policy of the EIS, which is Scotland’s largest teaching union. Teachers from all sectors were saying that they needed more training. They want to help, but they need the training to do it properly.

Heather Anderson: There are different models of change. In Italy, it was decided to remove all impediments to the development of the whole human being; the segregated system was banned in 1977 and people moved to a unified system. Italy has had 20 years of making inclusion work, which has had a big impact on people with disabilities in that culture. In places such as New Hampshire, that change has been done on a school-by-school basis. People worked with individual schools, helping them to become inclusive. There is a lot to be learned from other countries. There are different approaches in Australia and in other states in America. Newham, which was mentioned earlier, took a completely different line.

Our submission includes a list of recommendations. However, we think that it is crucial that there is a full debate about values, beliefs and philosophy. As soon as we have our philosophy straight, we can consider our strategy for reaching the dream. The first step is to convince people that inclusion is a good option. If people believe that inclusion is a good option, they will help others to see the bigger picture by bringing them together to talk about it.

We wanted to run a three-day summer school for parents, teachers and educationists to give them a chance to work out how mainstreaming might work for individual children. That is not a textbook exercise. Every child is different. Inclusion for every child demands gumption, imagination and resourcefulness. We cannot turn to page 83 of the handbook and look up how to include children with Down's syndrome—everything must be done on an individual basis.

Cathy Peattie: I realise that. I have been lobbied by one parent whose child was excluded from a unit in a mainstream school for being difficult. The child is autistic and was behaving as one would expect a child with autism to behave. There is something very wrong if such a child is excluded. We need to consider the children who are already in the system. Having read the background to the case, I believe that the teacher was not prepared to deal with the child—they saw the difficulty rather than the child. How do we get past that? I am not saying that we cannot go beyond it—I think it important that we do—but there is still a long way to go. Training and discussion will help, but we must make progress. I would be interested in considering models from other countries.

Dorothy McDonald: Teacher training is also important. People who enter teacher training colleges should do so with the assumption that at some point in their career they will be teaching a child in a wheelchair, or a child who has autism or Down's syndrome. I have heard people say, "They should not be in this school," or, "I am not trained to deal with that." As a parent talking to other parents, I have been told that a child's auxiliary is great, but the class teacher—perhaps in a particular year—is hopeless. In such cases, the child seems to be thought of as the responsibility of the auxiliary, who should deal with any problems. That is not inclusion. That is a problem with the attitude of an individual teacher. We cannot legislate for that, but we can ensure that from now on all teacher-training courses contain a greater element relating to children with disabilities and special needs.

Drew Hunter: I agree with Dorothy. Many of my friends at university went on to become teachers and many of them have yet to come across a situation where they are teaching a person with a disability. There is a lot of willingness among teachers, but many are afraid that they do not know how to deal with certain situations, because they have not had the training. That should be addressed.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): You have already answered my question on teacher training and your evidence mentions the attitudes of peers, families and society. What change of thinking is needed among senior educational professionals, such as directors of education and so on? It has become evident to us that attitudes among such professionals are rather uneven. I am interested in your thoughts, because those people have huge powers in the local authorities.

Dorothy McDonald: There could be more awareness training for such professionals, perhaps involving parents. My contact with the school in relation to my daughter Jill was limited to parents nights and the parent-teacher association. However, as far as Nina is concerned, I have had greater contact with the education department—the educational psychologist, the head of support services and the director of education—than with the school. Because I am fairly vociferous, they probably see me as a problem parent—one of the ones who is always on the phone and writing letters. It is about time that parents were involved in the training that is given to the people who run education departments. Surely those people have in-service training.

Heather Anderson: We suggested that one of the in-service training days could be used for disability equality awareness. In England, there is disability equality training in schools. There is a massive amount of recent research—I have brought just a small handful to the committee—from places such as the Educational Institute of Scotland, the University of Manchester and the Bolton Institute of Higher Education. People can learn from others' experience, and we could organise events to allow people to get the information really quickly.

The Convener: If Fiona McLeod and Ken

Macintosh keep their questions very brief, we can get the two of them in before we move on.

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): Instead of asking some specific questions with examples, I have two wider questions. When we talk about issues such as teacher training and disability awareness, we are actually talking about a continuum of learning strategies where, if every child was taught to his or her needs or abilities, we would not have to mention special needs or disabled children. We would not need to have special teacher training, because all teacher training should equip all staff to deal with all learning needs.

I think that Heather Anderson mentioned that we have to change attitudes. Can you comment on the presumption of mainstreaming in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill, which has just been passed? Will that bill change such attitudes?

11:00

Heather Anderson: That is the $100,000 question. As only 17 per cent of people in the special schools system have any specialist training, there are many myths about what is meant by specialist training. Inclusive schools are better schools, because inclusive teachers have to work at being creative in teaching all children. All children are included, no matter whether English is not their first language, whether they use wheelchairs or whether they want to get on because they are dead excited about learning.

As it is better to have two teachers in the classroom instead of one, we have to examine models of teaching. It is important for teachers to teach all children, not those who need the least teaching. Richard Rieser, the director for the Alliance for Inclusive Education, has said that value added should mean getting the best output from the most disadvantaged kids. Schools should be scored on that, not on getting the easiest kids through the most exams. Value added means getting rid of inequality of opportunity in education, not exaggerating it, as currently happens.

It was fantastic that the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill was passed because, as we said in our April newsletter, it contained a presumption of inclusion. All committee members will know that we had grave concerns about the exclusion measures, which take us back to the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. We will work with the legislation, which does not force anyone to include children if they do not want to. However, it allows the people who believe that kids should have a chance for a life to continue their good work. We must focus on people who want to make the change and not let legislation get in the way of that.

The Convener: Because of time constraints, I will move on and let Ken Macintosh ask his question. Then we will bring this part of the meeting to a close.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): The witnesses have put an overwhelming case for ending the discrimination that disabled children face. Perhaps you could comment on the question whether we should impose national guidelines or whether we would be better off with a supportive local authority, even in the face of a hostile national authority.

Are special schools an obstacle to inclusion? Several comments in your submission highlight the progress that can be made and the hurdles that must be overcome. However, I am not sure whether the goal is to get rid of all special schools. Do we want a situation where all children are included in mainstream schools? Indeed, would that be possible? Your submission mentions

> "Children with emotional and behavioural difficulties".

It continues:

> "We are asked about . . . the need to exclude them from school".

However, the situation might be the other way around. Psychologists always argue that children with challenging behaviour benefit from being taken out of a classroom and treated in a special way. Do you completely disagree with that argument?

Dorothy McDonald: People must justify why children should be excluded instead of justifying why they should be included. I understand your point about children with behavioural difficulties, perhaps those on the autistic spectrum. Obviously children will need time out to be given their own space; many methods of teaching children with autism allow for such periods within a mainstream setting. For example, there is the TEACCH method, which is short for the treatment and education of autistic and related communication handicapped children.

I am part of a parent support group on Bute. One family has a child with Asperger's syndrome, who was in the local primary school but is now in a special school. His parents do not want him to be there. I imagine that the local authority is spending far more money sending the child to a special residential school than it would cost to provide the necessary support in the local school for time out, if he needs time out, or for a low sensory environment for children with that impairment. The question is how to make that work. Although we have to treat children as individuals and consider their individual needs, children with autism should not necessarily have to go to a school for autistic children. I do not know whether that answers your question.

Mr Macintosh: It sort of does. Although I accept the overwhelming thrust of your argument, the question is how far the proposal should be taken. Should there be no special schools? Although you have powerfully made the point that we are not in the business of taking away choice from anyone, there is no doubt that a line of thinking, particularly from educational psychologists, believes that some children—not necessarily autistic children, but children with mental health problems or specific challenging behaviour that is very difficult to handle—are better looked after in a more isolated way.

Heather Anderson: That goes back to the question of the outcome of such a choice. The Scottish Executive has plenty of adverts about how children end up if they take drugs; heart disease adverts show four-year-old kids lying on sofas and warn children what might happen to them. That is what is missing from this equation: folk are not able to make an informed choice. We cannot impose inclusion on people; we have to work with them. Our approach would always centre on creating a vision of what is possible and on inviting people to choose inclusion.

I do not think that the Italian solution would be the right one. However, we have to be positive about inclusion. This is a policy statement from one of the counties in Oregon in the USA:

> "All students with disabilities who live in the school district have the opportunity to be totally included in regular classrooms and the extra-curricular activities of their school. The only criterion for a student to attend any of our six elementary schools, our middle schools or our high school is that they must be breathing."

We would say to anyone, "As long as you're breathing, you can come here, and we'll work out how to keep you here and help you to be part of the school."

Dorothy told a story about the balloon: when inclusion works, it takes your breath away. When you see it, you will never forget it, and you will feel ashamed that you did not think it was possible. We need to tell more stories about inclusion working so that folk can have that dream and make it happen for their kids.

Nancy Hansen: Often kids get stuck in a cycle of diminished expectation because of social perceptions and beliefs. I wish that there could be a shift in perception. The space will evolve if the mind is open enough. For things to happen, all you have to do is to realise that they are possible. I honestly believe that, and it has changed my life.

The Convener: I would like to thank all the witnesses. Your comments and answers have been very useful. We will have a lot of discussion about what you have said and about your written submission.

I welcome the next witnesses to the committee. We have received your written submission. In a moment I will ask you to make a few comments, and then I will open up the meeting to allow committee members to ask questions. I will be nice to members who have not yet had the opportunity to ask questions.

Fernando Almeida Diniz (Minority Ethnic Learning Disabilities Initiative): We are pleased to be here. We are quite skilled at submitting written evidence; we are even more skilled at looking at documents that appear thereafter to see whether there is any glimmer of evidence of anything having been taken note of. This is our first opportunity actually to talk, and we welcome that. We will talk about strategic change. We hope that we will enjoy this occasion. My daughter said to me this morning, "Talk serious, but don't look glum." [*Laughter.*] I will do my best.

I shall introduce my colleagues, and then I shall give you a little information about MELDI. We shall then each talk about individual items. I shall start by highlighting what I have put in the first paragraph of our submission on the nature of institutionalised racism. Sophie Pilgrim will talk about priorities 1 and 2 on the first page; Khushi Usmani will talk about priority 3; I shall talk about priority 4, and we hope that you will engage with us at the end on the issue of practical change. I am an academic with a background in educational psychology. I have spent 25 years in special educational needs, both in England and, in the past 10 years, here in Scotland. I hope that I have a sense of the complexity and the contradictions in the field.

MELDI was set up seven years ago with a grant from the social work department in Edinburgh. Its remit was to support what were called black carers. Our title contains the words "learning disabilities". That is a social work policy term; it does not have legitimacy in the education discourse. In reality, we have provided support for individuals with a range of disabilities and/or difficulties, and their families.

We do that through three projects. The first has to do with families—and I would like to emphasise that it is "families" and not "parents". There is a cultural issue here: whereas policy is written around parents' rights, we, especially in the black communities, see it as a families issue. The second project has to do with befriending and the third has to do with special educational needs. Our money for the first project comes from the City of Edinburgh Council, for the second, from the lottery board and, for the third, from the Scottish Executive's innovation grants.

11:15

Our policy focus is on the interface between race and disability in service provision, on what is sometimes characterised as double discrimination. As I will argue later, the discourses on special educational needs and inclusive education are themselves exclusive. They have failed to recognise issues of race and racism. Our central message to you is that MELDI exists because mainstream services are failing to give due regard to racial, ethnic and cultural diversity in service provision.

I am talking not only about the statutory services, but about voluntary organisations, including disability organisations. In terms of systemic strategic change, our success in removing the barriers for individual families, which we do on a case-by-case basis, is also our failure, for it has allowed the mainstream services to carry on gloriously and not to attempt to become racially inclusive as well.

I will now talk about the first section of our submission. In talking about the tackling of institutionalised racism in special educational needs, I am using as a baseline the 1996 Commission for Racial Equality report in Scotland. What has changed since then? The concerns about which we shall talk to you today have to be set in the context of a standardised neglect of race in education and social policy in Scotland. Special educational needs, and race issues within that, have been characterised—as I have written elsewhere—by the “invisibility of race” in SEN. I will give the committee a few examples.

A vast amount of money has been spent, even while I have been in Scotland, on educational research and special needs provision, but it is stubbornly colour-blind; race and ethnicity have not been factored in. So, for example, a study of the integration of children with special needs into the mainstream said nothing about the number of children from minority backgrounds who were affected. That situation is aggravated because of the poor practices of ethnic monitoring that exist in Scotland. The researchers will say, “But we didn’t have the data”, and the data are not there because there is no ethnic monitoring. That is the kind of institutional barrier that I am talking about.

We have no national policy on the assessment or education of children from minority backgrounds with special educational needs. That is something that the CRE’s 1996 report asked for. Neither is there a voice for black people in policy formulation. It is with regret that I have to say that the recently constituted special educational needs forum remains all white.

Sophie Pilgrim will talk to you about provision, and Khushi Usmani will talk about assessment and curriculum practice. There is also a staffing issue. You have before you one of only two black bilingual psychologists in Scotland, both based in Glasgow. There are no speech therapists with a Chinese background in Scotland, and I have the dubious distinction of being the only black academic in my field not just in Scotland but in the United Kingdom. That is systemic failure, and has consequences for the representation of families in decision making and effective practice.

That concludes my opening statement about institutional racism. I shall now hand over to Sophie.

Sophie Pilgrim (Minority Ethnic Learning Disabilities Initiative): I am the research and development officer for the project that Fernando mentioned, which produces video-based information packages for families from minority groups who have a child with special educational needs. I will talk about priorities 1 and 2 of the inquiry—the diversity of provision and the effectiveness of current integration strategies.

The common theme is the difficulty of providing information to families from minority groups. Because those families have more difficulty getting information, they are less well informed and therefore less able to ensure that their children receive the most appropriate provision. As part of my project, I have met representatives from 18 voluntary organisations, many of which work specifically in the area of special educational needs and provide excellent resources for families. However, all those groups are willing to admit that they do not have contact with families from minority groups, for a whole range of reasons. When I visited them, they nearly always asked me why families do not contact them, and we hope to tackle that later on in the project and draw up guidelines for voluntary organisations on improving access to their services.

Research indicates that families from minority groups lack information about disability and special educational needs, including concepts, terminology, the role of professionals, assessment and rights to services. Interpreting and translating services, English-as-additional-language services and advocacy services are concentrated in city areas, so people from minority groups who live in rural or remote areas are even more cut off.

On the effectiveness of current integration strategies, let me tell you about my situation. I am the parent of a five-year-old with special educational needs. To find a school place for him I visited six different schools in two local authority areas. In one local authority area, he would be placed in a mainstream school with support from what they call a language unit. However, the professionals from that language unit would support him in a mainstream class. In the other local authority area that we visited, the choice would be between a special school and a special needs nursery. You asked the Equity Group about the section in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill on the presumption to mainstream. It is very hard to see what effect that has had when such different options can be offered to people in two neighbouring local authority areas.

We visited six different establishments. It is very demanding, to negotiate one's way in to see what is available, to work out the difference between a language unit in one authority and a language unit in another, and to work out the difference between mainstream and special education. If someone does not have access to support and information, it is difficult for them to assess what is available to their child in the first place, let alone negotiate the best possible provision for them.

There has not been much research in Scotland into families from minority groups with children with special educational needs. However, a recent study indicates that minority ethnic pupils are underrepresented in assessments for dyslexia. That is interesting, because there is evidence that children from those groups are not seen as having special educational needs, as opposed to general learning difficulties. We have no statistical data on minority ethnic representation among those with sensory impairment, speech and language disorders, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and autism. Patterns within special educational needs should be investigated more, so that we can ensure that children from minority groups are not being placed in special schools and special units rather than being offered mainstream education.

Khushi Usmani (Minority Ethnic Learning Disabilities Initiative): I am a bilingual educational psychologist working in Glasgow. It was heartening to hear what the Equity Group had to say about inclusive education, because it overlaps with issues related to racism. This is about justice. It is also about attitudes and prejudices—about envisaging difficulties where they need not exist. Sometimes it is attitudes that create the difficulties, rather than problems in the child, the family or the community. That is even more the case when it comes to bilingual children. Language is then used as an excuse for creating a difficulty, when the important thing is to communicate with people.

Anyone who has been abroad and visited places where they do not speak the language knows that there are ways of communicating or trying to communicate. It requires considerable effort, but it is possible to get started taking that approach. Showing a willingness to communicate includes people and allows them to offer help and support. If a professional wants to communicate with a family that speaks a different language, making an effort will encourage that family to support them, as both sides want to communicate.

One of the biggest barriers that we face is the resistance of professionals to communicating and their use of the fact that people speak a different language or have a culture that they do not know much about as an excuse. The witnesses from the Equity Group said that teachers had told them that they did not have the skills, training or expertise. I am not sure how people get expertise, except by struggling in practice. The more that people try to practise and engage, the more expertise they develop, as one of the parents explained earlier about the special needs auxiliary with her child.

Most of the issues that I come across are to do with attitudes and racism. That is the biggest block, and it is the main cause of bilingual children failing. There is a lot of research to say that if bilingual children are in an additive bilingual environment—that is, one in which their language is valued and encouraged—they outperform monolingual children. We know that being able to speak two languages must be better than being able to speak one, because you have greater skills and a wider range of resources to draw upon. It makes you more resourceful. If bilingual children are failing, it is not because the research says that language is a hindrance or a problem; it must be to do with prejudice and the lack of opportunities that children are allowed.

In her articles, Victoria Graff showed that once a teacher or someone in education makes a decision that a child had difficulties or special needs, the situation becomes like a conveyor belt, and people are reluctant to say: "Hang on. I don't think this child has special needs." They are more likely to go along with the decision. The way in which bilingual children or children from ethnic minorities are perceived as having special education needs when they do not—other issues may be involved, or a lack of opportunities—affects the decisions that people in education make, which results in those children being labelled later on.

Equity Group referred to low expectations. The failure of children from ethnic minorities has much to do with attitudes, and not with their being culturally deprived or coming from a poor background, which is often said. Poverty is not racially specific. We know that people from ethnic minorities are more likely to be disadvantaged and impoverished, but even so, when I visit families they are supportive. Although they may not be enriched materially, they are enriched in many other ways that help and enable children.

11:30

My other point relates to schools not being inclusive, not only of people's culture, background and experiences, but of parents. The committee said how important it is for parents to be involved.

If bilingual children or children from ethnic minorities are failing because they have special needs, the best way to deal with that difficulty is to get the family involved and to get support within the family. There have been numerous occasions on which education professionals have not included parents.

What I have mentioned so far is not out of the ordinary. As people from ethnic minorities we are not asking for something special; we are only asking for the same sort of consideration that you give to someone who is more advantaged socially. When articulate parents claim that their children have dyslexia, they get attention and access to psychologists and the various people who are involved. We are not asking for anything special.

Because this is such a wide field, I do not know what more to say, except that the attitudes that are passed on from the teachers to the head teachers and then to the psychologists almost create a conveyor belt. A child whose special needs could be stemmed becomes a child with special needs. There is also the problem of a child becoming a special needs child because he or she is failing—not because he or she really has special needs, but because of an excluding background.

Fernando Almeida Diniz: I do not need to say much about the fourth area: equal and active participation of parents. The indicators are not a wish list that I dreamed up. They come from the case study research that we undertook over a five-year period, some of which was published in 1997. Those indicators are practical.

That is the end of our presentation.

The Convener: Thank you. Do members of the committee have any questions?

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When we have taken evidence and visited schools, we quite regularly ask about the level of difficulty, or the experience that people have had with the record of needs. We would be interested in your viewpoint, which might be helpful to us, as it might show that children from ethnic minority backgrounds have distinct difficulties in relation to the record of needs.

Fernando Almeida Diniz: The notion of a record of needs is problematic in any event. Because we do not have research across the board, all I can say is that none of the families with whom we work, and I acknowledge that they are all from the Edinburgh area, had any notion of the record of need. That was puzzling, given that some of the children would fall within the traditional notion of having special educational needs, with complex difficulties or whatever. One would assume that those children would have a record of need, like other children within the authority area. Yet the parents would ask, “What is a record of need?”

However, it is possible that someone has given them something. For example, we have had cases involving Chinese families where people said, “We got this letter or this document”, but where the parents did not understand the information—it might not be provided in their language. There are questions about the extent to which kids from minority backgrounds are engaged in the record of needs process, warts and all. I cannot make an authoritative statement about the situation across Scotland, but I have gathered evidence from my own academic work, from, say, going to Aberdeen and meeting teachers on in-service courses. They say, “Hmm, yeah, there are difficulties”.

Mr Monteith: This question, which I ask out of curiosity, is for Khushi Usmani. You are presented as one of only two bilingual education psychologists. What languages do you speak? What languages does the other bilingual educational psychologist speak? That would give us a feel for current provision.

Khushi Usmani: I speak Urdu, which gives me access to Hindi—those are the main languages of India and Pakistan. My colleague speaks Cantonese and, I imagine, Hakka as well. He conducts most of the assessments in the Chinese community in Glasgow. We have another colleague who speaks Hindi and Punjabi, but she is only part time.

Mr Monteith: Do other local authorities make use of your services, because they do not have that provision?

Khushi Usmani: The authorities that were previously part of Strathclyde Regional Council usually call me in when they are puzzled.

Fernando Almeida Diniz: The Chinese service is very much in demand. All the Edinburgh assessments must be re-routed westward.

Cathy Peattie: I want to ask about the record of needs, in which context I am interested in the involvement of parents. The situations that you are outlining arise right across the spectrum. I have come from the voluntary sector, and I know that convincing social work departments that they need to engage with families from ethnic minority communities is like talking to a brick wall. I was told that there was no community care problem for folk from that section of the community. How do we get past that, to ensure that people are visible and that parents are consulted?

People build their own barriers, and consultation becomes difficult. Rather than looking for ways round the barriers, they say, “I cannot do it.” All the things that you are describing happen, and we need to move forward, but there is frustration because we do not seem to be getting anywhere—not only in education, but in relation to the wider area of provision.

Sophie Pilgrim: We recently received funding from the Scottish Executive to hold an event in a year's time, and we are hoping to draw up guidelines for local authorities, incorporating good practice, as there is inconsistency in provision across Scotland. We hope that that event might generate information and ideas.

The record of needs contains a description of the condition of the child and a description of the appropriate provision for that child. However, it is difficult to convey to families that they have the opportunity to negotiate what goes into the record, and that that is a legal entitlement. There is a lack of equity for parents from minority groups, as that issue has not been taken on board.

Because educational psychologists allocate provision within their local authorities, they know what provision is available. A parent has the experience of seeing their child's condition being made to fit the provision that is available in the area. The evidence for that is clear when a different local authority is contacted, which views the child's condition in a different way and highlights different aspects of it. That level of complexity and disparity within the allocation of resources for special educational needs means that families from black and minority ethnic groups are likely to lose out, as they have less negotiating power and less contact with the voluntary organisations that would be able to point out to them where they are able to step in and act for themselves.

Cathy Peattie: Last week, we heard that it might be worth changing the record of needs system. I agree that we need to change it, but perhaps there should be a national focus, to get away from the practice among local authorities of making a child's condition fit the available provision. Would that be a way forward?

Sophie Pilgrim: I very much support that idea. One of the problems with the focus in local authority areas is that it can become unpleasant for parents to interact with the professionals. For example, if a placing request is made for a scarce provision, a negative reaction can be given at a personal level. Parents should not have to face that. If the parent is from a minority ethnic group, that experience does not help the situation.

Khushi Usmani: When parents are involved in drawing up the record of needs, they are disempowered. That situation needs to be tackled. We have legislation that says that parents must be involved, and that their consent is required, but that is done quickly. They are often tied down to saying what the people in the authority want them to say. The more empowered parents are, the more likely they are to be heard and the better the outcome is for the child. The legislation helps to exert pressure from the top down, but people always seem to find a way round, or a way to restrict, parental involvement.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Would there be a case for a national advocacy group or a national provision of educational psychologists? If it came from the centre in that way, the provision would be available to all local authorities. I can understand why a local authority might not employ such professionals on a full-time basis, and that provision can be patchy. Would you support the idea of creating a national advocacy and advisory group as a contact point for local authorities?

11:45

Fernando Almeida Diniz: One must recognise that the patterns of settlement are different in Scotland, and that a numbers game has always been used as an excuse to do nothing. Local authorities simply say that they do not have people from ethnic minorities. One of the groups that feels most marginalised is people of African origin, as the perception is that we do not have them in Scotland.

We might need a national resource. For example, because of the problematic lack of access to language resources, one of my colleagues is involved in an EU-funded project that supports isolated learners from minority backgrounds through teleconferencing. We should consider such strategies. It is not about every local authority thinking that it must run its own show. Our fundamental problem is that, even where there are the numbers of people, the provision is not being made. That is worrying.

My final point is about the reluctance to engage with families. One has to recognise that some people are reluctant to do so. However, there is a thriving black voluntary sector in Scotland, with black projects. It is time for the statutory sector to engage with those projects. There are many black young professionals in the voluntary sector—Sophie Pilgrim is an example. Why are they not in the statutory sector? Why are they leaving the statutory sector to take up non-permanent, no-guarantee jobs in the voluntary sector? They are a resource, and should be used.

Khushi Usmani: One of the hurdles for people accessing a resource, even if they know of it—whether it is the interpreting service, myself or some other rare resource—is finance and the different authorities' having to buy people in. That acts as a hurdle, especially for small authorities in which people try to save on costs. If there was a national agreement, understanding or exchange that did not require money, that would ease accessibility for people—wherever they are—to the resource that they need.

Fiona McLeod: I want to explore issues similar to those that I raised with the Equity Group. Much of the matter is about philosophy and changing attitudes. Heather Anderson said that it is thought that mainstream is okay, and it is up to everybody else to fit in.

If we get the philosophy right for special educational needs in relation to mainstreaming and inclusion, will we also have got it right for children from minority groups with special needs, or should we have—as I think Fernando Diniz suggested—ethnicity audits to ensure that when we address special needs provision, we also address minority special needs provision?

Fernando Almeida Diniz: We must recognise that the special educational needs system in which we work has a long history. Tackling that is clearly a long-term goal. One of the problems with the debate about inclusive education is that everybody thinks that they know what it is and that it happens in their classroom.

Fiona McLeod is right that there is a philosophical issue, but it underpins any society—that issue is justice. It is about the extent to which we say that we recognise that it is complex to move from point A to point B. For example, I do not describe myself in my academic area as belonging to special educational needs. I gave that up 15 years ago; I say that I work on social justice issues in education. If you consider the notion of special educational needs, somehow or another it brings up constructs of disability. Special education has been rooted in the notion of disability. Interestingly, many of the children in special education are not disabled, in terms of the characterisation, but they are treated as if they are disabled; those are constructs that disabled people themselves do not share.

In Scotland, we want a system that is inclusive. I do not mean the same for all; that is not inclusion. If we had such a system, it would begin to be recognised that ethnicity is one of a multiplicity of dimensions and that there is an overlap. We have not even mentioned gender, special needs and race. It would be interesting to know how many black kids of male gender are in special education or in certain groups of special education. I hope that that is not a convoluted, academic way of answering Fiona McLeod's question.

Khushi Usmani: Once the philosophy of inclusive education is entrenched in the education system, it will remove some of the barriers of racism. The difficulty is in people letting go of prejudice that gives them social advantage. We need to create a way of making people feel more confident in themselves, so that they do not need the social advantage and therefore the prejudice. Racism exists partly because it gives advantages to some people.

Sophie Pilgrim: I agree. One of the problems at the moment is the complexity, disparity and difficulty in negotiating decisions. If those barriers were removed, provision could be more equitable.

Yesterday, I had the strange experience of meeting a teacher who had rung me to discuss a Chinese boy. I had asked on the phone whether she wanted to speak to our Chinese development worker, but she said, "No, not at this stage." When she met me, she said that she wanted to find out about schools in Hong Kong so that she could understand the boy better, and asked whether I could recommend some books. I said, "I don't think that there are books that will answer your questions, but our development worker will, because he came from Hong Kong six years ago and has a child with special educational needs." He talked to her and we told her that she could refer her pupil to our services.

When the teacher left, the Chinese development worker said to me, "I think she expected you to be white. I don't think we'll get a referral. Do you?" It is complex, but it was as if she wanted somebody white to explain to her what the situation was in Hong Kong. The focus was not on what the family needed. I tried to ask her whether it would help to have an advocate for the family so that they could explain their needs to her, but I think that she saw it the other way round—that she wanted to understand their needs, so that she could respond to them. It is a bit complicated to sift out what is going on there, but it was an interesting experience.

Cathy Peattie: That takes us back to the barrier; people will not go round their fear.

Sophie Pilgrim: That is right. They do not want to talk.

The Convener: That useful discussion has raised a number of issues that we had not previously considered in other evidence sessions. There might be further discussion on this subject, and we might need your assistance again. Thank you for attending the committee this morning; it has been interesting.

We move to item 2, which is reports on visits. We had agreed to do it orally this time, as we did not receive any written submissions last time—at least, not from everybody. If we do it orally now, it will be on the record. I seek comments about the visits that members have undertaken so far. I appreciate that some are still to take place, but I would like to hear about the specific issues that arose from visits.

The first visit was to Stanmore House School. Karen Gillon, Mike Russell, Ian Jenkins and I went along. I invite Karen to start, as the school is in her constituency.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): It is a wonderful school and—

Fiona McLeod: Could you explain what sort of school it is?

Karen Gillon: Stanmore House School is a Capability Scotland school for kids with cerebral palsy, ranging from nought to 19 in age. The type of care that the pupils receive is fairly intensive. Some pupils are there on a residential basis and others are there on a day-care basis.

The range of educational opportunities available to children is mixed because there is a wide spectrum of ability. Some of the younger kids who are on permanent feeding through a gastrostomy are not really moving very much. We were not able to see them in the afternoon, although Mike Russell saw them in the morning. Much of their educational provision is done through stimulation by light, sound or movement. They have a room that has different types of facilities, to enable them to stimulate their senses.

We split into two groups, one of which considered curriculum issues. We met a group of young people in the 12-to-16 age group who were able to express themselves well. Another group in the same age group were not able to do so. Much of what they were doing was based on sensual experiences and on trying to develop noise recognition and light recognition. The school also has a cottage for the post-16 age group. In the facility are young people who were not born with cerebral palsy but have had road accidents. One young chap had a severe car accident and lost all his powers of movement, but he has been in the facility for two years and has come on a great deal in that time.

One issue that was raised was what happens after the young person reaches the age of 16. They receive a full experience at the school, and what happens after they leave is a matter of concern to the parents and the staff.

Another important issue was the concern that the staff have about inclusion and mainstreaming and the fact that, while the debate has focused on getting children into mainstream provision, it will be impossible to get some of the children in Stanmore into mainstream provision. The staff did not want a two-tier system to develop that would mean that, if a child went to what might be seen to be the second-class provision, their parents would be perceived to want less for them or they would be perceived to be capable of less. That links into what Fernando Almeida Diniz said about there being no one system of special education that will cater for everyone's needs. Even if there is a presumption in favour of mainstreaming, there will always be kids who will not be able to take up that provision.

Stanmore is one of the grant-aided schools, so we talked about how the changes in the grant-aided structure will affect the ability of pupils to access that type of specialist facility. Most of the kids come from Lanarkshire, but the system also brings in some from Stranraer, Edinburgh, Dumfries and the Borders. There are concerns about the fact that facilities of the kind that Stanmore can provide are not available in those areas. If grant-maintained status goes, local authorities might not necessarily buy into the provision that was available.

Stanmore provides respite care. The cost of that care and the ability of local authorities to pay for it has been an issue in the past year. Previously, because of the grant-aided system, the school could offer respite care as an additional service, towards which the parents made a minimal contribution of around £10 a night. However, the changes in the system mean that the school now has to charge between £100 and £150 a night for respite provision, which is paid for by local authorities. That limits how much respite care is available to parents.

The staff were keen to stress that the system has advantages and disadvantages. An advantage is that the parents no longer have to make a financial contribution. They said that, under the old system, those who could afford to pay the £10-a-night charge got a better service. The situation is fairer to the parents now, but it is not always easy to negotiate with the local authority. Respite care is important, especially when children do not sleep through the night, need to be fed through the night or need their heart to be monitored constantly. That is hard for parents to deal with.

The staff said that often the parents come to terms with the fact that their child is not going to get better only when the child is nine or 10. That is a difficult time for the parents, and the staff try to work through it with them.

12:00

The school is well integrated into the local community. Pupils from two of the local secondary schools work with the older pupils in Stanmore House School and do some caring stuff with the younger ones. The staff were keen to point out that the school does not want to create little nannies, nurses and doctors out of the able-bodied pupils. The fear is that that caring role develops for a short time, then the pupils move on—that is not really inclusion.

The school is involved in community events. On

Lanimer’s day, the local festival, the kids are involved in the street floats and so on. It has joint after-school provision with one of the youth centres in Carluke, where the older, more able young people go for youth provision. However, that is limited to those who can participate. There is after-school provision in the school.

Ian Jenkins: That was great—very full. The only thing that Karen Gillon did not mention was that because of the grant-aided system, the school felt that it had a bit more elbow room about how it could use the money. If the money comes from a local authority, for an individual kid, the school might be unable to use it for other activities or transport and so on.

The other thing was that the school takes children from a very early age—there were babies there, too. I listened to the Equity Group evidence and I agreed that everybody should be included, but it is not feasible for some schools. The level of care that the children were getting in one room at the same time from the speech therapists, the physiotherapists, the trained teacher and the carers was tremendous. Such a bank of care would not be easily available in a mainstream setting.

Mr Monteith: Having heard the evidence from the Equity Group today and having had an informal report from Mike Russell the other night, I wonder what actually happens in Italy. Is there provision similar to what we are hearing described here, but which is not called schools? Perhaps Julie Allan, the adviser, might be able to provide us with more information about provision in places such as Italy.

Karen Gillon: Some of the staff intend to go to Italy to discuss options. I do not know what happens in Italy. Perhaps it is my narrow viewpoint, but I cannot conceive how those children could be placed in mainstream classrooms—as I perceive them to be—and how it would benefit them or the other pupils. It might be useful to get some input on that.

The Convener: The adviser cannot answer questions at this stage, but many of us will have questions on that point. Like Karen Gillon and Ian Jenkins, I visited Stanmore House School and I agree with what they have said. There were children for whom I could see no circumstances in which they would benefit from being in a mainstream school, simply because of the number of individuals who had input into their daily lives. We need some information about how other places have solved that problem.

Fiona McLeod: I just wanted to ask the person who cannot answer us whether we could have some examples from New Hampshire, where some children towards the severely disabled end of the spectrum have been integrated successfully. If we consider only the most severe cases—the children who need 24-hour care—we will miss out the ones who are just a wee bit further up the scale and who can enter mainstream schools.

Karen Gillon: Some children have made the transition from Stanmore House School to mainstream education. The staff seem to think that one of those children will end up back in a specialist unit, because there is not sufficient support—the mainstream staff-pupil ratio is not even one to one, but perhaps one to three or four. The staff tried to make us realise that SEN does not cover a unified, defined group of people; what works for someone who is deaf-blind may not work for someone who has profound cerebral palsy. We must try to get out of that mindset.

The equity lobby has been very powerful, but there will always be parents who, at a certain time, do not see mainstreaming as the right option for their child. We should not make them feel that they are putting their child at a disadvantage just because of someone else’s ideals about where that child should be educated. It will take time to bring everyone with us, to get the system going and to put the resources in place to enable the children to make the transition, if that will ever be possible.

The Convener: The next school, Sanderson High School in East Kilbride, was visited by Brian Monteith and Ken Macintosh.

Mr Macintosh: Sanderson High School is attached to the local comprehensive, Claremont High School, and operates from one wing of the building. It is attended by about 60 kids of secondary school age, most of whom have learning difficulties of one form or another. I was very impressed by the head teacher—it is hard not to be impressed by all the schools we visit. There were many children with challenging behaviour. We were left wondering how on earth those children would benefit from being in a mainstream school, although we also wondered whether that was simply a matter of our personal prejudice. Sanderson High School is attached to a mainstream school, so the staff take the opportunity to try to integrate and include the children, although that opportunity is very limited.

Two points struck me about the visit. First, the head teacher told me that one of the problems she has to deal with is the ever-growing number of pupils who experience mental health problems. We are talking not just about education, but about mental health problems. The head teacher linked the growth of that problem to drug misuse; that point is rather anecdotal, but it was an interesting observation. Brian Monteith and I were both intrigued, if not shocked, by that statement. The fact that there is a growing number of people with mental health problems is an interesting phenomenon in the area of special educational needs and multiple difficulties.

My second observation concerned the involvement of parents. When we deal with parents such as those from the Equity Group and those of pupils from the Royal Blind School, we get a clear picture of strong-willed, concerned and articulate parents, fighting with the authorities in a frustrating battle to look after their child’s needs. In many cases, they understand their child’s needs better than the psychologists, as Cathy Peattie said earlier. That is not the situation in Sanderson High School where, in some cases, it is difficult to get the parents involved. The parents themselves have many problems. In some cases, they are glad that their child will be taken off their hands for a few hours a day and that they can have that respite.

I found that interesting, and it challenged my views. As a constituency MSP, my dealings with special educational needs almost always occur when parents come to see me about difficulties that they are having with the local authority or other bodies. There is no doubt that that coloured my view of parents’ difficulties. The situation at Sanderson is exactly the opposite; the school has to make great efforts to involve parents in making decisions.

12:15

Mr Monteith: I agree with Ken Macintosh. I will add a couple of points. It was noticeable that the head teacher was strongly of the view that her school was a high school, although it was on a joint site. Numbers at Claremont High School had dropped quite considerably, so some buildings were surplus to requirements and they turned into Sanderson High School due to the closure of a number of other schools in other local authority areas. The head teacher saw Sanderson as a distinct stand-alone high school that had a relationship with Claremont; staff tried to use that relationship to bring about inclusion, but as Ken Macintosh said, that was rather limited.

The relationship was particularly evident in subjects such as physical education, but to retain some sense of dignity there was a concern that Claremont should not always be seen to be helping Sanderson. The schools had games and competitions together, and the head teacher felt that it was an achievement when, for example, a pool competition went to the black ball, and the person from Claremont won the game rather than throwing it and letting the other person think that they had been helped out. The pupils from Sanderson liked that, because they thought that they were getting respect.

I think the head teacher feels that there could be more contact with Claremont, but it is not easy. The shared campus was not designed for that. It is a rather intimidating place. I am surprised that Ken Macintosh did not mention, for example, the razor wire that had been put up to counter vandalism; he was quite shocked by it. First impressions are not conducive to visitors’ experience.

The other impression that I came away with concerned the number of pupils who had been in mainstream education and had encountered difficulties there. As a result, the parents had chosen to move them, or it had been recommended that they go, to Sanderson High School. It was hoped that the pupils’ time at Sanderson High School could either return them to a position in which they could work in mainstream, or benefit them so that they could go into further education. There was a feeling of trying to ensure that they did not just leave the school, but gained something from it to go into mainstream further education.

We saw some examples of behaviours that I imagine would be especially problematic for a mainstream school. There is one young girl who can vomit on demand. She uses that to get attention, and the teachers have to deal with it. They even have to try to stop her drinking water, because any water that she drinks could be thrown up at any point. If someone walks into the classroom, she will throw up just to get attention. There is no doubt that such a problem would be difficult to handle in a mainstream class. When you visit schools and see the breadth of difficulties that teachers have to deal with, you begin to ask yourself questions that you may not have asked before. The visit was very useful.

It was interesting that the turnover of staff was very low. The staff were greatly committed to the school. Most of them had been there since the school started five or six years ago, which says something about their belief that they are doing things right.

The Convener: How many people were at the school and in the classes?

Mr Macintosh: There were about 60 pupils.

Mr Monteith: That is right, although the number varies.

Mr Macintosh: And there were 12—or rather, 12.6—teachers, seven instructors and seven auxiliaries. The instructors are from the old system, but that is another issue.

Fiona McLeod: Could we ask the Scottish Parliament information centre to do some research into the mental health problems? I wonder about the dividing line between mental health and challenging behaviour. Is mental health being used as a label for challenging behaviour because it is easier to consider the behaviour as a health problem than as a social problem?

The Convener: We can ask Julie Allan, our adviser, to have a look at that. If we need further research, we can do that.

Jamie Stone will tell us about Viewlands Primary School in Perth.

Mr Stone: I went there last Friday and it was a most interesting visit, to say the least. I am sorry that no one else was with me, because it was highly instructive. Viewlands is a middle-sized mainstream primary school in the city or town of Perth. It is fairly old, but there is nothing much wrong with its fabric. It is a bright, airy, pre-war school, which has a significant number of SEN pupils. The number can vary between 10 and 20 or so; at the moment, it is in the upper teens.

I was impressed by the school as an example of taking SEN into the mainstream as far as we can—although that, of course, is a value judgment. A number of pupils had cerebral palsy; one was not far off being completely blind; another was profoundly deaf; and there were a variety of other disabilities. I was struck by the way in which the children looked after each other. I saw all the classes except the P7s, who were on an away day for the secondary school, and I saw children helping each other—a lass in a wheelchair being helped into the playground, to give an example. Everything that we have heard this morning about other children getting to understand disability and to see it as normal—as something that is run-of-the-mill and can be dealt with, if you understand what I mean—was very encouraging. At the school, one young lad had to be put in a standing frame every day and all the children would help with that.

I asked how the system at Viewlands had come about; curiously, it seems to have evolved of its own accord. It all started a few years ago, with an especially forward-looking head teacher, and things continued from there. The staff were at pains to point out that—although the school gets a tremendous amount of help from the local authority—each time that another member of staff is required for SEN, it is not easy. They have endless meetings about that.

They pointed out that they were next door to a secondary school, which made the transfer not too difficult. I report back to the committee the same point that other members have raised, which is that there is an end of the SEN spectrum that can never be mainstreamed. I had a cup of coffee with the staff, who were quick to point out that behavioural disorders could be exceedingly difficult—as we heard about the girl who can vomit on demand. They were earnestly asking us to take that point back to the committee as it is incredibly important. Whether we have gone as far as we can on mainstreaming is a value judgment, but I was certainly struck by that point.

I do not want to keep you long. Clearly, the liaison with parents is quite good. Staff were at pains to show me how they met the parents and how they kept thorough records. All in all, the school seems to have established itself in the early years and is now running on its own momentum. Staff turnover is not high, but morale is, and they are dedicated to what they do. It was a standard primary school, apart from its one extraordinary element.

Staff found the position with the transport contract quite difficult, as the contract might be lost and the people who help the children into the minibus to take them home might change overnight.

I had a rewarding experience and am glad that I went.

The Convener: This is not meant to make life difficult for members when they are reporting back from visits, but because we are naming schools and what is said will appear in the *Official Report*, we must ensure that individuals in schools are not identified. Members should tailor their comments to that requirement.

Fiona McLeod: Does Jamie Stone know how many parents are placing requests to that school?

Mr Stone: I do not know.

Fiona McLeod: Can we write to find that out?

The Convener: I am sure that we can find that out from the school. Schools are very keen to keep up contact.

The next report is from Brian Monteith and Cathy Peattie on Stirling High School.

Mr Monteith: The head teacher at Sanderson High School told us that she was not keen on units because they created a clear differentiation between pupils who had special educational needs and those who did not. When we went to Stirling High School, which had been flagged up as having a unit, it was interesting that the unit did not appear to work as a distinct unit. Certainly, there were classrooms that were very well equipped, in which the pupils who had SEN attended classes, but those pupils also attended classes elsewhere in the school. The school seemed to be trying to minimise the presentation of that type of education as separate.

It had been planned that the provision would be for children with moderate difficulties, but in fact the school has children with moderate to severe difficulties. One child presented more difficulties than did the others, but the school seemed able to cope with them and was happy with that child's progress. I read between the lines that if the school had too many children with severe rather than moderate difficulties, it could be overwhelmed unless adequate resources were provided. The issues of resources and training were raised. The unit is quite small at the moment—it has 11 children—but new pupils are coming in and it is planned that that number will grow to closer to 20.

It is possibly too early to say how successful the unit has been, but certainly the pupils seem to be making the progress for which one would look. The commitment of the staff is laudable. It is good that each child's different needs were identified and that a programme was developed for each child. Much more development is still to happen in that unit, so it is hard to draw a conclusion about its effectiveness in comparison with schools that do not have such a unit. My fears that the unit might be seen as too stand-alone were allayed, because the school had identified that as a problem. If inclusion is to be achieved, the unit must be a vehicle to provide that inclusion, rather than something that makes people stand out.

The Convener: Does Cathy Peattie want to add any comments?

Cathy Peattie: No, that was fine. I agree with everything that Brian Monteith said.

The Convener: We will move on to Riverside Primary School, which is also in Stirling. Brian Monteith, Cathy Peattie and Nicola Sturgeon visited it.

Cathy Peattie: Several of the questions that Nicola Sturgeon and I asked this morning came from our visit to Riverside. There were different impressions of Riverside. We spent the first part of the visit with teachers who were working with kids who had autism.

Fiona McLeod: Excuse me, what kind of school is Riverside?

Cathy Peattie: It is a mainstream primary school with inclusion.

Teachers were realistic about what they planned to do and how they were going about doing it. The issue of a halfway house and the feeling that that was probably not the best way forward was around. We witnessed some kids reading and storyboard time. I was impressed with the commitment of the teachers and their approach. The issue of how many adults need to be in a classroom to make a lesson a success was very much apparent; one teacher was with four kids and in the next room there were three adults with six kids.

We went on to visit primary 3 to primary 7. Clearly a lot of work had been done with the kids. It was difficult to pick out the special needs kids from the other kids. For example, we witnessed the French class and all the kids participated. We spoke to several teachers. I was especially impressed by the primary 6 teacher, whom we had the opportunity to speak to. She had a great commitment to making things work and her attitude was, "Let's go for it." If anything was going to be a success it would be with that kind of teacher.

Some of the remarks that she made to us were about time to plan to ensure that she was ready for children who had special educational needs and the opportunity to find best practice and compare it with other people. She probably had a lot of best practice that she could have shared with folk. There was frustration that she did not have time to do that. If inclusion is ever going to work, that kind of teacher's experience must be explored and there must be an opportunity to share best practice with other teachers.

Resources is a big issue. All the teachers that we spoke to were clear that they needed classroom assistants. Those assistants clearly did not only work with special needs kids; they were another pair of hands and someone else that the pupils went to. It is probably quite a good example of mainstreaming working, but there are limitations in how it can work. It still raised questions about resourcing, training, time for teachers and the halfway house issue—kids were travelling in to the school and some kids were separate, if included in the same building.

12:30

Mr Monteith: Cathy Peattie has described Riverside Primary School quite accurately. I was struck by what appeared to be a dual policy at that school, where children with moderate difficulties were included in the mainstream class. Children with autism in particular tended to be helped in what could be called a unit, although the children whom we saw were of such a young age that it was difficult to see how their teaching would be developed later.

The head teacher made a point about target setting. She had argued with Stirling Council about her concern and had won the argument, saying that target setting should not include the children with special educational needs, because that would immediately affect their ability to meet the targets unless a special allowance was made.

Material was given to the Scottish Executive. When that material was churned out again by the Executive, it had not taken account of what the head teacher had won that argument on, and the statistics on children with special educational needs were still included. She was very annoyed about that, and feels that including those statistics creates a disincentive. Parents looking at the published figures will begin to think that the inclusion of those children in the statistics is affecting the school's performance. It is not that it is affecting the performance of the mainstream children. The statistics have changed the base. She thought that that was unfair, and I thought that that she had a valid point.

She said that there were changes in the boundaries over a period of years. It appeared that the roll had fallen slightly. People from neighbouring areas were choosing to go to other schools. She could not put her finger on the reason, but it was because of the mainstreaming. It was a concern that if people made target setting the issue, it might mean that people would choose to go to some of the neighbouring primaries, using inclusion and targets as the excuse. It is a delicate area, which requires attention.

The Convener: Thank you, Brian. You will remember that one of the issues raised by a teacher at the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers conference was the whole matter of schools actively progressing inclusive policies, but feeling that there was a possibility of their being disadvantaged through the way in which target setting is interpreted. I have raised the matter with the Executive, and Peter Peacock has promised to come up with some guidance on it. It was never the intention that those schools would be disadvantaged for doing what we were asking them to do. The matter requires sensitive handling, and we will pick up on it throughout this inquiry.

Mr Monteith: The head teacher was not against children with SEN having their own targets. She thought that that was important too. Her point was that the change of base would throw the statistics askew.

The Convener: That is the case as with any group of children who are being included. The example which was then given was of children, who would normally have been excluded from school because of behavioural difficulties, being classed within the regime. We need to consider the matter very sensitively, and I am sure that we will return to it.

Fiona McLeod: You said, convener, that you had taken the matter up with Peter Peacock. Have you done so officially or on behalf of the committee?

The Convener: I raised it with him following the NASUWT conference because I was asked to at that stage. The minister had said that the Executive would consider the matter and return to it. Since then, we have been considering the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill, but I would expect to get some comments back, which I will be happy to share with the committee when we get a response.

Fiona McLeod: That raises a highly significant issue, and I think that we have to get an official response on that.

The Convener: Okay. The next visit was to Linwood High School. That's near Paisley, and it's Ken.

Mr Macintosh: The way that you introduced me, convener—"Linwood. That's near Paisley, and it's Ken"—sounded like a conversation on a television phone-in. [*Laughter.*]

Linwood High School is a very interesting school, completely different from the other schools on the list, as far as I could see. Linwood is a mainstream secondary comprehensive. It is quite small and has a special unit attached, which is called a base—I do not like the term unit, as many of you know. The base addresses the specific problem of pupils who have a school phobia and who are not attending school for emotional and behavioural reasons. The facility caters for a specific group of pupils and is phenomenally successful in dealing with them. Those pupils are not going to school at all, and their attendance rates are less than 10 per cent. The pupil with the highest attendance rate was attending 48 per cent of the time, but most of them attend school less than 10 per cent of the time.

The facility comprises only two classrooms and two teachers, but it provides a supportive environment and the right attitude. The initial work involves persuading the children to come to school, and the teachers are successful at doing that. The children start at the base, and it is somewhere that they can always rely on and go back to. Where possible, they are then integrated into the mainstream school. Not all the children go into the main stream, but most of them go on to sit their exams like everybody else.

The children are very withdrawn. We expected not to be able to speak to them at all. Most teenagers can be awkward and withdrawn, and often do not want to speak to adults. However, the children at Linwood were extremely bright and communicative. They were really impressive, and the school was achieving a great success with them. There were between 10 and 15 children attending the base. Almost all the children come in third year, having been at local schools in first year. They have tried everything and have not found suitable facilities, but Linwood provides what they need. They can be amazingly successful, going on to attend university, get jobs and play a full role in society.

I do not know whether facilities like those at Linwood exist anywhere else in the country; nor did the teachers. However, the teachers told me that, if they did not attend the Linwood base, those pupils would be going to inappropriate schools—what are known as list D schools. Those schools deal with a different range of problems, but the pupils at the base were very bright children. I do not know what lessons we should draw from the visit, as the base is atypical. All children are individual and special, but those pupils had a very specific problem.

One of the factors contributing to the success of the school is its size. It is a small school of fewer than 500 pupils, which is good for the children as it is less intimidating. It is not a truancy centre; it is for people with emotional problems. Those children wanted to go to school but could not because they were withdrawn. The school ethos was important. The headmaster encouraged the teachers to promote good practice and provide a supportive environment. That is absolutely vital. The two teachers in the special unit said that they were able to talk to their colleagues and integrate their pupils into the classroom by being supportive and telling them exactly what to expect. The teacher training issue is one of the hurdles that must be overcome, but Linwood provides an example of how supportive teachers can achieve success.

My main point concerns the matter that Brian Monteith raised. He has been in dispute with HM inspectors of schools about assessment and performance indicators. Targets are important, and the Linwood teachers have performance targets for the pupils in their base, which are set by the pupils themselves. It is important to achieve those targets, and the pupils appreciate it. However, it would be wrong to penalise, or to disincentivise, ambitious teachers who want to do well in their school by making them take on more children, particularly children who will drive up the truancy rate, which is a specific performance indicator. We should remove that requirement.

Mr Monteith: That point was raised at Stirling High School. Some teachers are concerned that taking those children will affect the ratio of pass marks. Their chances of future promotion are affected, because when they go for a job, people will say, “Your pass rate was not as good as we had hoped for.” It would not come over well in an interview if the teacher then says, “I actually had a number of SEN children.” How will teachers handle that issue?

The Convener: As there are no other questions for Ken Macintosh, I thank him for his report. We have been much more productive than we were last time. Some visits remain, on which we will report once they have taken place.

I suggest that we postpone items 3 and 4 until next week.

Committee Business

The Convener: I have only one point to raise under item 5, which is that next week we will have written evidence on the school infrastructure inquiry. The committee advisers, Professor Rob Ball and Dr Maryanne Heafey, will attend next week’s meeting. I ask the committee to agree that we should consider that evidence in private.

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We will now move into private session for item 6, which is the written evidence on the Hampden inquiry.

12:44

Meeting continued in private until 13:00.

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

Members who would like a copy of the bound volume should also give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the bound volume should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Parliamentary Headquarters, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Monday 10 July 2000

Members who want reprints of their speeches (within one month of the date of publication) may obtain request forms and further details from the Central Distribution Office, the Document Supply Centre or the Official Report.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY EDITIONS

Single copies: £5
Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £500

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

Single copies: £70

Standing orders will be accepted at the Document Supply Centre.

WHAT’S HAPPENING IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, compiled by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, contains details of past and forthcoming business and of the work of committees and gives general information on legislation and other parliamentary activity.

Single copies: £3.75
Special issue price: £5
Annual subscriptions: £150.00

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75
Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Published in Edinburgh by The Stationery Office Limited and available from:

The Stationery Office Bookshop
71 Lothian Road
Edinburgh EH3 9AZ
0131 228 4181 Fax 0131 622 7017

The Stationery Office Bookshops at:
123 Kingsway, London WC2B 6PQ
Tel 020 7242 6393 Fax 020 7242 6394
68-69 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AD
Tel 0121 236 9696 Fax 0121 236 9699
33 Wine Street, Bristol BS1 2BQ
Tel 01179 264306 Fax 01179 294515
9-21 Princess Street, Manchester M60 8AS
Tel 0161 834 7201 Fax 0161 833 0634
16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD
Tel 028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401
The Stationery Office Oriel Bookshop,
18-19 High Street, Cardiff CF12BZ
Tel 029 2039 5548 Fax 029 2038 4347

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

Telephone orders and inquiries
0870 606 5566

Fax orders
0870 606 5588

The Scottish Parliament Shop
George IV Bridge
EH99 1SP
Telephone orders 0131 348 5412

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers

Printed in Scotland by The Stationery Office Limited

ISBN 0 338 000003 ISSN 1467-0178