



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 4 May 2022

Session 6



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EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE
12th Meeting 2022, Session 6

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*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

*Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Ruth Binks (Inverclyde Council)

Gerry Lyons (Glasgow City Council)

Tony McDaid (South Lanarkshire Council)

Mark Ratter (East Renfrewshire Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Herbert

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 4 May 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:32]

Scottish Attainment Challenge Inquiry

The Convener (Stephen Kerr): Good morning, and welcome to the 12th meeting in 2022 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee.

The first item on our agenda is an evidence session as part of our Scottish attainment challenge inquiry. We will take evidence from representatives of local authorities. I am delighted to welcome to the committee room Ruth Binks, who is the director of education, communities and organisational development at Inverclyde Council; Gerry Lyons, who is the head of education at Glasgow City Council; Tony McDaid, who is the executive director of education resources at South Lanarkshire Council; and Mark Ratter, who is the director of education at East Renfrewshire Council. Good morning to you all. I think that this is the first time in the sixth session of the Parliament that we have been able to have all our witnesses with us in the committee room, which is wonderful. You are making a little bit of history today. I thank you for your time.

I will begin with a couple of straightforward questions. We have often heard it said that the additional funds that have come through attainment challenge funding have been used to plug gaps that have arisen because of cuts that would otherwise have had to be made because of the reduction in central Government funding for local government. How do you react to that? Is there a case for saying that that has happened? Is it still happening? Let us start by hearing from Ruth Binks.

Ruth Binks (Inverclyde Council): No, that has not been my experience. We were in at the very beginning of the attainment challenge—seven years ago now—when the money came in to support the local authority. Since then, the attainment challenge money has been regarded as additional. The pupil equity fund has also allowed us to put additionality into the system. The fantastic initiatives that we have introduced include working with the third sector on family support, bringing additional teachers into the system to target support where it is needed, and taking

teachers out of school to train them to become coaching and modelling officers so that the system can keep self-improving, in order to level it up. The answer is therefore no—the additional money has been additional to core funding.

We are aware of funding issues in the core, and we must ensure that core funding and additionality for schools—the entire system—work hand in hand. Attainment challenge funding is only a small part of the funding that we give to schools, but that funding has definitely been additional—and very welcome.

The Convener: Do the additional teachers have permanent contracts now?

Ruth Binks: The ones who came in at the beginning will have permanent contracts. Although they were brought in on temporary contracts to begin with, they will have transferred to permanent contracts when they had enough service. We work with the terms and conditions of the Scottish negotiating committee for teachers, which means that, when a teacher has had two years' service, they transfer to a permanent contract.

We have tried to keep stability for schools, so that teachers can remain in schools. We have managed to work the two systems together—the core system and the additionality—to give us as many permanent contracts as possible.

The Convener: Gerry Lyons, have you been plugging gaps in core funding with attainment challenge funds?

Gerry Lyons (Glasgow City Council): No, not in my experience. We have always taken an holistic approach to funding. On the Scottish attainment challenge fund, we allocated more than 80 full-time equivalent additional teachers to schools, over and above their core staffing, with a view to supporting and developing teachers—it was very much a continuing professional development model—and supporting targeted groups of young people. We did not allocate people; we allocated the money to allow those teachers to be released from class to do additional CPD work with colleagues and to support targeted groups of young people.

The attainment challenge fund and the pupil equity fund have very much gone to our schools, as was the intent. We have given headteachers the agency to make decisions about how they allocate the funding. We have had no intent to plug any gaps.

Core business for us has been the business of the Scottish attainment challenge and of improving outcomes for our young people. That did not come to Glasgow differently, in any shape or form, from where we were—it has always been core business for us, and the additional funding was used to

develop that core business. It is a small percentage of the full budget for Glasgow City Council education services. We very much took an holistic approach—

The Convener: It has always been used for additionality, Gerry. Is that what you are saying?

Gerry Lyons: Yes—in the period in which the Scottish attainment challenge has existed.

The Convener: That is very clear.

Tony McDaid, how about South Lanarkshire?

Tony McDaid (South Lanarkshire Council): The situation is similar to the one that has been described by Gerry Lyons and Ruth Binks. However, we were not part of the Scottish attainment challenge authority programme, so it is principally our PEF money that has gone directly to our schools. We had 20 schools involved in the SAC schools programme, too, which is a grant-claimed activity—it is a school planning process. The only way in which a school was funded was if it had a plan that related directly to the funding. That was all funded towards schools. We need to use all the finance that is available to us, and not just the SAC activity, if we are to make a difference around the poverty-related attainment gap.

PEF is devolved to schools, but we made an early decision that there would be permanent contracts available for teachers. The reason for that is that we acknowledged continuity in learning. We also realised that it is a big workforce and that there is turnover, which needs to be managed. If school leaders wanted an additional teacher as part of their PEF, we tried to accommodate that as best we could through permanency as opposed to fixed-term contracts.

The Convener: Let me stay with you, Tony. You know Greg Dempster.

Tony McDaid: Yes.

The Convener: This is what Greg told us recently:

“When the funding in a school or an authority goes down, some of the PEF might not really be additional, depending on our definition of that. It might be used to prevent a reduction in staffing or in what is offered in the school. A school that is to lose a couple of support staff because of a change in funding or policy in the authority might use PEF to retain those staff because it knows that it needs them to make a difference and that losing them would have a negative impact.”—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 20 April 2022; c 15.]

Is there anything in what Greg Dempster says that bears out your experience in South Lanarkshire?

Tony McDaid: On the specifics, we have additionality in our school support assistants. I think that we all recognise the additional pressures

around supporting children with additional support needs. In that example, what he said is not the case for us.

I understand the core pressures—that is the reality. We all recognise that there are core pressures on our budgets. However, we have all been acutely focused on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Schools might well prioritise certain things, and, when the additional SAC budget has come in, it has been very clear that that is what the money must be used for, whether that has been schools’ accountability and how they have been improving outcomes or, for us as a local authority, looking at what schools do. I recognise the pressures—those are real—but I do not think that one form of funding displaces the other. That is not the way in which we have worked with our schools. We have tried to ensure that our schools are really clear about where SAC and PEF spending should go.

The Convener: Could it have happened in South Lanarkshire?

Tony McDaid: No. I will use the example of school support assistants. We have increased the number of school support assistants for children with additional support needs. In Greg Dempster’s example, if you are losing two school support assistants—

The Convener: As an example.

Tony McDaid: As an example. What might have happened is that there might have been changes in practice. If I had allocated resources to something in a school and the school continued to do that, we, as a local authority, would say that we had a different focus. I accept that that could have happened.

The Convener: And the school might decide that it disagrees with the authority and is going to keep the staff.

Tony McDaid: Indeed.

The Convener: So, strictly speaking, it is not additionality, is it?

Tony McDaid: It is additionality. Priorities change, as does ensuring that your priorities are focused on the activity. It is not just about the resource; it is about your priority and focus, and ensuring that those staff or additional resources are used for the purpose of closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

The Convener: I will give you a break for a minute. Willie Rennie wants to come in with a supplementary question. I will make way for him and then bring in Mark Ratter, which will give Mark a bit longer to prepare his answer.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Just to follow up on—[*Inaudible.*]—this morning. There

has been massive growth in the number of temporary teachers, not just during the pandemic but before that. I am curious about how we can be absolutely sure that we are reducing the number of temporary contracts. Some teachers are going from temporary contract to temporary contract, sometimes for up to six years. How are we managing to be so confident that we are reducing the numbers?

The Convener: We had a bit of a technical hitch there, Willie. Were you talking about the number of teachers on temporary contracts?

Willie Rennie: Yes. I want to know how we can be so confident that we are reducing the number of teachers on temporary contracts when the use of temporary contracts has been going on for years. It has been said that it was the additional funding throughout the pandemic that resulted in a growth in the number of temporary positions, but it was happening for years before that. How can we be confident that the number will not creep back up again in future years?

The Convener: Tony McDaid, we will come back to you on that.

Tony McDaid: The temporary contract activity and the Scottish attainment challenge are two different things, are they not? I accept that there is a connection, to some extent.

For us, it has been about looking at our pupil teacher ratio, our workforce planning activity and the configuration around numbers of classes versus number of pupils. In a sense, that is taken care of—there is a formula that we work to. What we are trying to do is supplement through additionality, such as SAC and PEF, and ensure that there is a degree of permanency.

To some degree, there will always be a temporary nature to this. For example, we have area cover teachers, as we call them, who are permanently based. We have a permanent contract for our cover teachers, who cover long-term maternity leave and long-term absence. However, there is a daily paid activity, if you think about it. Staff get unwell for a short period, and sometimes retired teachers come in to cover for a day or two.

You need to look at how you staff your schools on a day-to-day basis. You then need to build in workforce planning around cover. That might be those long-term contracts. For us, those long-term contracts have been about permanency. Beyond schools and class teachers, we also have an area cover pool—that is permanent area cover teachers we want to move into class posts.

Managing temporary into permanent is a pretty complicated picture. Of course, we want permanent members of staff. It is better for our

children and young people and it is better for our staff. Staff get to know the community and the children and young people. However, there will always be a need for temporary activity, given the nature of the workforce.

09:45

The Convener: What proportion of the workforce in your local authority area is on temporary contracts?

Tony McDaid: I do not have the exact figure, but I can check. The vast bulk are permanent staff. As I have said, we have a permanent area cover pool for secondary and primary to ensure that we cover absences.

The Convener: We might come back to teacher contracts, which, as the witnesses will discover, is a bit of a favourite subject for the committee, because we are exercised by the fact that one in eight of our teachers is on a temporary contract. We think that that is, to be frank, outrageous.

I ask Mark Ratter to come in on my original question.

Mark Ratter (East Renfrewshire Council): We are not part of the Scottish attainment challenge, but, in relation to wider funding, we received about £1.4 million in pupil equity funding for schools. That is absolutely additional in the sense that it goes straight to schools. The evidence from schools is that they feel very empowered by that and that they have ownership of that money. They speak to us about the ability to be creative and take decisions. That, as well as the ring-fenced nature of the funding and the accountability that comes alongside that, has been welcome.

I recognise the comments of my colleagues. For us, £1.4 million represents just under 2 per cent of schools' devolved budgets, so we need to ensure that all the money makes that difference. I recognise that, over the past few years, there has been pressure on core budgets, which has meant that priorities at the centre have needed to be very focused. However, schools have been able to take ownership of the additional PEF money.

The Convener: Is the money additional in the sense that it is not being used to plug any gaps that have arisen from core funding shifting or being cut?

Mark Ratter: Our position is similar to that of South Lanarkshire in that regard. At the centre, we have had to make difficult decisions, whether they have related to reductions in numbers in the quality improvement team or of educational psychologists. However, schools have the ability to make such decisions through their devolved budgets, and they will focus on the key priorities for them.

The Convener: How will Inverclyde Council cope with the slashing of the funding that is available to it? The council will lose 47 per cent of the money that it gets currently through the attainment challenge; it will be gone by 2025-26. What will it mean for Inverclyde to lose all that money?

Ruth Binks: We always knew that the Scottish attainment challenge funding was not guaranteed year on year. We started off much smaller, and we were always challenged on our exit strategy and on sustainability. The amount of attainment challenge money has gone up to £3.2 million, but if you are asking whether I would like to keep the £2.8 million that we will lose, the answer is yes. The bottom line is that of course I would like to keep it, but we have to be pragmatic and look at different funding models. There is poverty throughout Scotland—in every education authority area—so revision to the original funding model was merited. However, we are one of the biggest losers as a result of the revision.

How will we cope? On top of the attainment challenge funding came pupil equity funding, with schools being given money directly. We put some of our initial attainment challenge money into schools to give them autonomy, then pupil equity funding came in. Some of our attainment challenge money funded summer activities such as our literacy lunch clubs. Again, that funding is coming in through other ways.

We are worried about whole-family wellbeing and our partnership with the third sector. We have a very good partnership with the third sector, but we will probably not be able to keep that going, given the amount of money that we will end up with in 2024-25. However, there are opportunities now for us to revise our approach by working across children's services to look at whole-family wellbeing.

We are now considering revisiting and revising all the initiatives that we have taken forward, such as initiatives on mental health and employability for parents. Such initiatives were all part of our original attainment challenge, but they are now being done in slightly different ways.

A lot of our early work through the regional improvement collaborative was on developing pedagogy. Now we have a very good initiative on improving our classroom systems, through the collaborative, which will work in a similar way. For us, there was beginning to be overlap in the system, but we have to manage the staffing out of it. When we talk about temporary contracts—

The Convener: When you say “manage the staffing out”, does that mean that people will lose their jobs?

Ruth Binks: I meant out of the attainment challenge or into the system, so—

The Convener: Are people going to lose their jobs?

Ruth Binks: No. We are looking at a four-year plan. We have additional teachers coming in, we have recovery teaching and we will have natural churn in staffing. We have some temporary contracts, because you cannot have such additionality without bringing in some of those. We have the core system, with permanent staff, and year-on-year funding will bring in temporary jobs. We hope to be able to work the teachers back into the system over the four years.

The Convener: You surprise me a little bit. It is almost as though you are saying that you welcome the refresh.

Ruth Binks: I am not saying that I welcome it; I think that it was a fair thing to do. We needed to look altruistically across Scotland. When we started as attainment challenge authorities we were very much told that we were the pathfinders, looking at how to make things work. We were asked to adopt, adapt and abandon initiatives, which we certainly did. It is very helpful to see that many of the initiatives that the attainment challenge authorities took forward in the early days are now being rolled out more widely.

I started my answer by saying that if I could keep the £2.8 million I would absolutely welcome that. It is a big cut for Inverclyde, but it is one that we always knew could and would happen.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I want to pick up on the line of questioning that the convener started, about the change to the formula. Prior to the pandemic, we had what we were told was very limited progress against the Government's targets on closing the attainment gap—those are Audit Scotland's words.

We know that, following the pandemic, the gap in attainment between the richest and the poorest groups is the largest that it has ever been, and that it has grown significantly. We all recognise the impact of the pandemic on that gap, given its impact on our most deprived communities. Therefore, I find it a little bit surprising to hear our witness from Inverclyde Council talking about the council's exit strategy. Surely the exit strategy should be to ensure that those kids have better attainment, rather than to ask ourselves how we stop spending money on it? I want to explore the rationale of that a little bit.

According to the committee's papers, the reduction in Inverclyde is 47 per cent and the local authority area is consistently among the most deprived communities in Scotland. At the other end of the table is our witness from East

Renfrewshire, which is consistently one of the most affluent local authority areas in Scotland, and its funding is up by 43 per cent.

We all recognise that what we might call hidden poverty exists in every community and that such figures mask numbers. By making this change, are we moving away from using the rationale of severe multiple deprivation in communities and towards something more general? To me, that has been a founding principle of how we have dealt with poverty in Scotland over a generation—or, at the very least, how we have talked about poverty, as dealing with it is a different matter. Has that rationale changed? I ask Ruth Binks to start.

Ruth Binks: I do not think that it has. I have read in the papers about the different measures of poverty. The children in low-income families approach is a good one. However, as long as there is a consistent measure across Scotland, the money can be targeted where it is needed most. Although we have had a big proportional cut, we are a small authority and have to look at numbers within the authority.

You said that there had been very limited progress with the attainment challenge prior to the pandemic. Although the statistics were not where we might have wanted them to be, a lot of groundwork was done during that period to look at the types of holistic family learning that could happen and at the ways that authorities deliver children's services and education. I have seen the opening up of boundaries in our schools. Partnership working has really flourished.

Michael Marra: Those were not my words about development and progress; they were Audit Scotland's words. That groundwork does not really make a difference to the kids who have already gone through the process. It might in the future, but there are young people who have lost out and whose life chances have not improved.

In your own situation, Ms Binks, there are young people who, over the coming years, will lose the resource of some of the teachers or classroom assistants who are now in front of them. Last week, my colleague Ruth Maguire highlighted the 60 posts that will be lost in North Ayrshire. In Dundee—my home city—100 posts will be lost, which is a 79 per cent cut. We can talk about the longitudinal side of the experience, but those are real cuts that will affect the experience of young people now, are they not?

Ruth Binks: Let us look at the totality of the system and the learning that has taken place. I hope that the experience of our young people will very much benefit from the attainment challenge work that has been done to date. We should take the pandemic into account. A lot of what we learned before the pandemic was about building

relationships and providing whole-family support. Attainment in Inverclyde suffered badly during the pandemic because a lot of what got us to the pre-pandemic level was not available during the pandemic.

I see a workforce that is skilled up and is able to deal with young people. That workforce is imaginative in its use of funding. Schools will still have money from the pupil equity fund, and their ability to manage that funding has grown year by year as they look at what the evidence says and what the impact is. I am working with a group of headteachers who are building on prior learning and are optimistic for the young people.

Michael Marra: I am not sure that that answers my question about young people now—those who have left school.

I have one more specific question before I turn to Mark Ratter. Will you use PEF money to make up for cuts to SAC funding?

Ruth Binks: We will not do that as an authority, but schools might opt to behave differently. For example, there is the opportunity for schools to use pupil equity funding for something that might previously have been funded by SAC.

Michael Marra: Okay.

Mark Ratter, you are on the other side: your increase is a fairly significant one. You come from a reasonably small authority with a reasonably small increase of about £2 million, but that is up by about 43 per cent. How will you allocate that money to specifically target young people living in poverty?

Mark Ratter: To be clear, by the end of 2025-26, the increase will be about £0.6 million a year. Our PEF allocation will go up by £100,000, but that is allocated directly to schools, as we have said. By the end of that period, East Renfrewshire will have about £530,000 of strategic equity funding coming to the centre.

As your question suggested, we are looking at that holistically, alongside our existing approach. We have a very clear vision in East Renfrewshire: we want everyone to attain and achieve through excellent experiences.

The £500,000 funding is very welcome, and it will provide additionality, but we see it very much as sitting alongside our existing money for making a difference for our children and young people.

10:00

We have a strategy that was certainly making a difference in our schools before Covid. We were seeing the closing of the attainment gap. We talk about raising the bar and more young people achieving and attaining at a higher level, but also

about closing the gap for those in disadvantaged groups. We look at that through different lenses, and we are seeing more of those young people achieving the levels.

We will want to build on our strategy. That is what we are currently looking at. We are currently consulting. I spent last week in meetings with seven groups of different members of staff whose views we are gathering on how we should spend that money. Our priorities will be around literacy and numeracy. Over the past few years, we have done work that has made a real difference in respect of reading recovery and literacy strategies. We want to invest further, and the money will allow us to invest further in numeracy and particularly in staff expertise around professional learning.

I had the opportunity to be part of the inspection process for the Scottish attainment challenge in Glasgow and Inverclyde. We have been able to take some of that learning and use the evidence that Education Scotland gathered to inform our own approaches and ensure that we have evidence-based approaches for our numeracy strategy.

I think that Ruth Binks mentioned family learning and wellbeing. That will also be a key element of our strategy over the next three to four years. We have seen an impact on children's wellbeing from Covid, which has been well trailed nationally, and that will be part of our work in addressing the matter holistically.

That gives you a flavour of some of the key areas.

Michael Marra: I found that really useful.

I have a question for Mr Lyons. For a long time, Glasgow was one of the most deprived communities in Scotland. Does the shift away from an analysis of multiple deprivation and extreme poverty to something that is more general across the country worry the local authority and you personally?

Gerry Lyons: Not really. In a way, I would be concerned if there was an understanding that a focus on young people in poverty started only with the Scottish attainment challenge; that focus was heightened by the Scottish attainment challenge.

I have been in Glasgow for well over 20 years, and we have always had a focus on improving outcomes for young people in poverty. The Scottish attainment challenge sits within Glasgow's improvement challenge, which is about improving outcomes for all our young people, especially where there are gaps.

We have a school where 95 per cent of the pupils are in Scottish index of multiple deprivation zones 1 and 2. We therefore need to improve everyone in that school. However, a more

sophisticated process goes on in which we start to ask where the other gaps that appear are. We have got much better at that. Dealing with that issue has been core business for Glasgow, and we have made very significant strides.

I want to pick up on a couple of points about additionality. We will continue to focus on doing the best for all our young people and closing the gaps that we identify for young people who need an extra push, and we will continue to work with our schools in order to do that.

Additionality is also present in our schools in respect of capacity. Our teachers and staff are better in that they understand the issues better than they did because of our investment in them and because of the work that the local authority and the schools have done in partnership.

I do not see a move away from trying to do better for young people in poverty. From a Glasgow perspective, that will never happen. We will never move away from that, because it is so vital to us. Working with colleagues here, we are all focused on that, and we always have been. I think that we are more acutely focused on it now. The fact that we are sitting here and having a conversation about it is a really good thing.

I agreed with what Mel Ainscow said. There is greater clarity about the issue and greater crystallising of it than there was. Thinking that that is enough lacks a wee bit of ambition, because there is a greater understanding of what it takes to respond to it and of how to implement that and the range of interventions that that takes. That is vitally important.

There is a Covid frustration around it, if that is the right phrase. In Glasgow, we had closed the gap by 3.5 percentage points in just under three years in both literacy and numeracy, but then Covid came along and we had a different issue.

One of my concerns in all this is how we recognise that the gap is closing. Among our young people in SIMD zones 1 and 2, we had an increase of 524 per cent in those gaining the Duke of Edinburgh award. That gets no recognition in this debate, and it should. We have to look more widely at the issue, but, certainly from a Glasgow perspective, there is no exit because there was no entry; we were already working in this area and we will continue to do that.

Michael Marra: I have one last question, which is for Mr McDaid—I do not want to leave you out. You may have followed some of the recent evidence from colleagues in trade unions, who described the shift in the funding formula as “immoral”. They were aghast about that shift, which, in their view, is totally unacceptable.

South Lanarkshire Council's funding has gone up by 8 per cent. How would you cope with a 79 per cent cut? A former headteacher from Dundee told us that they did not know how they would cope. Would you be able to cope with that?

Tony McDaid: Let us be honest—it is challenging, as Ruth Binks has described it, but it depends on the kinds of programmes and activities. One of the crucial points is that PEF continues and the PEF money goes directly to schools on the basis of free school meal entitlement. That gives schools leverage; it gives them an opportunity—

Michael Marra: [*Inaudible.*—the cuts from SAC?

Tony McDaid: Not necessarily. We have not been involved in some of the Scottish attainment challenge activity, but we have worked closely together. Some of the Scottish attainment challenge activity was based around family learning and whole-school activity, as well as some centralised activity within the local authority, so it is possible to look at some of the other budgets to be able to do that.

For us, the bulk of our money continues to come from PEF. We were involved in the SAC schools programme, so 20 of our schools were given some additional funding beyond their PEF. We would not necessarily have picked those 20 schools. Those schools were picked on the basis of a particular profile, but that did not take into account rural poverty or the concentration of poverty in a couple of our schools.

The bulk of the money still goes through PEF, but there is also the strategic equity fund, which comes to just over £2 million for us. We will be able to redirect that resource to more concerted activity around the 124 primary schools and, indeed, across our 20 secondary schools as well. We can take some of the learning that has happened with the schools.

Support for the 20 schools will continue for the next period of time in relation to some of the work that they are doing, but the strategic equity fund now helps us by offering a collective benefit to some of our other schools. Some of our rural schools do not really get any PEF, but there is rural poverty and one of our workstreams is on rural poverty. The strategic equity fund will allow us to redirect some of that resource.

Michael Marra: With that redirection from parts of the country where there is huge deprivation and significant challenges to those young people who are in poverty, is it not the case that those kids in some of the poorest communities are paying the price of helping the kids who are in rural poverty? Is it right that we should have that trade-off, one for the other?

Tony McDaid: It is not an either/or situation, is it?

Michael Marra: Let us face it—for some of those children, it is.

Tony McDaid: To be clear about the kinds of support that we are giving, we are trying to address those issues of rural poverty. That is what some of that strategic equity fund—

Michael Marra: That should happen—absolutely—but not at the cost of others. We might not agree on this.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Good morning, and thank you for attending. I am finding this morning's session really interesting.

Last week, the convener and I, along with some other colleagues, met parents from some of your local authorities and received direct feedback on how the different initiatives had helped their children. We heard how access to a nurture hub had helped one girl to sustain her attendance at school. We also heard good examples of the provision of dignified support to parents who were in great need. It was good to hear that feedback from folk who really know what is going on, as they are supporting their children.

I am interested in what Gerry Lyons said about local authorities and teachers always being focused on poverty. I think that that is absolutely the case. Even before this inquiry, I have seen headteachers and teachers in my local authority doing things to help children to break down those barriers to sustain school.

I want to ask about the culture change that SAC has brought on. Gerry, you spoke about the additional learning for professionals, which has been helpful. Could you say a bit more about that?

Gerry Lyons: Absolutely. It is an important culture change, because it made explicit something that we were all working away at, and it led to very direct engagement around the issue more widely.

In relation to some of the features of that culture change, we have recognised over time that it is not one thing, but a whole matrix or jigsaw of activity that will make the difference here. The change in culture has meant that we now understand that range of activity better. Things will never be better if we do not improve learning and teaching, so that is part of it, but it is not a case of just improving learning and teaching and everything being better. We know that understanding poverty and its impact is important, and a lot of professional development has taken place around that.

As for supporting families and nurture, support for families is an entitlement; it is not something

that we do just because we want to be nice to people. Families are entitled to that support, and we understand what family support should look like better than we did. We also understand what in-school support should look like better than we did. For example, nurture has grown, evolved and developed, as has support for young people with ASN. The culture is made up of many different activities.

I would also highlight that the culture change has allowed for much closer partnership working with community groups, who, in many ways, understand the issues better than we do. We have benefited hugely from those groups working directly with our families—parents and young people—and from their working alongside our staff and letting our staff understand the issues from their perspective. All those things have come together to bring a cultural focus on the issue, which has been really positive.

I have also noticed, and it is observable, that the dialogue that I have with headteachers and that headteachers have with their staff has improved. They understand the need for dialogue when an issue is identified: “What about Ruth Maguire in your class, who’s here but probably should be there? What are we going to do about that?” The systems are better, and the dialogue is better and more focused.

Staff now recognise that, although we want to be universally effective, we sometimes need targeted interventions. Glasgow City Council has an approach of targeted intervention groups, which has emerged from better use of data. We get the intervention to the young people who need it most and can then look at what difference it has made.

I hope that that answers your question. Culture is made up of many different features, all of which have improved as a result not necessarily just of the SAC funding but of the agenda. Does that make sense?

Ruth Maguire: It does, thank you. That is helpful. One of the key things that I took from our session with the parents was that they repeatedly articulated that their families and their needs were understood. That was a very big thing.

10:15

Gerry Lyons: Could I come back in for one wee second? That understanding of families has meant our getting out to them more than them coming to us, and Covid helped with that. I will give one wee example. A parent in a school where there was a recovery visit said to me, “Mr Lyons, see when you’ve said to a headteacher that you’re running out of toilet rolls and she gives you toilet rolls, you don’t worry too much about asking how your boy is

getting on.” That wider engagement has been really powerful. We will now build and capitalise on that, and I am convinced that that will accelerate progress.

Ruth Maguire: That is helpful. The parents whom we spoke to were from East Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire, so I invite Mark Ratter and Tony McDaid to give their reflections on that culture change.

Mark Ratter: I recognise many of the changes that Gerry Lyons spoke about, but I would like to add a few. There has been a real focus on leadership at a strategic level, so schools are building that into their vision, values and aims. You spoke a bit about building the leadership skills of staff at all levels to make sure that there is a focus on addressing poverty and supporting families well. We should not underestimate the difference that that makes, particularly when it comes to learning and teaching. Gerry Lyons spoke about the numbers of children and young people in deciles 1 and 2. Although we have a very different profile, if we can improve the quality of learning and teaching for all the children in a particular class, the culture change will be enormous. That investment in pedagogy is important.

Rather than repeat what Gerry has said, I will simply mention the investment that there has been in upskilling how schools, teachers and the system more widely use data. We have learned from one another on that. There has been a focus on tracking individual children and young people, as Gerry mentioned, looking at the groups and making sure that staff can drill down in that way.

Do I think that we are there yet? No, not at all. In relation to the points in the paper about culture, which we may come on to, we are trying to share those approaches. As somebody who is involved with the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and who chairs the performance and improvement network, I know that we are constantly working to share the approaches that work well for local authorities and schools to make sure that they continue to improve the culture.

Tony McDaid: I will build on what has been said. There has been a huge focus on the cost of the school day. The work of organisations such as the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland has had a huge impact on all of us in relation to making sure that schools are sensitive to the issue and have the ambition of making sure that families, children and young people are supported with their readiness to learn.

However, the issue is not just about young people’s attainment; it is about making sure that the poverty of opportunity is not there and that, where we can, we take away the barriers to extracurricular activity, the residential experience

and curricular costs. That is essential. I think that we are all clear about the importance of the mission to make sure that children from deprived backgrounds have the greatest opportunities and that they are not stopped by those barriers. That has been a game changer for our schools' understanding.

Yesterday, I spoke to some children in primaries 6 and 7, and I asked them about the costs of residential activity and their uniforms. They all said the same thing—that they knew that, if it was too much for them, they could say so to the school. I asked them whether they would be confident enough to do that, but, of course, that confidence is built on relationships, the sensitivity and awareness of staff and staff knowing the individual children.

It is also part of a concerted effort, as schools cannot do all this work by themselves. A lot of people have said that to the committee. The council has a role to play. We need to make sure that families have access to benefits and that they have a decent housing environment. They also need to have access to our social work department, when necessary. We need to make sure that all those things are aligned and that families are confident that they can access support and additional help if they require it.

Ruth Maguire: Does Ruth Binks want to say anything? I am not leaving you out, Ruth. On culture, there is an issue about schools and teachers having more autonomy and collaborating with community groups.

Ruth Binks: I agree 100 per cent with that, and I absolutely agree with all my colleagues. We have seen a huge maturing of that sort of activity, with headteachers who had been aware of the issues feeling more able or more empowered to help.

One thing that has struck me is that headteachers now feel that they are not alone. Teachers have felt a huge burden on schools and that it is not something that schools can solve by themselves. Over the past few years, activity in that respect has expanded, and I have to say that the opportunity to work with partners during the pandemic is absolutely one of the positive things that we will keep going. That is about headteachers being able to ask parents, "What will help?" and feeling empowered to put in something that will help individual families. There is no one-size-fits-all approach; it is about what will make a difference to people's lives. Those are the sorts of dialogue that are taking place.

We have also seen parents helping other parents. We have been talking about culture; in that respect, I would highlight uniform banks as an example of parents being empowered by schools to help one another. We also have wonderful

examples of parents taking their college employability courses in the school, where they feel safe and welcomed. Headteachers have been able to facilitate that. They have used their imagination and the information that they have to look more widely and develop those kinds of partnership.

Ruth Maguire: Thank you. That was helpful.

Willie Rennie: That was a really helpful explanation of how the system has evolved. I take two things from it. The first is about the listening and understanding that is going on, and the second is about the fact that headteachers are reaching beyond the school gates into the family home, which is a significant change.

The committee often looks at challenges and barriers, because we want to make the system better. In that light, I want to raise two particular issues. First, although school leaders and headteachers are central to making the system work, we have seen a shortage of headteachers in recent years and the emergence of more joint headships in some areas. Does that pose a challenge to improving the system further?

Secondly, can we get the right expertise when it is available, to meet the needs of the variety of pupils that we are trying to assist? Are the specialisms there?

The Convener: Gerry, you were a superhead, were you not? I said "superhead", not "Superman", but perhaps they are interchangeable. In any case, will you start us off on the headteacher question?

Gerry Lyons: I am not sure that I recognise your characterisation of it, convener.

The Convener: So it was tabloid press speak.

Gerry Lyons: It was the press—the journalists and I have had a conversation about it since then. [Laughter.]

On the quality and number of headteachers, Mr Rennie, you are right that we have had challenges with recruitment. For me, one of the most important things that we can do—it is step 1—is put quality people into our schools and into headteacher posts. In Glasgow, we have more than 50 newly appointed headteachers; they have never run a school when there was no Covid, so they have a capacity-building issue to deal with.

The empowerment agenda for headteachers is different depending on where you are. For the headteachers whom I have mentioned, we need to grow their ability to manage their own empowerment and to find out how they make good decisions, how they work closely and in the right way with the local authority, how they plan

strategically and, indeed, how they can grow other leaders, which I think is a really important point.

In answer, then, to your first question about the number of headteachers, I would say: yes, we want to encourage more people to become headteachers and, yes, there have been some challenges around the legislative requirement with regard to the into headship qualification. It is right that we want highly qualified people, but there has been a bit of a time lag between people getting that qualification and their being ready to take on the posts, and then a lag between that and getting the number of people we need. There is a bit of work to be done to improve that.

We then need to grow those people. When I look at our 140 primary heads and 30 secondary heads, I see a range of readiness with regard to what they need to do—and that is okay. We are keen on having a key leadership strategy and developing people. If people do not feel ready to be empowered, as we need them to be, we identify what they need, which includes addressing their continuous professional development and considering what leadership strategy will help us to deliver what they need. We look at how we can move the compass so that they see themselves as key decision makers in the local authority. In short, it is challenging at the moment, but it is about the quality of the people and what we do, once they are in post, to help them to get better.

Scotland has huge expertise. We should further explore how we can work more closely in partnership with academic institutions and our higher education colleagues. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development picked up on the issue of using research more effectively; however, we have some of the best expertise right there in our schools and in our regional improvement collaboratives. Let us use the best of the people we have, and let us identify best practice in the system and be strategic about how we share that. By doing that, we can help all our people to grow. I want us to recognise that as something that we should continue to do. The expertise is in our communities, and we are making those connections more effectively. We could also work in a different way with our universities, which is worth exploring.

I hope that that answers your question.

The Convener: Did that answer both of your questions, Willie?

Willie Rennie: Yes, it did.

The Convener: I have a supplementary to Willie Rennie's question. Gerry Lyons mentioned a key leadership strategy. What do you do for new headteachers in order to help them to feel empowered as leaders?

Gerry Lyons: As I said in answer to Ms Maguire's question, we do not do just one thing. We have a detailed induction programme for new headteachers. As part of Glasgow's improvement challenge, we have a leadership workstream and hold regular sessions with our headteachers. Those sessions will become more regular now that we can get the headteachers into a building to work together. We have targeted sessions about leadership areas such as managing data, which Mark Ratter referred to, understanding intervention, how to plan and growing communities.

I split leadership into two areas. Technical understanding is one. Headteachers need to understand the curriculum, learning and teaching and assessment and moderation at the level that they are at. They already have a good understanding of those subjects, but we look at how that can be improved. The second area is leadership: relationships, working with local authorities and working with parents and families. We deal with that through formal programmes and sessions in which headteachers work together. As part of the leadership strategy, we work with colleagues in regional improvement collaboratives. Then, we get into the schools—the challenge team goes to all our new headteachers and sits with them to review their data, systems and where they think they are with their young people, in order to support them with their planning on the basis of their position.

That matrix of activity helps people to grow. We want that relationship to be clear. We also encourage people to make decisions and not to feel as though someone is going to judge them on those decisions. We will support and help them. Sometimes, they will get it wrong. Did anybody ever say that a headteacher never makes a mistake? Of course they will make mistakes, and that is fine. Let us learn from them and let us grow.

The hardest year of my career was my first year as a headteacher, but I got better—not to the point that I was super, convener, I would have to say, but I got better.

The Convener: That is not what it says in the *Glasgow Herald*.

Gerry Lyons: We all want our headteachers to continue to grow and to get better. Essentially, the best schools are led by the best headteachers.

The Convener: Willie Rennie is right. It has dawned on a lot of us in the committee that headteachers' leadership calibre is the critical factor in the performance of a range of indicators. We heard some amazing stories when we were interacting with teachers and parents. The committee would be interested in learning more about the leadership development programmes

that are being used and successfully deployed, and the effect of those programmes. That is a subject that we would want to come back to.

Michael Marra has a supplementary question.

10:30

Michael Marra: My question is at a slight tangent to the points about headship, but it is relevant to how the attainment challenge work is governed and run. We have talked about numbers, but data that was recently published in *Tes* magazine showed a significant decline in the number of deputies and others who actually want to become headteachers. You have talked about the work that is done with headteachers. Why are people less attracted to that job than they were previously?

Tony McDaid: It is a challenging job, and then we layer on top of that the last two years of work for some of our headteachers. I said at a headteachers meeting recently that they have proven that they can do anything. Their activity in the past two years has been remarkable, but they cannot do everything all the time, and we must be realistic about the workload that we put on them and think about longevity. When we ask about priorities, we must be sensitive to the fact that it is a long game, rather than look at the immediate and tell them to sort things by tomorrow.

Gerry Lyons is right. All of us who have been involved in a school environment know that you need breathing space, and you have to be confident that the people who lead the authority are sympathetic to that. We also need to continue to encourage the principal teachers, school leaders and deputy headteachers who aspire to headship and ensure that they see the worth of the job. It is a tremendous job, but it is demanding. The trick to that is to ensure that headteachers know that they are not making decisions in isolation, but that there is a support mechanism for them. That often comes from colleagues—perhaps through peer headteacher groups, a formal local authority learning network or a RIC. Those activities help people to feel that the job is manageable.

Headteachers have to feel and understand that they are in control and that they know their local community, while at the same time not feeling permanently overwhelmed. They must know where they can go and must have a manageable workload with realistic aspirations.

Michael Marra: Does the decline in the number of people aspiring to headship suggest that pressures have grown in recent years? Is that something that you recognise?

Tony McDaid: We have been fortunate with applications for our jobs, some of which are rural. We have not had much of an issue in our urban areas. We have to recognise that the past two years have been challenging—we cannot set that aside. All of us were working with our public health colleagues, and there were extraordinary demands on schools to stick to bubbles and to cope with isolation. I think that we are seeing the effect of that now.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): The committee's inquiry is looking at how effectively funding streams that are specifically aimed at improving attainment are being deployed, but I want to explore the potential impact of one or two other Scottish Government initiatives. Ruth Binks talked about the groundwork having been done, and I want to look at the impact of physical infrastructure. We are now in a position in which 91.6 per cent of pupils are being educated in settings that are deemed to be in good or even better condition. That has come about because of joint work since 2007 by the Scottish Government and councils to refurbish and rebuild schools. To what extent has that created a foundation to help us to tackle the attainment challenge?

Before the meeting, I was looking for examples of schools that have flourished, and I was struck by a couple in particular. Following a refurbishment, Kilmacollm primary school in Inverclyde won an award for raising attainment in literacy. We have also seen some quite remarkable figures at Eastwood high school in Glasgow, where the percentage of pupils getting five or more highers has increased from 17 per cent to 40 per cent.

I want to explore the extent to which refurbishing school infrastructure, including buildings, will help us to move forward with the challenge that we face. I will start with Ruth Binks, because I namechecked her.

Ruth Binks: I am in an incredibly fortunate position in that every school in Inverclyde either has been fully refurbished or is brand new. The early years estate in Inverclyde is phenomenal. Does that make a difference for the young people? Yes, it does. They come into high-class buildings, which gives the whole community a sense of pride in education.

We have some very imaginative architects in Inverclyde who have looked into Froebelian ways of working. They work alongside the school community and ask, "What will work? What break-out rooms do you need? What will your curriculum look like?" As the curriculum adapts, we might want to revisit some schools.

Infrastructure can, absolutely, give a sense of pride and place, but a school building is only as

good as the community that is in it. It does not replace that, and nor does it replace high-quality teachers. I have worked in some awful buildings—we had buckets for water from the roof—but, my goodness, the teachers were brilliant.

Tony McDaid: We are very fortunate with investment in South Lanarkshire, which predates 2007. All of our children and young people are either in complete new builds or in buildings that have been completely refurbished. That includes our early years settings. We have bright and airy break-out spaces. We absolutely see that pride, and I recognise that that helps the learning environment.

I would say this, but there is no greater investment. When you drive into a community and see that the new building is the school, that gives a sense of all of us investing in our children and young people. There is sophistication in whether it is correlation or causation, but it is definitely better for our children and young people. We needed to replace our buildings because, in many instances, they were unfit for purpose.

We have been fortunate, as a local authority, in that that money has been invested, but that does not mean that remarkable learning is not taking place in other local authority areas where the buildings are not quite up to speed—remarkable learning is taking place. The buildings definitely help, though.

Graeme Dey: In my neck of the woods, community campuses have been developed. The school building does not just open Monday to Friday, 9 to 5, and then shut; its leisure facilities and so on are available to the community. That model must surely assist communities to develop.

Gerry Lyons: I will rewind a bit, if that is okay, and pick up on the important issues of ethos and valuing and honouring our young people and staff. You are right—all of that is important in isolation.

On community centres, parents have talked about being in schools and learning. In a range of schools in Glasgow, we have parent learning programmes. If parents want to better themselves, they go to the school, and the community campus allows them to do that.

For community groups, sports clubs and so on, we want our schools to be the hub of activity in their local communities, because when that is the case, people feel part of them, and when people feel part of them, they get the best out of them. The community hub development is welcome and we encourage it. At different times of the year, we run lots of summer schools and festivals, which keep young people involved and occupied when they are not in school. The school holidays are not always idyllic for every young person, and our schools allow them to get into their school, with a

partner, to get something to eat and to do some really interesting things.

To add to what my colleagues have said, we are able to use our school buildings to improve the curricular offer in a range of ways. We have barista training, vocational centres, working offices and working construction centres in our schools. We have beekeeping in a number of schools in the east end of Glasgow. Our young people have their own beehives—not that I have been anywhere near them; I refuse to go anywhere near them—and they make honey. We also have a microforest in one of the schools.

That work goes wider than just the building; it involves the whole area. That provides opportunities to young people and the local community. Some of the outdoor education is delivered by parents who come in to help and do their bit. It all works around a well-designed facility that is supported by strong leadership and strong people working within it.

Graeme Dey: I ask Mark Ratter to comment, because I think that there was remarkable improvement at Barrhead high school on the back of a refurb.

Mark Ratter: Both of the high schools that you referred to, Mr Dey—Eastwood high school and Barrhead high school—are in East Renfrewshire and have been recently refurbished. Those new buildings and wider facilities have made a real difference to the whole-school ethos and ambition. The National Foundation for Educational Research did some research to track and examine the factors that make the biggest difference to supporting the achievement of disadvantaged children and young people. Whole-school ethos and ambition are two of the seven factors that the NFER considers to be critical. We have spoken about some of the others relating to learning and teaching. A new building can also facilitate that.

I emphasise the vocational aspects within the two buildings that you talked about. They have fabulous facilities for home economics—barista training can take place—and for physical activities. In Eastwood high school, there was a huge increase in the number of children registered for free school meals who took part in wider extracurricular activities. The school used its PEF specifically to support that, but its new facilities enabled it to happen.

It is about a holistic approach as well as attainment, to which you referred.

Graeme Dey: To be clear, I was not in any way suggesting that refurbished facilities are the most important thing as opposed to the ethos of the school and the quality of the teaching—far from it. I see them as being complementary to the work that is being done.

Mark Ratter: I totally agree.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I have been fascinated and hooked by everything that has been said. A lot of it resonates with the evidence that I took from headteachers from the West Partnership a couple of weeks ago, so I will come on to that.

I will talk a little bit about collective agency, which is part of that renewed mission. Sometimes, schools have felt a bit isolated over decades. Having worked in the field for many years, I am glad that schools are being recognised as part of the picture in addressing the poverty challenge and that there is recognition of the need for a multi-agency approach. That is fantastic to see.

Regarding that collective agency between the Government, which sets policies, local authorities, which implement those policies, and third sector organisations and community partners, will the witnesses give me a flavour of success stories from their local authorities and what has not gone so well? What challenges have they faced working with partner agencies?

Mark Ratter: The starting point on collective agency is, for me, an empowered approach. That has been part of our culture in East Renfrewshire since well before we were given PEF. It is an approach of working in partnership with our headteachers, them very much having ownership of the improvement agenda and providing the conditions, facilities and support for them to lead that improvement. When we speak to our headteachers, we find that they feel that sense of ownership. The quality improvement team and the team at the centre act as a critical friend to support that.

We take a partnership approach to, for example, the areas that the headteachers identify as ones to prioritise for improvement. For example, in the discussions with our schools, numeracy is coming through as an area that they want to address as they come out of Covid, with the authority supporting them by investing in professional learning for the staff. That approach is much more effective and efficient.

10:45

The schools need to have ownership of the curriculum, with teachers making the decisions on the curriculum for the children and young people who are in front of them. That is the approach that we have taken in East Renfrewshire.

That brings me to the other part of your question, which was about collective agency and the link with the third sector or other partners. If you were to come to East Renfrewshire and speak to the different schools, as you got a little flavour,

you would get the sense that each school is meeting the needs of its young people and making sure that the curriculum is relevant to them.

Kaukab Stewart: So, the schools are empowered, confident and supported enough to be able to respond to the sometimes very bespoke needs of their local school communities. At that session, I asked a couple of the headteachers whether they felt supported by their local authorities to make quite difficult decisions on competing demands and priorities. They said that they felt supported. It is worth passing that on to you. Celebrate the successes.

Gerry, do you have anything to add to what Mark Ratter has said?

Gerry Lyons: Yes. Some of my experience is exactly the same as Mark Ratter's. Definitely, Glasgow is so diverse, as you will know, that what works in one community will not work in another. The people who understand that best are the people who work in the community.

Our partnership with our headteachers is therefore very much about setting out the direction of travel and what we want to achieve for our young people, and asking them how they are going to do that in their area. We then provide the appropriate support for each school. As you will know, they need different things at different times. That is okay. We want to provide that.

All our schools would tell you that they cannot do that alone and that they have no desire to do it alone. They see their partners not as external but as part of the school community and people with whom they work closely. That is good. Again, we give them the agency to make those connections and to work and plan with those people. That works well.

Agency goes beyond the head of the school. Some of our most effective people are our teachers, workers in support for learning, co-ordinators for developing the young workforce, and other people in schools who wrap around the children, as it is so important to do. Some of our partner agencies and the people who work in them are outstanding.

There is a wee challenge in there. You asked what had not worked. Early on, people found that what they thought they would get from a partner agency was not necessarily what they got. That is where people need to be brave—to say that something is not working and ask whether they can change it, tweak it or get better at it. There was a bit of that.

We are growing in our understanding of how to show the impact of that work. It has always been important for us to say, "Yes, those activities are all well and good, but what have they meant for

the young people in poverty?" Our schools are getting much better at saying that, having needed that development from early in the challenge. However, again, partnership working precluded that in Glasgow.

Ruth Binks: I will build on the subject of partnership working. At the beginning of the attainment challenge, we had an implementation group. One of the wonderful things about it was that it involved not just headteachers but libraries, the third sector and social work. The cross-fertilisation of ideas was very exciting. For example, our headteachers could take ideas from the libraries and explore those. That gave them the ability to develop such ideas and come back to discuss them with others—to constantly reflect. In addition, partnership working through Covid—people having to work together to take things forward—has been fantastic. We have six headteachers who, knowing their different circumstances, have been able to work as a group and feed back to us what they think will work. That has been a very exciting environment to work in.

Kaukab Stewart: That makes me think that, although there might be consistency within a local authority or within learning clusters, the challenge is the variation across Scotland's 32 local authorities. The dilemma that I am grappling with is that we might have collective agency and the empowerment agenda, but how do we ensure consistency across the whole of Scotland?

I invite anyone to chip in on that, once Tony McDaid has dealt with my previous question.

Tony McDaid: I will try to address both questions.

Kaukab Stewart: I thought that I would throw in that second question, which just occurred to me, before I forgot.

Tony McDaid: On the first question, it is really a case of schools and individual teachers knowing their own story around their children and young people and their school community, and being conscious of that strategic priority. People completely understand the need to have a collective priority around excellence and equity.

As has been touched on, the agency of the teacher is important, but within a parameter—there has to be a strategic direction. Maybe that addresses your second question. None of us is saying that it is just a free-for-all. I do not think that teachers would want that; I think that teachers and school leaders would want to feel supported and that there was a genuine direction.

The issue then is about the kinds of support that are provided. Teacher empowerment involves an individual teacher knowing where they can go for support, whether that be technical support on the

curriculum, support with the provision of pastoral support for a young person or support in relation to supporting additional support needs and staged interventions. It needs to be clear whether the support mechanisms are available in the school, the learning community, the local authority or the regional improvement collaborative.

I would like to mention a success story in that regard. The West Partnership put in its online school, West OS, following a request that was made early in lockdown for a digital offer for our children and young people. That request came from our leaders and our teachers. Gerry Lyons led on the West OS activity. Basically, West OS consists of a set of pre-recorded lessons that teachers put together, which we looked at strategically. This year, even in this session, 98 per cent of our secondary schools and more than 90 per cent of our primary schools have used it. Last night, I saw some tweets about West OS maths, because of the national 5 and higher exams. That was supported not just by teachers in the West Partnership but as part of the national digital offer. That collective agency came from teachers saying, "We're really worried about the digital offer." West OS was one way in which we could address that.

To answer your second question, we need to be clear about the outcomes and the measures that we are looking at. Are we looking at the national improvement framework measures, longitudinal activity, the programme for international student assessment—PISA—criteria or global competence that goes beyond simple attainment measures? We have lots of data in the country. The question is, what measures are important to us and help us to measure the gap?

Earlier, I spoke about the opportunities that are available for young people. It is important that we measure that. Such opportunities are available through the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme and lots of the other vocational courses on which young people develop skills. We need a way of capturing that, too.

Kaukab Stewart: Thank you. Did anyone want to come in on my second question?

Mark Ratter: I want to pick up on the theme of consistency. A key point that Audit Scotland made is about the variation that exists, and the consistency argument that follows on from that, which you raised. In its report, Audit Scotland set out three recommendations for local authorities: the first was about using data to understand the trends more effectively; the second was about using evidence-based quality improvement approaches and sharing that learning and practice; and the third was about an issue that we have just explored—working with schools.

ADES has taken a lead on the first two recommendations. We think that it is important for us to have the ambition to do more around consistency and variation. In partnership with Education Scotland, we have developed what we have called a collaborative improvement model, which, at its heart, is about sharing effective practice. It involves bringing together colleagues from Education Scotland and ADES to support a local authority in an area in which it has been identified as needing improvement. The ownership still sits with the local authority and the schools, and there is still that empowered approach that is based on self-evaluation, but the approach is supporting improvement.

I have recently gone through that model and, in the process, we had a focus on numeracy and maths and whether the strategy that we put in place just before Covid was making a difference. Were we seeing improved attainment in maths? Were we closing the equity gap in maths and improving experiences for the children and young people in our classrooms? It was a really robust and challenging process with colleagues from Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and Orkney involved, as well as HMI inspectors and people from Education Scotland, all looking at our data and the evidence that we had gathered. All those people took part and then helped us to shape the recommendations. The approach supports the understanding of the trends and the data, but it also supports the sharing of practice across the system.

I just note for the committee that all local authorities across Scotland have signed up to be part of that over a three-year period and, by this summer, 11 will have taken part. That is a positive step that local authorities have taken.

Kaukab Stewart: That is really welcome—thank you for letting us know about it. Does anybody else want to come in on that?

Gerry Lyons: I was going to mention the collaborative improvement. The only point that I would add is that from it comes a connection with and support for the local authority in taking forward the action plan. When I was involved in the process in Fife, I left an open offer to say that, if that council is looking at X, Y, and Z, Glasgow has a lot of people who have made strong developments on those, and we are more than happy to provide support. The collaborative improvement process is robust and is about helping one another to improve, but the follow-up is where we work together to bring about that improvement, which will lead to greater consistency.

Kaukab Stewart: I have a practical question. How do you monitor the process and how often do you meet? Does it happen infrequently or is it

regularly in the calendar? Is the approach embedded in your practice?

Gerry Lyons: It is in its early stages, but the intention is that it will become embedded in our practice. We want that to happen because, in ADES, we believe that we can all help each other to be better. The way that the process works at the moment is that there is a pretty intensive two or three-day programme, depending on the area of focus, and a detailed report is produced. It is a pretty robust process and there is an openness about it, which I think is positive. For example, if Mark Ratter owns it, he will say, "I want to know where this is working and not working," and then, as colleagues, we are happy to say that he needs to have a look at one thing or another.

The process is in its early stages, but the sign-up is brilliant, and the people who have been involved have found it to be a really positive experience. I think that it will grow to become a core approach, not just at local authority level but more and more, we hope, at school level.

Kaukab Stewart: Thank you.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I want to follow up on that line of questioning. I am interested in your approach to making sure that we get robust evaluation and that the money is spent on initiatives that are actually effective, without putting such an administrative burden on schools that staff spend more time on evaluating programmes than they spend on actually delivering better outcomes for young people.

I will start with Ruth Binks because, given the length of time in which Inverclyde Council has been a challenge authority, you have probably developed quite a coherent approach by this stage.

Ruth Binks: You are absolutely right that we do not want to create a bureaucracy that will take away from the day job. It is about intelligent use of data, intelligent support and challenge, and making sure that what is being put in actually transfers into outcomes for young people. We have done that in a variety of ways. We have built teams together, and we have had headteachers challenging one another. The headteachers were very open to sharing their data and their improvement journey. Therefore, rather than one person going into a school to support and challenge action, we have had teams of people, which is not dissimilar to the way in which ADES is working. The culture of mutual trust that we have developed has been absolutely imperative to getting this right.

11:00

Some things just have not stuck and have not worked. We have been fortunate in having a very good attainment adviser working with our schools. She uses the phrase “Adopt, adapt, abandon.” If schools are not getting what they might call enough bang for their buck, they will change tack or stop the project.

As an authority, we track data for the schools. We have three or four data points during the year. Teachers put the data in the SEEMiS system and we churn it to help and support them. We also have a jointly written pack that looks at the interventions.

We have been successful, and the culture that we have worked in is the key to that success. When we ask headteachers for information, they see the value of that information as it comes back.

We have submitted regular reports to the Scottish Government throughout the attainment challenge. I have one of those reports with me. They are comprehensive. We have always challenged ourselves that anything that we put in the reports must have meaning. Are we moving forward? What difference has been made? Writing the reports has also given us a reflection point. For example, we can look at whether we have increased the number of families that we are working with alongside the third sector, whether that number has gone down or whether attendance has really stuck. That has allowed our team to work together.

The attainment challenge authorities have also challenged one another. That is not dissimilar to what happens in ADES. We have been able to share practice and to be open and honest about what has worked and what we would lie down on the ground to keep. The one thing that our headteachers would lie down on the ground to keep is our data support team. Having that work done for them in a culture of mutual trust has been really supportive.

I hope that that answered your question.

Ross Greer: That is really useful—particularly your point about schools not being afraid to try something and fail. We should encourage that kind of innovation, and we have certainly heard evidence in the past of reticence about taking a risk and failing resulting in a lack of innovation. It is really healthy that schools are being encouraged to take acceptable risks and to know that the local authority will not come down on them for “wasting” money.

I put to the same question to Tony McDaid. How do you go about that? I know that your authority was not previously a challenge authority, but you have had some relevant funds. Now that we are

moving to the new model, what approach will you be taking?

Tony McDaid: That is a good point. It is important for us to align the approach to our school improvement planning process; they should not be two separate processes. Ultimately, we are looking at strategic priorities for the school and the local authority and nationally, and they need to be aligned.

You made a point about not being overly bureaucratic. We want our teachers and our school support assistants to lead on interventions, and we want to lead on evidence-based activity.

Our approach to data is similar to that in Inverclyde. We would help a school to produce its data so that it does not have to go through tranches of activity.

We have a coaching model in which headteachers can come together. They lead on many aspects of the delivery of the work that they have been doing, and they will look at an evidence-based approach, perhaps in a small test of change.

We have an equity team, and the equity leads from our schools will look specifically at some of the interventions and the evidence behind them. We then try to scale up some of that activity. We try to look from the local authority into the schools and vice versa.

The regional improvement collaborative does the same. We have headteacher networks that specifically support our colleagues in schools to focus on equity.

It is important to ensure that the avenues are there and to be clear that the approach is not additional but is part of the school improvement planning process and that the strategic priority is clear to all of us.

Ross Greer: I come to Mark Ratter to move the discussion on. It is impossible for the committee to scrutinise in detail what every local authority and every school spends the money on. We should not do that, because every local authority has its own elected representatives who are responsible for scrutiny at the local level. Will you give us an example of what that looks like in East Renfrewshire? What kinds of report do you prepare for councillors? What scrutiny is provided at that level?

Mark Ratter: In the annual cycle, we take our local improvement plan to our education committee at the start of the year. That is part of a consultation process in which the views of elected members, as well as those of parents, headteachers and so on, are taken as we form the plan. At the end of the year, we take the standards and quality report to that committee. As Tony

McDaid said, we do not separate the two. We make sure that there is clear evidence of the progress on closing the attainment gap and raising attainment more widely in relation to our strategic priorities.

To make sure that there was clear accountability, pre-Covid we also took to the committee a regular report on pupil equity funding and the progress that our schools were making with the £1.4 million. I thought that it was important that elected members were able to see the difference that that was making. It was also a way of sharing practice. We also took to the committee a regular report on the national improvement framework and the progress that we were making on the—at the time—four priorities. There are now five priorities.

Over the year, that gives elected members a clear picture of the progress that our schools are making. We supplement that with a range of presentations so that they are able to understand some of the difference that might be made in the specific context of individual schools. We really try to bring that to light. Colleagues have talked about that in relation to when they have met parents, headteachers and teachers.

Ross Greer: Finally, will Gerry Lyons comment on the new guidance that has recently come out on providing annual reports on how the money is spent to parent councils, for example? On one level, that provides a really healthy level of not local scrutiny, but local accountability and engagement. However, there is perhaps a danger that that will create false expectations that you can do something totally transformational in relation to embedded societal problems within the space of a year. How do you plan to get the balance right in Glasgow in giving parent councils the information that they deserve to have but getting their expectations right on what that means in relation to annual reporting?

Gerry Lyons: The way that you characterised that is really helpful. Right from the very start of the Scottish attainment challenge, we expected our headteachers to report to their parent councils and parent groups about the work that they were doing, and we would always expect that. However, before that, there is a process of consultation and discussion about how we are going to allocate the funding, what we are going to do and what difference we hope that it will make.

There is almost a cyclical approach in Glasgow. Parents, parent groups, parent councils and parent focus groups are involved—as are young people—in discussing what money there is, what we think we are going to do with it, and whether there are things that they would like us to do that we are not planning on doing. We therefore get their views. There are then regular updates on

how things are going before the gathering of information at the end. I am very comfortable with that, because it is important that parents feel engaged. If they do not, we are getting it wrong. I also think that our headteachers want that level of engagement with them.

I want that cyclical approach, and I want our parents to be involved. However, that goes back to something that Mark Ratter characterised. Different parent groups will need different kinds of support and will want different kinds of information. Headteachers know that better. They are the ones who work with those people, so it is for them to say, “For this group, that is the right information to give; for that group, it is not, and we will give them something different.”

If we take a cyclical approach in which parents are involved at the start and at the end, we get away from parents saying, “What do you mean you have only done X, Y and Z?” to their saying, “Yeah, we know that’s what we were trying to achieve. How have we done on that, and what happens next?”

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): It has been fantastic to hear from you all. When we have been out speaking to headteachers, my experience has been that they have been really confident in their own expertise. They have talked really enthusiastically about the positive work that they are doing and how they can build on it.

I have seen in parent councils—in my own children’s parent councils, for example—a real shift to talking about wellbeing all the time. It is not about going on a little school trip or doing the school fair anymore; wellbeing is central. The Child Poverty Action Group’s cost of the school day reports, which were mentioned earlier, have been massive in that. Parent councils have been given a toolkit.

You have talked about the initial funding allowing exploration, laying the groundwork, being able to trial different approaches to learn from and produce evidence on them, and being able to measure them better, which I found really interesting. I am particularly interested in how local authorities measure progress on health and wellbeing.

I appreciate that, on the ground in our schools, the improvements that are being made to our children and young people are very clear. However, how can we measure that on the ground? How can we ensure that those measurements cut across different schools and different local authority areas and are made at the national level so that we can consider whether we are investing money in the right places, what we

need, and how we can ensure that we are giving every support that we can?

I will start with Ruth Binks and Gerry Lyons, as you guys were part of the approach.

Ruth Binks: Health and wellbeing is a huge priority, and it always has been in Inverclyde, because we realised that, if children are not ready to learn or are not in a state to learn, they will not do so. Therefore, we have to get that right first.

That is difficult to track, because young people have different stages in their mental health and their health and wellbeing. It is not as easy as saying that a person has passed an exam; everybody is on a journey, and everybody will be at a different point in their journey.

On the types of things that we have looked at, we have had a big focus on attendance in Inverclyde, because we have a poverty-related attainment gap in relation to attendance. Attendance in Inverclyde was lower than we would have liked it to be, so we asked why that was and what was stopping young people going to school. That leads us on to a lot of the inputs that we have put into mental health.

On inputs and capacity, I will start with mental health and perhaps go wider than that. Teachers, young people, parents and school leaders have had a huge focus on the inputs that we can give to young people for mental health, especially coming out of the pandemic. There must be a suite of inputs. We are looking at whole-family and community mental health, and different inputs at different times, knowing that the relationships with teachers are very important to our young people. It is not always about having another counsellor in a school.

I was at an Easter school the other day. When one of our home economics teachers was putting soup into a wee pot to put into the freezer, two young boys talked away to her about their expectations. That was a lovely session to listen to. It is about having that relationship and building the capacity of our teachers to be able to deal with the health and wellbeing of our young people.

We also need to look at the health and wellbeing of the whole family. Through our work with Barnardo's in looking at families that are sometimes quite stressed, we have seen that attendance has sometimes been lower because the family were hitting a difficult time. It was perhaps the mum's mental health rather than the young person's mental health that was stopping attendance. A lot of work is needed around holistic support for mental health and wellbeing.

We have asked our schools to look at the range of activities on offer and at attendance in particular. Like others, we have doubled our input

for the Duke of Edinburgh awards coming out of the pandemic, because we want young people to be out there and to have the experiences that they have missed. We track the young people who attend to ensure that they are not just the same ones lots of times and that attendance is across the board.

Our schools are increasingly good at considering the inputs that they have for different types of health and wellbeing initiatives, such as after-school clubs, and the attendance at such initiatives—they are now beginning to consider putting in bespoke opportunities for the young people who perhaps are not attending anything.

11:15

Gerry Lyons: Glasgow's improvement challenge has a focus on the development of health and wellbeing. With regard to some of the ways in which we can see a positive impact every year, our sports team has gathered statistics showing increased participation in sports clubs in schools and has produced a lovely infographic that shows the number of people who are taking part, what they are taking part in and the increase over that period. That has been very positive.

Our nurture programmes have supported young people with attachment issues to be in school and feel safe there, which is not about a base but about a nurturing environment and nurturing principles. Glasgow has had huge success in that.

We have reduced exclusion—since 2015, the percentage of pupils who have been excluded has dropped by 59.1 per cent for primary pupils and 58.3 per cent for secondary pupils. There has been an 87 per cent reduction in exclusion. Our young people are spending more time in school, which is a good thing.

The mental health challenges are significant, and more so since Covid. It is important that we focus on promoting positive mental health and wellbeing rather than on reacting to poor mental health and wellbeing, but we need to do that effectively.

In addition to positive programmes and nurture, we have also trained staff as mental health first aiders across all our schools. The counselling input has been important and has helped people improve their own capacity, which is important too.

With regard to diet, the breakfast clubs, which are feeding our young people and ensuring that they are ready to work, have been very effective. Many of our schools have run classes for parents on how to cook well on a budget, which is a practical matter, but important. All those things are happening.

As we move forward, there is room for us to do targeted research so that we can all agree on a set of indicators for mental health would be, so that we can find a way to—measure is not the right word—exemplify mental health. I do not think that we have that across the country yet, and I do not think that consideration of attendance and exclusion is sufficient. The question is about what those indicators look like and what evidence we can provide to show that our young people are developing in their wellbeing and growing in all aspects of their health, including mental health.

Tony McDaid: To build on what Gerry Lyons and Ruth Binks have said, we would consider similar activities. I am acutely aware that schools will look at uptake of activities. Beyond the classroom, the question of how our young people are engaging in the extra offer becomes incredibly important.

From a national perspective, the healthy living survey will consider free school meals uptake and the offer around physical education and activity—the ambition is to offer two periods for secondary pupils and two hours for primary pupils each week—and we will collect that data yearly.

The growing up in Scotland survey will give us important information about physical and mental health and wellbeing, childcare, education, employment, involvement in offending and risky behaviour. It already helps us direct activities around speech and language development, for example, especially in relation to early years intervention activity, and some of the activity around motivational behaviour.

We are trying to find a way to measure pupil engagement, which is quite tricky because it sits with how the young person self-reports and with their expectation of their own wellbeing. Although that measurement is done very well at school level, the difficulty, as Gerry Lyons said, is to translate it into a consistent national picture.

Stephanie Callaghan: I should probably mention that I am currently a councillor in South Lanarkshire Council, although this is my last day as such.

Mark Ratter: To add to what colleagues have said, I suppose that this is about getting the balance between local measures that schools will use to provide that rich picture of the health and wellbeing of the children in their school and the system-level data. As Gerry Lyons has said, that is probably the bit where there are fewer consistent measures. Like others, we make use of attendance data. We also sample all our schools with a questionnaire in which we have built in some of those themes. For example, it asks the children whether the school is supporting them and helping them to become more confident.

Therefore, it picks up the wider purposes of education—that goes back to the four capacities—which is important. That gives us a sample across East Renfrewshire. However, the picture would not be consistent across all 32 local authorities, which takes us back to the theme that we were considering earlier.

The other measure that I would see as being important or related to that issue is around the participation measure or school leaver destinations. Although, strictly speaking, that is not about health and wellbeing, that gives a good indication of the curriculum that has been provided and whether that is meeting the children's needs and enabling them to go on successfully after they leave school in that way.

Stephanie Callaghan: That is great. Thank you very much. I am aware of the time, so I will pause there.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): That was a really important line of questioning from Councillor Callaghan, as she will be known for the rest of the day.

As the committee's final contributor, I want to step back and look at some of the evidence that we have received over the past few evidence sessions. Andrea Bradley from the EIS told us that we should look at achievement as much as at attainment, and Jim Thewliss suggested that attainment is too narrow a focus. In that context, we measure what we measure. As a Glasgow MSP, I want to give some data on Glasgow and get Mr Lyons's reflections on it. The other witnesses can then perhaps come in and flesh out their experience in their own areas.

Mr Lyons, I congratulate you on achieving the goal of a 3 per cent improvement in literacy and numeracy in three years. It is a great achievement. However, there are indicators other than those. What information should we capture routinely across the country as part of the attainment challenge, and what information should we not capture? For example, in Glasgow, 96.3 per cent of school leavers went on to positive destinations. That is a record level for Glasgow, and the figure is above the Scottish average. I should point out that every young person at St Roch's secondary school, which the committee visited, reached a positive destination. People who live in that area certainly know what deprivation looks like, as I am sure Mr Lyons will agree.

It is also important to put on record that 71 per cent of young people in Glasgow went into higher and further education. In fact, we had record levels of entrants into higher education in Glasgow.

There are two things that we, as politicians, debate, one of which is whether we are addressing the attainment challenge sufficiently.

When we look at literacy and numeracy, as crucial as those aspects are, I wonder whether we should step back, say, “Let’s chart this or that, too, to see how successful the attainment challenge has been” and then agree a different dashboard of measures.

I should highlight one final bit of evidence. The teachers from the West Partnership whom we met at St Roch’s secondary school wanted to ensure that we acknowledge, celebrate and champion the excellent achievement that already happens, because sometimes that is lost in the political debate.

In short, what would such a dashboard of success look like? What measures would you like to see in it? Do you have reflections on anything else that I have said? Other witnesses can come in after you respond, Mr Lyons.

Gerry Lyons: It is great to end with a Glasgow MSP talking about all the data. That is brilliant.

I agree with you that we need a wider dashboard of measures. I would also like us to use the measures that we have in a more sophisticated way than we currently do. We should continue to look at attainment measures, which I would like published and analysed as young people leave school, not at the different staging points when they are in school. Let us focus more on exit and where young people are at the end of their school journey.

With regard to the attainment context, there is no more important discussion in Scottish education at the moment than the one about how we assess young people and how they get a chance to show their learning and their levels of attainment. That is already being discussed, and I hope that we can be much more creative in how we allow young people to demonstrate their learning and attainment.

I would like the attainment measures to continue, but, as I have said, I would like to see them used at the point of exit. I would like the way that we assess to change so that young people can show their learning in a range of different ways.

I would like us to continue to focus on literacy and numeracy as foundational skills, but we should also celebrate attainment across all curricular areas. Our primaries suffer from that a little bit, and I know that it is incredibly difficult to do well, but let us not minimise attainment in the arts or in science, technology, engineering and maths. Some of our schools do brilliant work on that but they do not get the credit, because literacy and numeracy are still not quite where they should be.

There should be a wider basket of measures, particularly in primary schools. I agree with the other two contributors to whom you referred that we should celebrate achievement and that it should be part of the dashboard. We need to do a bit of work on what that means. Does it mean that we celebrate the number of kids who got a Duke of Edinburgh’s award or a John Muir award, or do we look at it more roundly than that?

We should have a great focus on positive destinations and, indeed, should continue to do so, because it is a big bit of the future look. The destination figures for Glasgow showed that 97 per cent of young people in the most deprived areas of the city—the quintile in the SIMD 1 and 2 areas—went on to a positive destination. That should be celebrated, which you have done, and I thank you for that.

We need to focus on achievement, attainment and positive destinations and find some way of celebrating health and wellbeing. However, I am not sure what that would look like, so we should commission someone to get that right.

I completely agree with the last bit of your question. There is much excellent work going on in Scottish education, with our schools, staff and communities doing much brilliant work. Let us get that out front and use it as the basis for improvement instead of, as is sometimes the case, finding the things that are not working and spending all our time talking about them. We miss so much by doing that.

Does that answer your question?

Bob Doris: It answers my question and a bit more, Mr Lyons, so thank you very much.

I will just put on record that the attainment challenge started in 2015 and PEF started in 2017. Therefore, when I mention positive destinations, I am referring not just to good work that is being done by teachers working with the cohort as they leave school but to work that has been done by teachers over a number of the years for which the attainment challenge has been running. We should not miss that out.

Gerry Lyons: Absolutely. It might be worth considering the fact that you do not get positive destinations if you do not have a really good three-to-18 journey, so the work of our early years centres and primary schools is also part of the celebration of positive destinations.

We should also consider how we show young people’s development and career readiness, if that is the right term, and whether we should make that part of the dashboard of measures, too. Please do not come back and ask how we do that, as I will have to say that I am not sure, but it would be great to do it.

Bob Doris: If I do come back, the convener will be upset, because we are running out of time and the other witnesses want to give us the story from their local authorities. Thank you very much, Gerry. That was very helpful.

Ruth Binks: Building on what Gerry Lyons has said, I think that we should absolutely look at the journey up to the leaving date, and we should ensure that we look at positive destinations and participation measures. In Inverclyde, we know what happens to all our young people—100 per cent of destinations are known and we do not let anybody slip through the net. That is important to us because, if somebody is not in a positive destination, we want to know what happened, what we could have done better and what we can do to support them beyond school.

We should absolutely think about celebrating the talent within the school and what teachers do on top of their literacy and numeracy day jobs. Each of those teachers nurtures talents and brings out the gifts that our young people have. The future tennis players, football players, musicians and actors are all in our schools at the moment. We are developing them and the rich curriculum helps that.

I do not have much else to add to what Gerry Lyons said.

11:30

Bob Doris: I am conscious that this might be a question for all four witnesses, but is there anything that you would like to add to a dashboard of achievement that we can monitor over a period of time? I would welcome it if that was addressed in any response.

Tony McDaid: We have the 11 measures in the national improvement framework, which help us with literacy and numeracy and definitely help us examine the gap.

I agree with the point about wider attainment measures. We have got better at doing that sort of thing. We now base our evidence at senior school level as pupils leave not only on the number of highers that they achieve; we are also able to consider Scottish credit and qualifications framework levels and comparable work. We need to extend that to a range of measures. We could consider foundation apprenticeships, but many young people might also consider, say, a training provider or college activity. It is crucial that all of that forms part of the suite of measures of activity that we examine.

We also need to be careful about trying to measure everything and then suddenly finding that it is of no worth to us—we need to consider what is currency for the young person. In the initial

move to curriculum for excellence, we talked about a pupil profile that captured the pupil's learning as they moved from broad general education into the senior phase and for which the pupil had responsibility. We could build on that with a young person leaving school, and it could be seen as having worth as they moved into employment. It would be not just, say, a personal statement that, as everybody knows, needs to be a certain number of words and which then becomes a mechanistic activity, but something that really captures the richness of their school experience.

We need to ensure that we do that, that it is not bureaucratic and that it does not become tokenistic. We need to capture the flavour of a young person's journey in school. If we can do that, the young person can then use it as they move forward.

Mark Ratter: I will be brief. The point about capturing attainment from three to 18 is important. For me, curriculum for excellence attainment in primary would be part of the key set of measures in the dashboard.

Colleagues have mentioned other points. I just wonder whether we need to have a discussion as a country about all this. I welcome the new core plus approach, in which we agree that certain aims are absolutely important. The discussion that we need to have, though, is what goes into the core set of aims and then what things beyond that, such as achievements in health and wellbeing, sit in the plus element. There might be good systems at a local or school level, but reporting is not necessarily happening all the way up to Scottish Government level. That should form part of the debate, and it probably brings in some of the recommendations in Ken Muir's recently published report.

Bob Doris: That was really helpful evidence. I thank all four witnesses.

The Convener: That brings us to the end of this agenda item. I thank Ruth Binks, Gerry Lyons, Tony McDaid and Mark Ratter for their invaluable help to the committee as it pursues its inquiry. I wish them all a pleasant day.

We will have a short suspension to allow the witnesses to leave.

11:33

Meeting suspended.

11:36

On resuming—

Petitions

Restraint and Seclusion in Schools (National Guidance) (PE1548)

The Convener: Welcome back. The next item on our agenda is consideration of public petitions. We will first consider PE1548, which is about national guidance on restraint and seclusion in schools. It was lodged by Beth Morrison.

The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce national guidance on the use of restraint and seclusion in all schools. The petition says that the guidance should support the principles of last resort so that, when it is deemed necessary, restraint should be the minimum required to deal with the agreed risk, for the minimum amount of time, and with appropriate supervision of the child at all times, including during “time out” or seclusion.

The guidance should also support the principles of reducing the use of solitary exclusion and limiting the time that it is used for—for example, by setting a maximum time limit; not using restraints that are cruel, humiliating, painful and unnecessary or that are not in line with trained techniques; and the accountability of teaching and support staff for their actions, which should include recording every incident leading to the use of seclusion or restraint and monitoring of that by the local authority.

The guidance should also include the principles that there will be regular training for staff in how to avoid the use of restraint and that, when restraint is unavoidable, there will be training in the use of appropriate restraint techniques from providers accredited by the British Institute of Learning Disabilities, with no use of restraint by untrained staff.

The petition also calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to appoint a specific agency—either Education Scotland or, possibly, the Care Inspectorate—to monitor the support and care that is given in non-educational areas, including by evaluating the restraint and seclusion of children with special needs in local authority, voluntary sector or private special schools.

Our papers outline the work that was undertaken on the petition by the Public Petitions Committee and the session 5 Education and Skills Committee. In December 2019, the Deputy First Minister and then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills confirmed that

“the Scottish Government will produce new national guidance that will provide a clear human rights-based policy on physical intervention and seclusion in Scottish schools”.—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 19 December 2019; c 22.]

A working group, whose membership included the petitioner, was established in early 2020 to develop and agree the new guidance. Although progress was delayed by the pandemic, the Deputy First Minister indicated, in correspondence dated 16 February 2021, that the guidance would be finalised later in 2021. As yet, that guidance has not been published.

Do members have any comments on the petition?

Graeme Dey: I should acknowledge that the petitioner is one of my constituents. I very much commend her doggedness and constructive suggestions, without which we would not have reached this stage.

Clearly, Covid has interrupted progress. It would be appropriate to write to the cabinet secretary, seeking an understanding of where matters rest at the moment.

The Convener: We could perhaps ask for a timescale in which we can expect to see the guidance that the working group has developed.

Ruth Maguire: This is a really important topic. I agree with Graeme Dey and the convener that, in the first instance, we should write to the cabinet secretary, asking for an update on when we will see that human rights-based policy and guidance. It is important for pupils, parents and teachers.

The Convener: As there are no other comments, do members agree to write to the cabinet secretary, asking for an update on the anticipated timescale for the guidance that is being developed by the working group?

Members indicated agreement.

Literacy Standards (Schools) (PE1668)

The Convener: Our next petition is PE1668, on improving literacy standards in schools through research-informed reading instructions. The petition, which was lodged by Anne Glennie, urges the Scottish Government, first, to provide national guidance, support and professional learning for teachers in research-informed reading instruction—specifically, systematic synthetic phonics—and, secondly, to ensure that teacher training institutions train new teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics.

Our committee papers provide an outline of the action that was taken on the petition during session 5 by the Public Petitions Committee and the Education and Skills Committee. The session

5 Education and Skills Committee was undertaking an inquiry into initial teacher education and the early phase of teaching. Ahead of the formal evidence sessions for its inquiry, the committee agreed to take evidence from the petitioner to allow the broader issues raised by the petition to be explored. It also agreed that the session would include a focus on any issues that could inform the inquiry.

The session, which was set for 18 March 2020, did not take place, as a result of the Covid pandemic, and the committee was unable to restart its inquiry on ITE owing to other work that it undertook on scrutinising the response to the pandemic.

Do members have any comments on the petition?

Kaukab Stewart: From an educationalist's point of view, we need to consider the issue very carefully. Directing methodology and pedagogy is a tricky area. From what I can see, the petition asks us to do that and to go down a certain route. I have taught synthetic phonics for over 30 years, but I have also taught the other methods. At the moment, in initial teacher education, they are trying to use a variety of those approaches. I am not commenting on whether they are doing it well enough.

There are technical flaws to synthetic phonics, because there are issues about pronunciation and how neurodiverse kids come into it. It also does not solve the issue of dyslexia. I wonder whether those issues are all behind that work. Obviously, I was not there during the previous session, but all of those issues have come to me, so, as much as I would love to get stuck into this, I wonder what our role is. Is it our role to direct the way that we teach reading and roll that out? That is what the petition is looking for, and I am not sure that that is our role.

The Convener: I am not sure that politicians should be getting involved in that.

Kaukab Stewart: Yes, I know.

Stephanie Callaghan: I agree, because mandating local authorities, headteachers and teachers to teach in a specific way is quite concerning. I have neurodiverse children, and having a wider range of options means that we can work with what is best for children as individuals.

Michael Marra: I am conscious that we have received some evidence—through the Ken Muir report on initial teacher education and discussions around it—that some forms were put in place almost a generation ago and have been replicated elsewhere, but we have not kept them up to date. I know that we have a full work programme for the

next year at least, but, perhaps later in the session, after we have been through the legislative process, the subjects that are dealt with in the petition might be addressed in a future inquiry. That is not on the immediate horizon, but I am sure that it would come up if there was another discussion about initial teacher education. The committee might want to have that discussion at some point, and I certainly think that there would be grounds for doing so.

11:45

The Convener: With regard to the petitioner's expectations, it is only fair to say that we are not going to get to this specific aspect of education policy any time soon—not within a year, at least—because of the inquiries that we already have under way. You mentioned the Ken Muir report. On top of that, we have a growing number of legislative requirements, which will also take up our time.

Ruth Maguire: Notwithstanding our obvious interest in initial teacher training, the right thing—based on what Kaukab Stewart has laid out—might be to close the petition.

Bob Doris: I will be brief. Michael Marra's suggestion was about embedding the activity in another body of work or another inquiry that the committee might pursue during the parliamentary session. That is what the previous committee agreed to do, and it found the opportunity to do so. Obviously, however, we do not have that opportunity during this session.

"Never say never" is the point that Mr Marra is making, I suppose, but the convener's point is about not giving a false expectation that things might happen any time soon. I therefore agree that we should close the petition. However, our knowledge of the wider issues that the petitioner would seek to have raised does not disappear with that closure. If there is another inquiry that we can tack those questions on to, we should do so, by all means. Nevertheless, at this stage, rather than having things drag on without being able to fulfil the petitioner's expectations, I agree that closure is probably the best thing.

The Convener: I tend to agree with what you have said. I will bring Michael Marra back in, in a minute. To be fair to the petitioner, we are not likely to get to this in the immediate future. As I said, I cannot see over the brow of the hill, but I do not see us getting into that policy area in the work of the committee in the next year at least. I therefore think that the best thing to do is to be completely on the level and say that we should close the petition but that, should we get to the subject of initial teacher education, we would have

an institutional memory of the petition and could revisit it at that time.

Michael Marra: I am content with that, convener. It sounds like a reasonable approach. The committee is pretty clear.

The Convener: Are we content to close the petition?

Members indicated agreement.

Getting it Right for Every Child Policy (Human Rights) (PE1692)

11:47

The Convener: The next petition is PE1692, which is on an inquiry into the human rights impact of the getting it right for every child—GIRFEC—policy and data processing. I am not a great fan of all these acronyms; I have to keep reminding myself of what they stand for. The petition, which was lodged by Lesley Scott and Alison Preuss on behalf of Tymes Trust and the Scottish Home Education Forum, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to initiate an independent public inquiry into the impact on human rights of the routine gathering and sharing of citizens' personal information on which its GIRFEC policy relies.

Our papers say that, in January 2020, the Deputy First Minister and then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills explained that his officials were in the early stages of developing a package of products based on shared principles around how services should handle sensitive personal information, to ensure that children, young people and their parents could be assured that their rights were being respected. At that time, the Deputy First Minister expected to publish those materials at the end of 2020; however, progress was delayed by the pandemic. In February 2021, responding to a request for an update, the Deputy First Minister indicated that the guidance would be finalised later in 2021. As yet, that guidance has not been published.

I ask members for their comments. Although I am not a fan of acronyms, the subject matter of personal data is a critical issue in the minds of many people, including the petitioners.

Michael Marra: The Government had a clear direction of travel in its intent to respond. It would be reasonable to write to ask what progress it has made on that. We would understand the delays, but, if it is going to make a response, it would be good to see it.

The Convener: I see lots of nodding heads. Are we content to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, asking for an update on the timescales, which clearly need to be updated?

Members indicated agreement.

Additional Support Needs (Funding) (PE1747)

11:50

The Convener: The final petition is PE1747, which was lodged by Alison Thomson. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide adequate funding to support children with additional support needs in all Scottish schools—primary, secondary and special.

Our papers outline the action that was taken on the petition by the session 5 Public Petitions Committee and its decision to refer the petition to the Education and Skills Committee. In its legacy report, the session 5 education committee explained that it undertook work on additional support for learning following the referral of PE1747, which included, at its 18 November 2020 meeting, taking evidence from Angela Morgan on her additional support for learning review report and, as part of its pre-budget scrutiny, looking at additional support needs. However, the committee stated that, given the time constraints, it was unable to fully consider the petition. Do members have any comments on the petition?

Michael Marra: This subject comes up weekly in our committee meetings, and it came up again today in the evidence that we received regarding the attainment challenge. Additional support needs are an underlying issue in the performance of the education system across Scotland and pertain to some of the most vulnerable young people.

Given how often the issue comes up, it would be good if it were firmly on our work programme for the foreseeable future. Given the representations that I receive as a member, I think that it should come to the fore in our work programme, if we can find space for it. I recognise that our work programme is busy and that we would have to find space, but it is a recurring theme that comes up week after week.

All the evidence that we receive shows that it is a challenge for local authorities and families. I am keen, therefore, that we try to find space for it. I recognise that that might not happen in the coming weeks, but let us take suggestions on how we deal with it. I am very keen for us to do something about it.

The Convener: That is a very clear position. To an extent, the issue is a silver thread that runs through so many other issues that we consider as part of our work programme, so it is not completely out there. As you pointed out, it keeps coming back up in the committee's work.

Kaukab Stewart: I agree with what both of you have said. However, we have been taking evidence about Covid, and it is important to put across the view from inside the profession that additional support needs is a very specific term that covers those who are not yet diagnosed, as well as those who have been diagnosed and who experience difficulties with and barriers to learning. It is true that additional needs have come up time and time again, but the needs that have come up are those of young children suffering because of Covid. Those needs and additional support needs are two different things—we must remember that. Although I do not disagree with what you have said, I want to correct the idea that is in your heads. You must not conflate those two things.

Experts are starting to note that, sometimes, when parents say that they think their child is autistic and they want them assessed, the early years practitioner says that, actually, in their professional opinion, the child is not hitting the markers for that and, instead, they have suffered from a lack of stimulus and need a bit of speech and language therapy. I hope that that gives an example of the difference.

The petition concerns additional support needs as per the tight parameters of the legislation.

Graeme Dey: This is not a question so much as an observation. I totally get Michael Marra's point about the representations that we receive as members, although we might disagree about the extent to which responsibility for additional support for learning lies with local authorities as opposed to the Scottish Government through additional funding.

What form would the committee's work take if we considered the issue? Given our workload, I do not envisage an inquiry into it, so I am not clear how we would take it forward. That is not to say that we should not, but we need at least to have an idea of what form our interest would take before we come to a decision as to what to do.

The Convener: This is about funding as much as anything else. We have another budget cycle coming almost as soon as we get back from the summer recess, so we could consider the issue in the context of our pre-budget scrutiny. Over the course of that process, it would be a fair issue for the committee to address with witnesses, including the cabinet secretary. We could keep the petition open to take us to that point and then review it. Does that answer your question?

Graeme Dey: With respect, you suggest that we fundamentally accept that this is an issue of national Government funding, and I am not sure that I entirely agree with that.

The Convener: As you well know, as a former minister, the Government has the capacity to ring

fence funds for certain things that it passes along to local government. The Government can make a party political point if it does that rather deftly, so it is something that the Government could do.

Michael Marra: I will come in partly to give the deputy convener reassurance that I am not confused in the picture that I have in mind about the evidence that we have received. Additional support needs issues have come up in the context of Covid and in a variety of other contexts, including the institutional reviews that we are considering and in the evidence about Education Scotland. Those issues came up again in today's evidence. As the convener has rightly said, it is the silver thread that runs through much of the evidence that we have taken over the past year. Those issues are not particular to Covid, although Covid has had a clear impact on young people with additional support needs.

That brings me to my point. I see the issue in a broader context. We must consider how the funding is allocated, which is part of the question. Has the Morgan review been implemented appropriately, and are we meeting the aspirations that were set out in it? A broader inquiry into that would be appropriate—I hear that all the time and there is a real need for it.

Kaukab Stewart: I have no difficulty with picking up from where the previous committee was, because it was going to consider the issue. Its next step was going to be to consider the matter as part of its pre-budget scrutiny. I do not have an issue with that.

The Convener: That is helpful.

Bob Doris: I hope that this is a helpful contribution. I think that we all agree to keep the petition open, but we are in danger of rehearsing what our discussions might be during our work programme chat. However much work on the issue we deem appropriate, we should reflect on how we can best take it forward. Budget scrutiny would seem an obvious hook to hang it on, but we will all want to reflect on that. We are saying that we should not close the petition, so that we can pick up the cudgels again in our work programme discussions.

The Convener: Absolutely—the cudgels will still be there to be picked up.

Ruth Maguire: There is obviously a great deal of interest in this important topic. I wonder whether one of our private business planning discussions would be the place to fully thrash out where we go with it. I agree with keeping the petition open but, with a full work programme, we want to be sure that we give it the attention that it deserves. We need to consider whether it fits into something else or needs to be separate. I propose that we keep

the petition open and consider it the next time that we have a private business planning discussion.

The Convener: Ruth has summed it up nicely.

Kaukab Stewart: Ruth said exactly what I was going to say—thank you for that, Ruth. I have no issue with doing what is proposed, but I am mindful of the impact on our work programme and what we would give up in order to do the petition justice—and it deserves justice.

The Convener: That is a fair point. Ruth's summary captures the sentiment of everyone who has spoken.

Stephanie Callaghan: I do not disagree at all with Ruth—she is bang on the money. The fact that more than 30 per cent of our children have additional support needs should be mentioned in the discussion, because the issue affects so many parents and families.

The Convener: That is a very good point, which highlights the concerns of the petitioner. That is, of course, why we are having this discussion.

Are we agreed to keep the petition open and to consider the matter further in a future discussion of our work programme?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That brings the public part of the meeting to an end. I ask members to reconvene on Microsoft Teams in a few minutes. Come to think of it, there is no one on Teams. We will consider our final items in private. I wish those who are watching proceedings a very good afternoon.

12:00

Meeting continued in private until 12:28.

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