The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 22 May 2012

Session 4

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EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
16th Meeting 2012, Session 4

CONVENER

*Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)
*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)
*Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)
*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
*Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)
Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Moira Finlayson (University of Glasgow)
Brian McAlinden (Scottish Government Attainment Group)
Craig Munro (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Education and Culture Committee

Tuesday 22 May 2012

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Attainment

The Convener (Stewart Maxwell): Good morning and welcome to the 16th meeting in 2012 of the Education and Culture Committee. I remind members and people in the public gallery to ensure that all electronic devices, particularly phones, are switched off at all times. Although we have received no apologies, I understand that Liam McArthur has to leave us briefly to meet a delegation. He will return to the meeting as soon as that is over.

Our first item of business is to take evidence on attainment in school. We will focus on the key findings from the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy report, which was published in March, and the recently published Scottish Government guidance on attainment. In addition, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland has produced a report on raising attainment, the main findings of which we will also undoubtedly discuss.

I welcome to the committee Moira Finlayson, who is an honorary research fellow at the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education—STEM-Ed—partnership Scotland, at the University of Glasgow; Craig Munro, who is the chair of the performance and improvement network of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland; and Brian McAlinden, who is a member of the Scottish Government's attainment group.

This is one of a series of one-off evidence sessions that the committee has been holding. At the end of June, we will discuss the main points that have emerged from those sessions with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Good morning. Issues such as deprivation have a major impact on attainment, but there are other factors that have an impact that are to do with what goes on in school. Do you have evidence of schools that are getting results that go beyond what we would expect them to get, given their catchment areas? What factors impact on that?

Brian McAlinden (Scottish Government Attainment Group): The answer to that is yes. There were five people on the cabinet secretary's attainment group. Our role was to offer advice. He picked the five of us because he felt that we were headteachers who were leading successful schools. My school was Castlemilk high, which I left more than a year ago.

Neil Findlay: You look older, considering that you left school only a year ago.

Brian McAlinden: I was a late beginner.

The school punched significantly above its weight. The level of free school meal entitlement was 52 per cent, which was well above the national average. Its exam results improved significantly between 2000 and 2010, leaver destinations improved dramatically, attendance levels shot up and exclusions went down. Castlemilk high is not the only school where that happened. A number of schools that the attainment group looked at were in the gamut of schools that would be deemed to be in the leafy suburbs and which still managed to improve their performance. We tried to capture what made the difference and that is what we told the cabinet secretary. Do you want to know what the magic bullet is?

Neil Findlay: Yes, please.

Brian McAlinden: There are two magic bullets. The first is that the person who stands in front of the class should be highly motivated and able to motivate young people. We need to pay attention to that because, in all the research that we looked at, it was not possible to get away from the importance of the person who stands in front of the class.

The second magic bullet is leadership—not just by the headteacher, but by senior staff, principal teachers and those who lead learning in the classroom. The quality of learning and teaching and the quality of leadership were common factors, regardless of whether a school was in an area of deprivation or in a leafy suburb.

Craig Munro (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): I echo Brian McAlinden's point. I absolutely agree that we can identify best practice in classrooms and schools. Working with the Scottish Government, we have identified a number of places across Scotland where there is good practice. We have set out on one side of A4 what we believe to be the features of an effective set of strategies at classroom, school and local authority levels. That was included in our submission to the committee.

I can think of a teacher right now who takes in children from an area of particular social disadvantage whose vocabulary scores and literacy are significantly below the mean. By the time they leave her classroom, the children are in

the top two or three percentiles on vocabulary scores. I can also think of a school right now in an area of significant social disadvantage where the headteacher has set up an effective target-setting, mentoring and coaching programme, which is taken very seriously. Young people come out of that school significantly better.

We have heard that the issue is about leadership, but it is also about pedagogy. The challenge that is before us is to incrementally increase the quality of learning and teaching in classrooms and the quality of the leadership in schools and local authorities. However, we can certainly identify best practice and we know what we are looking for.

Neil Findlay: Some schools that are identified as exemplary are in the "leafy suburbs", as Brian McAlinden described it. I think that there is an argument for us to have more flexibility in how we put resources into or take resources away from those areas. If a headteacher is hugely successful and a good leader in the leafy suburbs, why do they remain there? If they are great leaders, why do we not put them into the areas of most need?

Brian McAlinden: Why not have great leaders in all places, rather than shift them round?

Neil Findlay: We do not have them in all places.

Brian McAlinden: No, we do not, and that is what the attainment group is addressing. That is being done in conjunction with ADES; our two bits of paper add up to the same thing. I understand your point. The cabinet secretary was interested in flexible contracts so that headteachers could be moved from here to there. However, that would bring challenges and difficulties, which we set out to the cabinet secretary. Rather than shift a small amount of people to and fro, the challenge for us is to make them good leaders—let us not call them good leaders; let us call them excellent leaders—and try to infect the people around them. There are good leaders in every kind of school.

Craig Munro: I will comment on something that might be relevant to the question. We have people whom we regard as being very good leaders in schools that are in zones 6 to 10 in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, which are, supposedly, significantly affluent zones in Scotland. When we say that they are very good leaders, we mean that there is tremendously good order in the school: there seems to be a sense of discipline and there is normally punctuality, and good attendance, uniforms are worn, there is respect and there are well-ordered classrooms. According to how we traditionally measure classroom examination results, those results are excellent.

The trouble is with what we mean by "excellent" examination results. Of the nine indicators that we publish, seven measure one group of children—what we call the university group, who are the 35 per cent who go to university. We give headteachers of such schools great accolades and accord those schools great respect, but there is another group of children whom we do not measure at all. We all respect excellent leadership and we have some superb heads, but we have created a perverse system that says that a headteacher is very good but which has allowed the attainment gap to increase so that young folk in those selfsame heads' schools are being failed. The leadership in that type of school will be different from the leadership in another type of school. We must realise that there are different models of leadership requirement.

The question takes us into a complex area. I am not sure that we could completely sort out the problems by moving people about. However, I think that all three of us on the panel would sign up to the idea that we need to be clear about the attributes that we are looking for and how we can grow more of those people.

Neil Findlay: You are starting to get to where I was going with the question. Someone might be deemed to be a great leader because they have improved attainment and so on in the leafy suburb, but if we put them into a more difficult school, they might be found to be very much wanting because the challenges in that school would be completely different. I understand that fully.

What other elements in schools—such as the ethos, behaviour and the culture—have the most impact on raising attainment?

Brian McAlinden: You mentioned culture. I left school two years ago—I am going to keep saying that. Since then, I have been in the privileged position of having the opportunity to work with local authorities and individual schools, and I have worked with Norwegian schools—we talked about that before the meeting—that came to Scotland to see what excellence looked like and to look at self-evaluation, to which I will return. I have visited lots of schools throughout the country and, whether they were in leafy suburbs or areas of deprivation, I have been struck by the culture of high expectations, ambition, aspirations and a can-do mentality that the leadership in schools has created. It does not matter whether a school is in a leafy suburb or another area.

In the school that I led, I heard a teacher say, "What can you expect? These children come from Castlemilk." I was happy that that teacher moved to another school, where he was very happy. That was a win-win for us.

We need people who see that young people can achieve. There is no limit to young people's talent, skills and aptitudes, but we need to nurture them. We need young people to expect to achieve and we need communities to expect that and to be proud of what young people achieve, whether or not they live in a leafy suburb.

We are talking about a culture of ambition and expectation. In Castlemilk, our phrase was that all poverty is damaging, but the most damaging poverty of all is poverty of ambition and expectation. We need to get ambition and expectation into every class in every school in this country, to get us back to where we belong.

Neil Findlay: You have not mentioned resources.

Brian McAlinden: What would you like me to say about resources? The biggest resource is people. The number of bottoms on seats determines the number of teaching and support staff. Every member of staff—including janitors, cleaners, support staff and office staff—has a role to play in raising attainment and achievement among young people. It is important that staff all work on that theme.

In Castlemilk, we were fortunate that the schools of ambition programme was introduced in 2004, while we were on the journey of improvement. We were in the first tranche with a partner school, which was a denominational school in our area. We worked together on the curriculum and on continuing professional development and used the money for that.

It was like Christmas, because we were already on the journey when somebody in the Government gave us £100,000 for three years to work jointly. That accelerated our CPD. I have talked about the teacher in front of the class. In Castlemilk, we focused relentlessly on learning and teaching, on the assessment is for learning programme and on formative assessment. That was one strategy, which went on for three years. We could not have funded it for three years without the schools of ambition programme, which helped us to work in partnership with a local school and local colleges.

Craig Munro: I back up what Brian McAlinden said about resources. In areas of social disadvantage—which might be behind Neil Findlay's point—the issue is not so much the quantity as the quality of the resource. How do we attract the best teachers, the best headteachers and the best principal teachers of subjects and of faculties? The attraction factor is sometimes the issue. We do not believe that raising attainment is necessarily resource driven, but is about the quality of the teacher in the classroom.

If we are to change the social gradient in the country, we must consider not just the quality of the teacher and leader but the quality of the partnership and the early interventions from the ages of zero to three. Resources might have to come into the discussion about that.

10:15

Moira Finlayson (University of Glasgow): I have read research papers on methods of raising attainment and so on, and have examined what happens outwith school. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has done a lot of work on the issue; it has done a survey of more than 2,000 research papers, but its problem has been in finding good hard research. People have been very good at starting projects, but in many cases evaluation has seemed to be lacking.

One factor that came out as being important in raising attainment for disadvantaged pupils was their home background. If you can get mothers or carers involved in a child's education, that is regarded as one way to improve attainment. Most of the work is currently done on nought to three-year olds, because the gap is big at that stage, but the gap in attainment gets progressively larger as the child gets older. One finding of the research appears to be that if you involve parents with a child's education and they have high aspirations, that will improve performance.

Brian McAlinden: That report also says that in areas of deprivation—where we perhaps think resources should be going—parents have aspirations for their young people but do not know how to realise them. As leaders in schools, we need to work with them to help them to realise their ambitions for their children. They are passionate about their young children.

Moira Finlayson: The important phrase is "realistic aspirations"; it is crucial that people know how to achieve their aspirations. It is all very well to say that you want your child to be a surgeon, but that is not enough if you do not know what qualifications are required and so on. It is necessary to educate parents about their children's career options and how they can go about achieving their aspirations. It is also important for the child to realise that he or she must persevere.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Notwithstanding your comments about school leadership, the Scottish Parliament information centre's briefing on the programme for international student assessment—PISA—reading scores survey from 2009, which is a comparison of various countries, indicate that the countries that come out with the lowest variance according to socioeconomic group are places such as Finland and Canada. That seems to be backed up by the Sutton Trust report of last year, which found that

England had the same sort of gap as Scotland according to socioeconomic background, and the countries with the lowest gaps include Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Do other factors in those societies mean that there is more equality or is it about what they do in their schools?

Moira Finlayson: There is probably a mixture of both, but in the Scandinavian countries the gap between rich and poor is much smaller because those are much more equal societies than ours. I do not know what the situation is in Canada. Does anybody?

Brian McAlinden: We also looked at the PISA results. The gap in our country from the highest-attaining schools and children to the lowest is much bigger. I am not sure that it is about socioeconomic issues, although they will be a factor. It would be interesting to establish whether it is the level of resourcing—human resource or otherwise—that makes the difference.

Craig Munro: The Scottish PISA results in literacy dropped and have remained stable over the past few years, but the biggest issue is the gap in the PISA results compared to other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries.

I am not equipped to speak about the other countries. We have all read research and some of us have been on trips to other countries and have got various views, but I do not feel that I am equipped to give an ADES view on the other countries that have been mentioned.

However, the OECD is saying that there is clear evidence that there are as many differences within a school as there are between schools, and that a person's postal sector matters. We must think of strategies for the lowest 20 per cent that will be more effective than the current ones. There is good practice. Brian McAlinden has given a good example of at least one school and he represents a number of other headteachers in Scotland. Sophisticated strategies can be put in place in certain areas and certain contexts.

We can learn from individual teachers, headteachers and partnerships, and we need to be cleverer in how we address such matters. I certainly think that the answers can be found in Scotland, although we should be looking to international comparators for best practice.

Joan McAlpine: I notice that, according to SPICe, the OECD's analysis of the PISA results highlighted a number of pointers as to why the gap is smaller in some countries—in particular the fact that more successful schools gave school heads more discretion in spending money. In the light of that, what are your views on the report that was put together last year by David Cameron—not the Prime Minister moonlighting, but the professor of education—for the Scottish Government on devolution of more power to school heads? Do you agree with the OECD that such a move would make a difference?

Craig Munro: I am sure that Brian McAlinden will give his views in a moment, but I think that every headteacher will always want as many resources as possible in order that they can carry out their functions and I think that, in general, everyone wants more ownership. I can speak only for my own authority, but I believe that we devolve 92 per cent of resources. In fact, headteachers are actually telling us that they do not want certain things to be devolved and are saying, "That's fine—we've got everything we need". We do not expect them to be looking for the remaining 8 per cent.

The main issue is the way in which local authorities carry out their business; the best authorities will have devolved as much of the resources as the headteachers in the best schools want. Brian McAlinden will have his own views on the matter.

Brian McAlinden: I am strongly of the view that, instead of bits of budgets being ring fenced and headteachers being unable to play with them, 80 or 90 per cent of resources should be devolved to schools. In that respect, Craig Munro is spot on; I would not, for example, want to manage the school's electricity and such things. In any case, schools should have business managers who have expertise in dealing with such matters.

However, as far as leading a school and having a vision of where that school is going are concerned, I tend to use a saying that I stole from Lawrence Peters, "If you're not sure where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else." If you are on the journey and know where the school has to go, it is good to have money that has no strings attached, and to be allowed to focus on the key job of learning and teaching. The same approach was taken with the additional schools of ambition money, which we used to make sustainable and continuous improvements. When less money is available, we have to be more creative. I am not so sure, however, that all headteachers use that approach.

Joan McAlpine: The Cameron report seemed to indicate that although on paper it appeared that a large percentage of a school's budget was devolved, most headteachers said that in practice it was not so easy to spend money as they saw fit.

Brian McAlinden: Local authorities have to examine whether or not the money comes with strings attached and whether specific parts of that budget are actually ring fenced. However, the headteacher has the opportunity to be creative with the budget; I have seen some really creative

ways in which it has been used. Moreover, some of the best schools in this country look outwith the school and the budget that they get and seek to increase capacity by going into partnership with people who can bring their skills and talents to the school. If you are creative, you should not incur costs.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): At a recent presentation on the Finnish schooling system, I was struck by two things, the first of which was that financing for schools was driven by need. We have already touched on that issue, but can we learn any lessons in that respect?

The second issue was the esteem in which teachers in Finland are held. Do we need to do some work on re-establishing that kind of esteem in our society? Brian McAlinden talked about the importance of the quality of the person and I wonder whether having some sort of, say, masters-based system and ensuring that teachers had higher qualifications would improve the quality of the teaching profession.

Moira Finlayson: I know that teachers in Finland had to earn that respect. There, the idea was to free up the classroom teacher to be in charge of their own learning and to be more responsible in the class, which is probably in line with the curriculum for excellence, to be honest; perhaps that is where some of the ideas came from. In turn, that seemed to breed more respect from the pupil. Other countries seem to be trying to follow that approach.

I think that the curriculum in Finland is very open and that a lot of it is left to the classroom teacher. I do not quite know how that works in practice, but there must be a lot of co-ordination between teachers, which is in line with the curriculum for excellence.

Brian McAlinden: Yes. It is the teacher in front of the class who makes the difference. I keep coming back to that—we cannot escape it. Therefore, it makes sense that we invest in their training, that the training is continuous, that there is a green L-plate or a P-plate in front of them, that they do not throw the L-plate away, and that they continue to learn. If we are talking about lifelong learning, we have to model that in the classroom with professional people.

We have to ensure that enough of our budget supports staff in their training and gives them proper training so that we get the four capacities for young people that are in the curriculum for excellence. We need people to have meaningful professional review and development. I put my hand up: the system is not great across the country. If a person does not know where they are with their PRD, how do they know what they need in terms of self-evaluation? We then have to match teachers' needs to ensure that we produce a workforce that delivers for the young people in the class, the school, the authority area and our country. That is what it is about.

Moira Finlayson is absolutely right. It is not God-given that teachers get an esteemed position when they qualify. Such a position has to be earned. There is no longer such a thing as a dominie in this country. If young people, their parents and the community see high-quality teaching by people who care for young people and want to improve their life chances, that is where the esteem will come from. It goes from out to in rather than from in to out.

Craig Munro: I strongly believe that one thing that is working is the teaching and learning communities in Scotland. Although Finland has definitely got the recruitment and selection aspect right, Scotland can be proud of the journey that we are taking on teaching and learning communities in the development of our teachers.

Yesterday, I visited a group that sat down and spoke about the importance of the teaching of literacy—the group teaches literacy to early years and particularly primary 1 classes. Just a few weeks ago, I sat with another group of teachers, who spoke about specific areas of numeracy about which they were trying to learn from one another and creating opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own practice. We all agree with Brian McAlinden.

I also agree with Moira Finlayson. It is all about what happens in the classroom and improving our profession. We have some excellent teachers and a very good probationary programme. Some of the networks and getting teachers to reflect deeply on pedagogy are important factors in raising attainment in Scotland.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I want to move on, if you do not mind.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Good morning. I will ask my question and will then probably have to disappear quickly. I apologise for that.

Brian McAlinden: That is a good way to do it.

Liam McArthur: You have set out the background in speaking about the quality of the person in front of the class, the leadership throughout the school and the home support and learning environment all being key. It is clear that there are points in a child's progression through school, particularly from primary school to secondary school, that present specific challenges. A dip in the early years of secondary school—perhaps around secondary 2—has been noted. Various explanations have been offered for that, such as different teaching methods in

secondary school compared with primary school and changes in pupils' attitudes. Perhaps that is put down to their going through puberty. Can you shed more light on what is behind that dip? What can be done that we are not already doing to address it? Perhaps it is too much to expect the curriculum for excellence to take the pain out of puberty, but are there things in it that might help to address some of the long-standing and widely recognised issues?

10:30

Craig Munro: I welcome the fact that the SPICe paper explained that the issues were complex. I also welcome the quotes from Larry Flanagan about puberty and so on. I think that puberty is relevant.

It is fair to say that level 3 of curriculum for excellence was expected to have been reached by all students by the end of S3, so I am not sure that you are comparing like with like. That said, we know that local authorities that have longitudinal systems for examining standardised assessments of data have known for a number of years that a complex picture emerges as students move into secondary education. One of the complex issues is the fact that, although students who are particularly good at mathematics—those who are above mean by the end of primary 7—will substantially improve in secondary education if they get a maths specialist, those who are not so able at mathematics can sometimes go backwards.

Some of the most effective schools think about the way that they arrange the bottom set of maths classes in terms of broad banding, the pedagogy, the culture, the aspirations and the attitudes. Some schools and authorities have addressed these matters in a way that we could learn from. However, nationally, there is a dip among certain types of learners in the area of mathematics. That is something that we have to face up to. It is not as simple as saying that primary schools have done something and secondary schools have not. In fact, each type of school can learn from the other in relation to certain types of learner.

Liam McArthur: That tends to suggest that there is not only best practice but an evidence base for what works. That means that where the approach that works is not being applied, there is presumably an opportunity to say what people should be doing, regardless of the points that have been made about allowing leaders to lead. If we are not nudging people to follow the best practice, we should be.

Craig Munro: That takes us to the crux of the matter. We know what to do to raise attainment. The question is, how do we get from where we are to there? We have heard what has been done in individual schools. Brian McAlinden has spoken about the Castlemilk community and what happened there—we wish there were more teachers who were as effective as Brian.

How do we create more teachers who are enthusiastic in their classroom and who share feedback, and how can we create more communities that are inspiring kids and believing in them and raising their expectations in the way that Brian McAlinden described?

We know what best practice looks like in relation to low-ability maths students. There is some extremely effective practice in primary and secondary schools. We can learn from that, and we need to produce more of it. If we want to address those matters, we need to address issues such as creating teaching and learning communities and having an accountability system that ensures that teachers reflect more deeply on their practices.

I might have spoken too much. I look to my colleagues, who might want to say more.

Brian McAlinden: The S2 dip has been there for a number of years, and I hope that the curriculum for excellence will help us to address it.

The best part of my CPD is having a daughter who is a primary 1 teacher, who tells me, "Dad, that'll not work. Get a life." Basically, a primary teacher can bring consistency to the learning and teaching experience of a group of young people. The question is, how do we get that consistency in a secondary school that operates with departmental and faculty silos? That is the important thing in relation to secondary education. There can be pockets of excellence that the young people encounter as they go around the school, but the challenge for us is to ensure that they encounter the same consistency of practice that—I hope—they encountered when they were in primary school. It is not great if the primary teacher is not offering high-quality learning and teaching, although those pupils might start to blossom when they get to the high school. There is a factor in all of that that must be considered.

We are trying to have not uniformity but high-quality consistency in practice. That is important.

Moira Finlayson: On the point about numeracy dipping in S2, the curriculum for excellence says that people should try to embed numeracy throughout the curriculum. Science subjects very much lend themselves to that approach.

Primaries do quite a lot of project work that combines maths, numeracy, geography and all sorts of subjects. If an effort was made in secondary schools to have project-based work that involved all the different disciplines—which

would be in line with the curriculum for excellence—that might help.

Brian McAlinden: Subjects in secondary school will always be important, but we have to look at inter-disciplinary learning and opportunities for staff to work together to connect learning for young people. I do not mean that that should happen in a tokenistic way. I will not give you the example that I have, but, basically, we have to ensure that young people are using skills, and that skills are being developed, in a project that is inter-disciplinary.

To answer the question about the S2 dip, some of the most successful schools that I have had the opportunity and privilege to see over the past two years are those that monitor and track young people's progress. If schools do that, young people do not fall through the net and do not get into the habit of coasting.

I have great praise for St Luke's high school in Barrhead in East Renfrewshire. Its success is due to not only the leadership in the school but a relentless focus on monitoring and tracking. That is not about killing the young people with assessments, but about knowing exactly how they are doing, so that if they go off-colour or off-target, remediation is brought in and they are supported and challenged. In that way, in terms of pace and challenge, the pupils do not coast or get into bad habits in S1 and S2. In the successful primary and secondary schools that I have been watching, young people's progress is monitored and tracked relentlessly, and there is a relentless focus on learning.

Clare Adamson: The 2011 Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy showed that 30 per cent of non-mathematics teachers at secondary said they were "not very confident" or "not at all confident" in teaching numeracy across the curriculum. How can that threat to the success of the curriculum for excellence be addressed?

Moira Finlayson: There are two strands to that—and I had intended to say something about it later. If teachers are not confident teaching maths, they can learn. I do not see why they should not get together and have CPD, at a local level, to cover what is required, including simple things such as fractions and decimals.

To my mind, a lot of people find it quite fashionable to say that they are not good at maths. You hear that on the television all the time—it is almost a virtue. However, people do not say that they are not literate because that is not an acceptable thing to do.

Given the numeracy requirements throughout the curriculum, as part of their professional development teachers should undertake CPD to improve their maths or numeracy. That should be introduced within teaching programmes, which tend to focus very much on teaching methods and do not concentrate on the subject. I do not know how true this is but there was a report from the University of Dundee a month or two back that said that two thirds of trainee teachers could not pass the numeracy exam that their primary 7 pupils were taking. There is a place for the teaching of subjects within the programmes. I do not know whether my colleagues agree with me, but it is not rocket science to do that.

Brian McAlinden: The Donaldson report makes it clear that the selection and training of the next generation of teachers are issues, and that addressing numeracy, literacy, and health and wellbeing is the job of every teacher.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Donaldson report was specific about the point that perhaps we are not doing enough to support new teachers and that there is perhaps a role for schools to provide more support, once the teachers are in post.

We are talking about a significant attainment problem in the transition between primary and secondary—sadly, it is significant and I do not think that we can get away from that. To pick up the point that Clare Adamson raised, are there not far too many teachers in the system who may be good or potentially good but who do not have the right skills and confidence to impart their knowledge? That is what Graham Donaldson was suggesting, and it is to do not just with the teacher training process, but with leadership in schools, which you have talked about, Mr McAlinden. There must be some way to provide greater incentives to ensure that teachers have the right skills and can progress with those skills when they are in the profession. Can you say a bit more about how we can provide those incentives?

Brian McAlinden: The greatest incentive for staff is to see that they are having an impact on young people and to see young people succeeding. I am not sure whether you are talking about monetary incentives.

Liz Smith: I was not, but do you think that a monetary incentive would improve things?

Brian McAlinden: No, I do not think so. We have thrown vast amounts of money at projects, and evaluations of those projects suggest that that has not made a significant enough difference.

Liz Smith: At the moment, because we have national pay scales, there is no facility within the state sector to allow additional payments.

Brian McAlinden: No.

Liz Smith: That is interesting, given what you have said about a headteacher wanting the facility to be able to build excellence. Is there any reason

why an extra financial payment would not be a good idea?

Brian McAlinden: To recognise excellence, or in pursuit of excellence?

Liz Smith: Both.

Brian McAlinden: Before we came into the room, we were talking about a school that has looked at using its money creatively. If schools do that, that is great.

I have said that teachers should have a fixed-term contract. That is not a popular idea and I usually have to duck when I suggest it. I include headteachers in that. When someone knows that they are coming to the end of their five-year stint and they are up for reappointment, that is a big incentive for them to make sure that their CPD is up to date and that they are delivering for the young people. They will make sure that their leadership is better and they will not sit back—they will keep their green L plate up. That would be an interesting idea to discuss with Larry Flanagan and others. If we want to see the transformational change that this country needs, maybe we have to take transformational steps to get there. We should not try to make transformation happen within a process and a structure that are 10 years out of date.

Liz Smith: You raise an interesting point. I do not doubt that we have extraordinarily talented teachers and headteachers in most schools—we do not always give them credit. At the same time, some schools and headteachers are simply not performing. I argue—this came out of David Cameron's report and Graham Donaldson's report—that it is sometimes the system rather than the people that is preventing the achievement of excellence. If we can pinpoint what it is about the system that is not providing excellence, we might get a lot further because we could provide the incentive for schools to do a bit better.

Craig Munro: Part of the answer is in what Brian McAlinden was talking about earlier. Graham Donaldson has highlighted the teacher training issue, which we have discussed. We need a sophisticated target-setting, mentoring, coaching and intervention programme whereby a child is not allowed to get to the point where they cannot read or count because teachers will intervene. Sophisticated discussions must take place with every child, with groups of children and with teachers who are already in schools, and the interventions and pedagogy must be of a high quality. We must create a PRD system that is not patchy across Scotland but which is quite sophisticated, and people must be held accountable for the children and their outcomes. We must also create a culture in which people are open, so that masterclasses can be run for all teachers on certain aspects of numeracy and they can learn how to teach more able students higher levels of mathematics. Some schools and authorities are doing precisely that.

Ultimately, that leads us to the point at which such interventions improve not only the profession's overall quality but our children's overall numeracy and literacy outcomes. Although we have examples of that in Scotland, we need more of it to be systemised at national level.

10:45

Liz Smith: Do you agree with the criticism made of some local authorities that they move teachers who are not up to scratch from one school to another instead of dealing with their basic problems?

Craig Munro: Such problems have to be addressed in the school. As we know, there are certain processes—including, ultimately, a competency process—that can be pursued.

Moira Finlayson: We should not allow such situations to develop over time. After all, a person does not suddenly change from being a good to being a bad teacher.

Liz Smith: Absolutely.

Moira Finlayson: It happens because people get complacent over the years. If they had teaching reviews, that sort of thing would be noticed, picked up and nipped in the bud before it reached a disastrous level.

Neil Findlay: I have to say that I do not understand the point about fixed-term contracts at all. It is like being a football manager—your job is up and if you do not win the next game you are out. That kind of approach never works. Surely teachers will be more confident and put more into their teaching and their school if they know that they are going to be there for a substantial period of time. I agree that it is crucial that they be held to account for their performance but I find the concept of fixed-term contracts strange.

The Convener: I think that your previous profession is coming to the fore.

Neil Findlay: Indeed—and I declare an interest as a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland.

Brian McAlinden: I, too, am a member of the EIS.

Neil Findlay: Soon to be an ex-member, perhaps.

Brian McAlinden: Maybe, but we have to challenge opinions and views and, at the end of the day, I might change my mind about fixed-term contracts. However, you are absolutely right to say

that there needs to be performance management to ensure competence and capacity.

Going back to Liz Smith's comments, I simply point out that getting to the point she mentioned can take a phenomenal amount of energy and time. I know that the system has safeguards to protect teachers at certain points but if they are consistently not delivering for young people we need to address the situation and ensure that local authorities move a bit quicker.

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): My question was about the widening gap between deprivation and attainment. I believe that Mr Munro mentioned the school in the leafy suburb where the gap was wider because it achieved fantastic results for only some of the pupils. I am not a teacher or an EIS member, so you must forgive me if my question sounds silly, but might there have been too much emphasis on league tables and, because the school and teachers wanted to be seen to be attaining, might some pupils not have been presented for assessment or examination? How can such a gap be allowed to happen?

Craig Munro: The fact is that we have established a system that has created perverse incentives for headteachers. I am glad to say publicly that we are working very closely with the Scottish Government on this issue and think that our direction of travel will change the situation. However, although I am encouraged by all that, I have to say that, no matter what you might hear about the approach taken at Castlemilk high school, Brian McAlinden had to endure an annual process known as principal component analysis in which he would be compared with a number of comparator schools on the basis of deprivation, which took into account, say, the number of children in Brian's school who lived in the lowest 15 per cent of SIMD zones or lived in families who have never worked. Such an approach looks at only a small bit of the process instead of every child in Scotland. Schools in fairly affluent areas that had very few children in those zones were being compared with schools in other areas, but schools were not being compared on a like-for-like basis. We need to look right across the profile.

A good example would be the comparison under that system of two local authorities, one of which sends off twice the number of children to higher education than the other does. Using the digital concept of measuring deprivation, the two authorities look very similar in terms of the number of children who live in the lowest 15 per cent of zones. However, if we look right across the profile, we can see that one authority has significantly more children who live in SIMD zones 8, 9 and 10, so the comparison is unfair.

We have schools that are in the top 50 of *The Sunday Times* league table that are failing children, and schools in the bottom 50 that are successfully changing lives in a dramatic and transformational way. We have created a perverse incentive by focusing on nine performance measures. There are five at level 3, five at level 4 and five at level 5 in fourth year. In fifth year, there is one at level 6, and there are three at level 6 and five at level 6. In sixth year, there are three at level 6 and five at level 6, and there is one at advanced higher. Seven of the nine measure the same cohort of children. A school can therefore look really good under PC analysis—it can be in the top quartile, and sometimes even in first place—and yet be failing a substantial number of children. The school is looking at children on the cusp—good schools do that—but they are looking at the children who are getting grade 3s and trying to get them grade 2s, not at the children who are in the lowest 20 per cent. Those children have been lost sight of.

One of the issues that Brian McAlinden had to face was that he had to take a school forward against that system. Many heads have done that, and they have thankfully been recognised for their work. However, we have created a perverse incentive, and, as a result, many very effective heads and teachers have been overlooked and have sometimes suffered from significant bad morale as a result.

We sometimes say, "That's a really good school," when it is not. Certain features of it may need to be improved. We need a much more complex analysis. Instead of saying that schools are good and bad, we can say that one bit of a school is brilliant. In that way we could ensure that schools learn from one another, rather than using the digital concept that makes distinctions between good and bad and rich and poor instead of looking right across the whole social profile, which would make a difference.

Jean Urquhart: We are scrapping that, though.

Craig Munro: I hope so. I know that the Scottish Government is certainly keen to work with our new senior vice-principals benchmarking group. The group is taking a very sophisticated direction of travel, and I look forward to what will come out of that at the other end.

Brian McAlinden: I am one of five in the raising attainment group, which the cabinet secretary put together at the tail end of last year with the remit of looking at lessons learned and how we raise attainment. Interestingly, the definition of attainment was rich attainment. Attainment as we all know it was the end product—which Neil Findlay was talking about—that includes standard grades and highers.

If that is our only measure, we are not acknowledging the journey that young people have undertaken and where their starting point was. Our task in the group was to consider how we raise and acknowledge attainment as a journey, rather than just looking at the end point. Two people can finish up at the same end point, but one may have travelled a considerable distance. However, that is not acknowledged because we acknowledge only the standard grade, higher and intermediate results. That person has worked their socks off to come from a very low level—a baseline—of attainment to reach a level that perhaps is not on the scale yet.

Craig Munro: In terms of changing the system, it is quite encouraging that things are happening in schools such the one in which Brian McAlinden worked that would never have been measured in any way before. Those include things such as the Duke of Edinburgh award, the ASDAN awards, the youth achievement awards and the Prince's Trust awards, which improve children's skills in employability, team building and problem solving. Those awards will be affiliated to Scottish credit and qualifications framework levels, and will be part of the overall framework by which we measure the success of a school. We strongly endorse that.

Jean Urquhart: Mr McAlinden mentioned the quality of teaching and the importance of having an inspirational teacher in front of the class. I am sure that we all remember having one or two—if not more—such teachers in our lives. We are changing to curriculum for excellence. Can we teach inspiration? Do we have inspirational teachers teaching our teachers? How is that education changing in the light of curriculum for excellence?

Brian McAlinden: That is a lot of questions.

Jean Urquhart: Sorry. Just a sentence or two is fine.

Brian McAlinden: I believe that we can do what you asked about, but it will not be easy. The curriculum for excellence is not a new initiative. It is about three key issues: how we teach, what we teach and what we assess. Surely that reflects what good and excellent teachers have been doing for a number of years. I believe that the curriculum for excellence gives us more licence to do that kind of teaching.

As Neil Findlay said, we must find ways of encouraging teachers and leaders who do a fantastic job day in, day out to work with other teachers. However, we must also properly select teachers to come into the profession, then mentor and coach them for lifelong learning so that they can be sustained in the classroom and inspire young people.

Jean Urquhart: I agree with Neil Findlay's point about the five-year contract. Whatever is done in that regard, would it be a good idea to take teachers out of the classroom for a period to free them up to learn something or do their own CPD programme for longer than, for example, just a Monday?

Brian McAlinden: That would be interesting to do. I know of teachers in Canada who take a one-year sabbatical to upskill, do a postgraduate course or whatever. That practice does two things: it upskills them and at the same time it gives them a career break and refreshes them before going back in.

Talking about the five-year thing, it is interesting that the General Teaching Council for Scotland is looking at—I cannot remember the exact phrase, but it is not that you get ditched after five years. It is about keeping the teacher's training profile up to speed. I suppose it is a bit like a pilot's licence.

Jean Urquhart: Clare Adamson spoke about the session that we had in the Parliament with Pasi—

The Convener: Dr Sahlberg.

Jean Urquhart: Dr Sahlberg, who spoke on Finnish lessons. One of the things that struck me about that was that in Finland there is a lack of inspection of schools but much more collaboration between teachers. It seemed to me that they kind of excited each other to raise their attainment and challenged each other's teaching methods and work with their pupils. Is that something that you would approve of?

Brian McAlinden: Yes.

The Convener: Yes is fine.

Brian McAlinden: Good. We can learn from Finland and places like that. The interesting thing is—I read this somewhere, but I might not be right—that a significant number of Finnish teachers are exiting.

Craig Munro: I cannot speak for Finland, but I know that it has got one thing right: the selection and recruitment of teachers. The evidence seems to be well trailed for that.

I do not think that we have anything to fear from taking a third-party, objective look at classrooms. If we are real professionals we need to be able to invite other teachers into our classrooms and to reflect with them. We need headteachers who can reflect with one another and be more open. The McKinsey report indicated that the best education systems are much more open and transparent. I certainly think that it is a good thing to have a third-party, objective lens looking at practice and coming to conclusions about whether we are

improving children's educational outcomes. It is about how you do it, rather than what you do.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): ADES presented a list of attributes for raising attainment. Do they not just reflect existing practice in schools? If we know what factors are key in raising attainment in schools, why do we still have a problem with attainment?

11:00

Craig Munro: The paper that we submitted identifies the attributes that raise attainment. It is interesting that, although Brian McAlinden did his work independently from us, we came to the same conclusions. As the committee can see, the Government leaflet that was issued was joint work between the attainment group and ADES. We all agree completely on the six key themes, which also agree with the Sutton Trust research that we have heard about and with the OECD research.

There is no debate about the specific aspects that raise attainment, but we have not quite completed consistent work on the reasons for that. We have spoken about some of the issues. One issue is conviction. We have some fantastic teachers and headteachers, but how can we get more, with a deeper belief that there is something in there? How can we get more children—who sometimes come from homes with a poverty of aspiration—to believe? We have a national issue with belief. That takes us into the social complexity discussion that we have had and into going through the door of the home to speak about parenting from the ages of zero to three. We need to get there.

Consistency is another issue, as Brian McAlinden said. There is as much inconsistency within schools as there is between schools. How do we get leaders to get teachers to take a more consistent approach? Teaching and learning communities are one way to do that; other ways are attainment reviews and discussions and professional review and development. Some strategies are beginning to produce much more consistent approaches.

The complexity of performance systems is another issue. My belief and ADES's view are that the performance systems have created perverse incentives to increase the attainment gap. We need to take a much more holistic approach—the four lenses view. We need a national lens, a personal lens, a contextual lens and a longitudinal lens. We must use all the rich data that we have from the ages of zero to three, at the ages of three, five, seven, nine and 12 and all the way to 15 and 16, and about leavers' destinations. We do not have a system to use that information. We have such an approach in effective schools and effective local authorities, but we do not have a consistent approach across Scotland.

You asked a big question. I will stop there, but three or four areas could be explored further.

Brian McAlinden: The leaflet, which was the result of joint work by ADES and the attainment group, is interesting. Last week, I was with 130 headteachers from across Scotland, not many of whom acknowledged the leaflet. Every teacher got a copy of it through the GTCS. If we are looking for silver bullets, we must be careful about having a communication strategy as opposed to an implementation strategy. We are good at handing out bits of paper, but we do not follow them up and make something happen, so that every teacher and every school operate naturally in the way that has been described.

The 2009 report "Improving Scottish Education", which was on inspection, came up with the same things as the attainment group and ADES came up with, so the question is why implementation has not happened for Scotland. The answer is that we do not get the journey from the communication strategy to the implementation strategy right. We have an opportunity to take the communication strategy about how we raise attainment and get that happening. I hope that we will make a recommendation on that to the cabinet secretary.

Moira Finlayson: One issue is that a teacher who reads the leaflet cannot implement it on their own. That must be done in the school, where meetings and joint effort must take place. Perhaps such meetings about how to implement the measures have not happened.

Neil Bibby: Brian McAlinden mentioned turning a communication strategy into an implementation strategy. I was concerned to read in the SPICe briefing that maths teachers were significantly less confident than other teachers were about introducing the curriculum for excellence. I do not know whether you can comment on what is being done in CPD or anything else to boost maths teachers' confidence about delivering the curriculum for excellence.

Craig Munro: There is an issue about how people interpreted that question when they were asked. I think that some maths teachers interpreted it as involving their confidence in relation to literacy outcomes and health and wellbeing outcomes. That is one reason why the figure might be slightly low. Unlike the modern studies, history, geography or the science teacher, who has a range of skills and specialisms within their subject area, maths teachers have a specific skill.

Effective schools sometimes get a non-maths specialist to be in charge of numeracy outcomes and a non-English specialist to be in charge of

literacy outcomes. They are getting groups of staff to sit down and think about the outcomes and experiences and consider ways in which, within their own classroom teaching, they could improve aspects of health and wellbeing and literacy.

We are trying to break down some of the subject barriers. The issue is particularly acute in the area of maths. We have excellent maths teachers, but we have an issue in that regard, which is evident in the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy, particularly in relation to lower ability students. We have spoken about possible strategies to deal with the issue, including broad banding, using non-maths specialists to take on aspects of maths teaching for lower ability students and ways of making maths relevant, because many students do not see that it is. Some of our primary and secondary colleagues in the clusters of best practice are getting together to talk about those things.

The Convener: I will finish this morning's session by taking us back to the start. Mr McAlinden, you began by talking about the idea of excellence in terms of good leadership. Is it the case that we have not yet got it right in terms of attracting the right people into the profession in the first place? In other words, are we attracting some good leaders into education by chance, while other good leaders go elsewhere? Is it the case that we must go out and bring leaders into education as opposed to just teachers? Is there something that we are not doing quite right at the start?

Brian McAlinden: Yes; there is an issue with the selection process. To go back to Neil Findlay's football analogy, we need to talent spot early on, when young teachers come into the profession. We need to think about their potential for leadership in formal leadership roles. They need to be leading learning in the classroom, but some of them might well be up for becoming the leaders of the future. At the moment, not a lot of secondary teachers are applying for headteacher posts. We need to think about why that is the case. It might be that they do not feel equipped to do the job, which suggests that we need to support and mentor young teachers who we believe can, at some point in the future, take on leadership roles.

We do not have a leadership academy, which England does. I am not punting that notion, however. I am saying that there are excellent leaders in our country. Why do we not use them?

Neil Findlay: We have not got into the guts of the deprivation issue, which is the big elephant in the room. It would be remiss of us not to note the fact that we have not raised that today. We might need to have another session on the issue at some point.

The Convener: Duly noted.

I thank the witnesses for coming along this morning.

11:08

Meeting suspended.

11:11

On resuming—

Subordinate Legislation

Education (Provision of Information to Schools) (Scotland) Revocation Regulations 2012 (SSI 2012/129)

Education (Schools and Placing Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (SSI 2012/130)

The Convener: Agenda item two is consideration of two negative statutory instruments. No motions to annul have been lodged in respect of either of the instruments. The Subordinate Legislation Committee has drawn SSI 2012/130 to the attention of the Parliament on the ground that the meaning of regulation 17(3)(a) could be clearer.

Do members have any comments on either of the instruments?

Liz Smith: I understand the need for this subordinate legislation, but it is fairly complex and it is quite difficult to dig through to find out why some of the information is felt to be necessary and why there is not a bit more scope for schools—or local authorities in some cases—to use their initiative in that regard. I am not sure that we are terribly clear on that.

The Convener: We have time to e-mail the Government and get some answers if there is something specific that you want to find out.

Liz Smith: I understand the need for the subordinate legislation—accountability is obviously paramount. However, having spent ages reading through it, some areas seemed incredibly complex. Also, I was not entirely convinced that some of the information was needed at a national level. Other bits were perhaps of more relevance to a local authority or an individual school.

My concern is that the witnesses suggested earlier that the measurement process is not necessarily at its best when it is done at a national level—it may be better when a school or a local authority looks at whether it is progressing satisfactorily against its own measurement criteria rather than measuring itself against others. Perhaps we could pursue those points at some stage.

The Convener: Do you see any requirement for us to delay the SSIs until next week or should we ask the Government questions, but let the SSIs go through?

Liz Smith: It is unnecessary to delay the SSIs. This issue comes up fairly frequently, because different types of information come in. I suspect that with the oncoming of the curriculum for excellence at different stages and particularly the new Scottish Qualifications Authority exams, we will need to review the issue in the not-too-distant future. It would be helpful if the committee could review just what information is helpful and what information is not at some stage—it would tie in with what some of the witnesses were saying earlier.

The Convener: That is helpful. In the first instance, I can write on behalf of the committee to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Michael Russell.

Liz Smith: If the cabinet secretary is coming to a committee meeting anyway, he could answer my questions then.

The Convener: The cabinet secretary is coming to a committee meeting at the end of June, but I will write in advance to say that this issue is of interest to the committee. If there is any information that he can provide about the whys and wherefores of, for example, this subordinate legislation, he can do so in writing in advance of the meeting, but we may want to ask him some questions about it when he appears before us.

Liz Smith: Thank you.

The Convener: If there are no other comments, does the committee agree to make no recommendation to the Parliament on SSI 2012/129?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Does the committee agree to make no recommendation to the Parliament on SSI 2012/130?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: The committee has agreed to hold the next agenda item in private.

11:15

Meeting continued in private until 12:47.

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