OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 21 February 2024

Session 6

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE
6th Meeting 2024, Session 6

CONVENER

*Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
*Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)
*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
*Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)
*Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
*Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)
*Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Peter Bain (School Leaders Scotland)
Matthew Cavanagh (Scottish Secondary Teachers Association)
Mike Corbett (NASUWT)
Sylvia Haughney (Unison Scotland)
Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)
Susan Quinn (Educational Institute of Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Pauline McIntyre

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 21 February 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:02]

Interests

The Convener (Sue Webber): Good morning, and welcome to the sixth meeting in 2024 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. We have apologies from Ruth Maguire and Ben Macpherson. I welcome Stuart McMillan, who joins us as a substitute member of the committee. Our first item of business is to invite Mr McMillan to declare any relevant interests.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I have no relevant interests to declare.

The Convener: That is very convenient. Thank you.

Additional Support for Learning Inquiry

10:03

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is our first formal evidence session as part of our additional support for learning inquiry, which starts today, during which we will consider how the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 has been implemented and how it is working in practice, 20 years on.

In our inquiry, we will focus on three themes: first, the implementation of the presumption of mainstreaming; secondly, the impact of Covid-19 on additional support for learning; and, thirdly, the use of the remedies that are set out in the act. Today, we will focus mainly on the first and third themes.

I welcome, in no particular order, Susan Quinn, who is convener of the Educational Institute of Scotland's education committee; Mike Corbett, who is national official, Scotland, at the NASUWT; Peter Bain, who is executive headteacher at Oban high school and Tiree high school, Tiree primary school and Lismore primary school, and president of School Leaders Scotland; Matthew Cavanagh, who is representing the additional support needs committee of the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association; and Sylvia Haughney, who is education convener at the Glasgow city branch of Unison Scotland. I welcome you all and thank you for the written submissions that you provided ahead of this meeting.

We will move straight to questions from members. Michelle Thomson, who joins us online, will kick off the session.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Good morning, everybody, and thank you for attending—[*Interruption*.] I hope that you can hear me now—can you?

The Convener: Yes.

Michelle Thomson: I want to kick off the session with a bit of framing out, because the feedback that you have provided to the call for evidence is very content rich. First, at a summary level, what do you see as being the expected benefits of the presumption of mainstreaming? I ask that question because anticipated benefits were identified when the policy was put in place, and we now have a lot of data to draw on. That is my first question, which is an open, framing question.

Secondly, what do you see as being the main impacts of implementation of the policy on children with complex needs? I suspect that we will want to

get into a lot of detail, so you can keep your answers at a summary level. What do you see as being the expected benefits, and what have the impacts been of implementation of the policy? I invite everyone on the panel to respond.

The Convener: Who would like to go first?

Susan Quinn (Educational Institute of Scotland): Thank you for that really interesting question, Michelle. Most of us would have thought that the potential positives of the presumption of mainstreaming would have been that young people would have continued to be taught in their local area alongside their peers, so that they could continue to be part of the community where they were brought up and would be able to work and play with the children whom they lived with. That is a short summary of the potential of the presumption of mainstreaming.

The impact of implementation, as we see it, is that, because of underresourcing and the challenges that schools face, the needs of the young people who are in mainstream education are not being met as well as teachers and others would want them to be. Large class sizes and the growing number of complex needs that are being addressed mean that, at this time, it is difficult to meet the needs of young people in the mainstream setting. That is a summary—there is a lot more behind that issue. In the past three or four years, we have had the impact of Covid, but the ability of schools to meet the needs of our young people in mainstream schools was an issue pre-Covid, too.

There has also been a knock-on effect for our specialist provision because, although we are talking about the presumption of mainstreaming, the needs in relation to specialist provision have become more complex and more challenging to address. Those schools that, historically, addressed complex needs are now addressing needs that are more complex. Children who, historically, would have attended a complex needs school are now attending an additional support needs establishment, and those children who would have attended an additional support needs establishment are now attending a mainstream school, alongside those young people whose needs we would have expected to be addressed through the presumption of mainstreaming. In other words, there is still a level of tiering, which we would have expected the presumption of mainstreaming to address.

Peter Bain (School Leaders Scotland): I, too, thank you for that question, Michelle. The issue that you raise is crucial to the whole agenda. The presumption of mainstreaming should be aspired to for every youngster. That falls down because of underfunding and a lack of resources and training for staff—ASN staff, in particular. The last time I was here, when we were discussing a similar subject, I mentioned that we have a very underutilised resource in ASN staff. Because of the way in which the service is funded, the only hours that we allocate to it tend to be those for which ASN staff are in front of children.

We need to build in, at a national level, a formula that allows for additional hours, so that every member of ASN staff in every school has opportunities to receive career-long professional learning, to discuss with teachers the individual needs of the children they are supporting and to have additional time to allow them to upskill and increase their knowledge of the support that they need to give those youngsters. At a basic level, if we could build in a formula that insists on, or advocates for, that additional time allocation to support the ASN staff, that would go a huge way to solving many of the issues that arise with the presumption of mainstreaming.

Above that is the expectation level. It is many people's expectation that the presumption of mainstreaming should be available for everyone. That is an ideal principle, but there will always be a certain number of youngsters for whom it will not be suitable, for very complex reasons. The fact that our insistence on that universal level of support is so strong is disadvantaging the small number of pupils for whom an alternative setting might be better.

Perhaps the most important point is the one that was highlighted by Professors Ken Muir and Louise Hayward, and in the Morgan report, about the need to recognise the term "mainstream" itself. We have a presumption that mainstream is about going to school between nine and half three; that everybody has to go to school between nine and half three; that they all have to do eight curricular areas in the broad general education and five subjects in the senior phase, and so on; and that they all have to be in the building.

We need to stop that. We need to recognise that every individual in our school system has individual needs, and that those needs might include their being able to come in later or to be taught in a workplace—although I am not suggesting that a secondary 1 pupil should go to a workplace. We must change our insistence on mainstream schooling being from nine till half three. If we were to do that, the presumption of mainstreaming and the level of provision that we give to each youngster with ASN would be far better fulfilled and we would achieve the goal.

However, I agree with Susan Quinn—that will require additional funding, and I add that it must come with additional CLPL.

Sylvia Haughney (Unison Scotland): The ideology of the presumption of mainstreaming in

the 2004 act is that all children born in Scotland should go to their local establishment, whichever way they get there, whether it is an early years establishment or a primary or secondary school. It is a matter of inclusiveness; mainstreaming creates a view that there is diversity in society and an acceptance of that diversity. However, the problem has been that, since 2004, there have been cuts in the provision of psychologists and speech and language therapists to support that inclusiveness. That support has been withdrawn over decades.

With regard to the school estate, complex needs pupils who would have gone to a complex needs school have no place to go because the buildings are full to capacity. Those pupils are now in ASN schools or in mainstream co-located units. Their needs are complex, but there is little training for support staff, who are the lowest paid and the least trained. We have been at a crisis point as regards the impact on the children in those establishments.

Mike Corbett (NASUWT): Surely, the aim of the bill and the biggest benefit that we wanted at the beginning was for there to be the best support for each child as appropriate. However, the impact has been, as many have already said, a lack of resourcing. That is a major issue, which I am sure we will return to in more detail.

The fact is that, over the past 20 years, there has been an explosion in the number of pupils with an identified additional support need. As others have touched on already, maybe we need to change the focus and the terminology and look at how we support all pupils. Although I completely understand where the term “additional support needs” comes from, it is sometimes seen as a minority interest by some, which is perhaps why it has not had the resource devoted to it that it has needed over the years.

10:15

As we have heard, there are issues for pupils who are not getting appropriate support. In mainstream schools, sometimes the requirements for pupils with additional support needs create knock-on impacts for other pupils. There is also an impact on families who are trying to get the right support for their children. Furthermore, there is an impact on teachers, who are trying to deal with all of that—far too often, without the appropriate support that they need.

I will point to one of the headline statistics that emerged from a survey of dedicated additional support needs that we carried out last year. When asked whether pupils with ASN received the support to which they were entitled, 35 per cent of our members said that they rarely did. It is all very well to have a policy that we all agree, in principle, that we should pursue. However, clearly, we are not currently fulfilling it, for the reasons that I have mentioned and that others have touched on.

Matthew Cavanagh (Scottish Secondary Teachers Association): Social inclusion is one of the intended benefits of the presumption of mainstreaming. I agree with my colleagues that we are all absolutely on board with that and want to see it happen. Improving learning through diverse provision for our young people is a massive part of the benefits that can happen through schools. Having young people learning together across society, learning about one another and about themselves within that society, remains a common goal that we must pursue.

The challenges for provision of such educational experience in the mainstream system are profound and wide ranging. We have heard about several, including environmental challenges and the fact that teachers’ specialisms have to be spread more broadly in the mainstream, whereas in ASN specialist learning environments such as the one that I work in, we can meet individual pupils’ needs through teachers’ greater specialism and experience.

As for the consequences, we are seeing more young people who have experienced bullying leaving mainstream secondary schools and ending up in alternative provision. We are also seeing an increase in the number of pupils with emotionally based school non-attendance—EBSNA—who, for all sorts of social relationship reasons, are not attending school. There is a lack of specialist support in general mainstream secondary schools, but support for all those elements can be provided in specialist settings.

It is important to remember that specialist provisions, such as the one that I work in, have staff who work with partners every day and who have greater ability to meet the needs of individual pupils, whom they know better. In a mainstream secondary school, primary school or nursery there is not the ability to provide support to that extent, but that is the strength of settings outside the mainstream. Sadly, that is one of the unexpected consequences of the presumption of mainstreaming.

The Convener: We have spoken about the presumption of mainstreaming. How is that understood by the parent population? How is it implemented in schools, particularly in those with additional support for learning hubs? Here, in Edinburgh, there is currently an issue whereby parents are being told that their children cannot go to schools with enhanced support bases because the council has made a decision to roll out additional support provision to every school. Again, the issue is communication. How is the

duty on mainstreaming understood and implemented on the ground so that parents understand what is happening in schools?

My second question is about the flexibility provided by hybrid models, which Peter Bain mentioned. I have heard that such flexibility is not being offered, whereas it should be if we are to allow as many people as possible to take part in education. Will you comment on that?

Peter Bain: I will use Oban high school, which is one of my schools, as an example. It has a facility for pupils with severe and complex needs, which is referred to as a learning centre. That term is used by a number of local authorities. Such facilities are quite common in rural areas where schools are so far apart that it might not be possible to have an additional learning centre or facility for pupils with severe and complex needs, because it would be too far to travel. For example, there are a number of such learning centres in Argyll and Bute because of the distance that would need to be travelled. In those schools, the level of support is very good, because we have been providing such support for 20-odd years and we have learned a lot as we have gone along.

The level of support that is required for youngsters with very high levels of additional support needs is such that there are adequate resources at that level. The flexibility of the curriculum for youngsters who are unable to physically or mentally engage in many mainstream classes works very well, with additional or alternative provisions being provided. For example, we have a large number of children with various degrees of autism, and they might do more outdoor learning. That is covered in a publication by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in which we are specifically mentioned. Those children do more outdoor learning instead of science experiments, because they might not wish to—that is the crucial point—or be able to spend their time doing a great deal of science work, but they might benefit from outdoor learning or from doing more hospitality work, particularly in rural areas such as Oban, which is a tourist destination. That will help them to focus on their job prospects when they leave school.

The ideology behind the presumption of mainstreaming is that the alternative curriculum that is provided must suit the needs and desires of young people so that they can make their way in life after school. Quite often, that is very much overlooked in the commentary on this subject. We seem to talk only about providing provision, but the provision must be tailored and useful.

The Convener: Of course, people can learn lots about science in the outdoors.

Peter Bain: Yes. My point was mainly about certificated science.

My other point, which builds on what the convener has said, is that we must stop trying to insist that everybody does national qualifications or highers when a suite of different qualifications are available to our young people. Young people can use those qualifications to prove to employers that they have the necessary skills and experience that would be useful in whatever job they wish to move into. That is part of the flexibility. At that level, the system works very well.

However, the system is not working in areas where there has been an explosion in numbers, as Mike Corbett said. That has been happening since before Covid. Many additional support needs issues sit below the issues affecting pupils with severe and complex needs, and schools face those daily. Although our additional support needs assistants are brilliant, they are not being given enough time and support to develop the skills to help teachers to deal with the explosion in the number of pupils with mid-range additional support needs. That is creating the biggest problem.

Some of those issues could be resolved. Matthew Cavanagh mentioned attendance issues. The last time that I spoke to the committee, we talked about lappers—youngsters who do not stay in the classroom for a variety of reasons. What alternatives would give them a beneficial educational experience? We need a strategy to deal with that. Why are those youngsters no longer staying in the classroom? Why are they no longer interested? Why are we not able to hook them in? That relates to an additional support need. Those youngsters might not have a diagnosis, but they are not staying in the classroom in ever-increasing numbers, as we can see from attendance figures, so we need to work on that.

On top of that, there has been a huge rise in the number of young people being diagnosed with dyslexia, for example. I cannot remember the exact percentage, but there has been at least a 10 per cent rise in the number of youngsters being diagnosed with dyslexia. What additional training are we providing everybody to cope with that? It is a numbers game.

The explosion, especially in the mid range, is not being catered for. We need additional staffing, but it is not just staffing: there has to be training. We have loads of staff, and if we trained them more effectively and gave them time, they would deal with the numbers better.

The Convener: We will shortly come on to some questions on both of the themes that you spoke about.

Susan Quinn: Your opening question was about whether parents are aware of their rights under the presumption of mainstreaming. It is for the parent groups to respond fully to that.

For the most part, local authorities now have systems in place to work with parents of young people who are coming through the early years sector into primary and secondary school to ensure that they are aware of how to make their voices heard and that they advocate for what is right for their children. The challenge is that, because a school has a specialist unit in it, parents sometimes presume that their child will automatically be supported there. With the best will in the world, that will not be the case. It depends on the local authority that they are in.

I work on a campus where we have a language and communication resource, which has historically been for young people who are on the autism spectrum. It is a Glasgow-wide resource that is attached to our campus and is run by the other primary school, which leads on it. Young people who come to my school will not necessarily be prioritised for a place in the unit, because it is a local authority resource. That is the case across the piece, because it is not possible for every establishment to have a specialist provision for every need and we do not have such resources in every school.

As Peter Bain said, the range of need is growing and changing. It is for somebody bigger and brighter than me to determine why that is, but there are many issues. The better healthcare that our young people get at the earliest stages leads to changes. The Covid situation has clearly led to changes and an awareness of additional support needs. There is a wee bit of celebrity now that is making people think that ASN is something to investigate. That is to our benefit, because it is good for people to know what affects their life and how they can deal with it, but the challenge is how that is addressed in schooling.

I absolutely agree that the opportunities for flexibility, alternative pathways and options are vital, but we need to be clear that they are resource heavy. If a young person from a mainstream primary school is going to an outdoor event, that requires them to get there, if it is not in their own place. That will not necessarily be affordable for the parents, so the school or the local authority will have to provide the transport. You will generally require more than one adult to be present, even for one child, because of the nature of the need. You cannot just have one person working with them so that, if you need to get support, for example, it is there.

We should aim for and look to enhance the flexible options, but we need to be clear that they are resource heavy.

To pick up on Peter Bain's point about the qualifications, we need to acknowledge the implications for not just the nationals. In mainstream primary school, we have to assess young people using the standardised assessments at primary 1, 4 and 7. We can choose not to do primary 1, but we have to do them at primary 4 and 7. The young people can get the support that they get in their class, but if the support that is available does not meet their needs, that affects what the school can say and what a local authority can report about the levels achieved.

That emphasis on attainment over achievement is problematic for providing a flexible and alternative approach to supporting young people with additional support needs. If we constantly say that the aim is to get the young person to a certain point so that they can pass a particular test or a certain part of it, the flexible route for them will be ignored somewhere down the line. Teachers and others can assess what they see outside in the woodlands, but it disnae tick a box for assessment.

10:30

The Convener: Some of the comments on flexibility probably pertain more to young people who have complex needs, but Peter Bain spoke at length about those with mid-range needs who should perhaps be offered some flexibility in their learning that might not be as resource heavy, such as the opportunity to dip in and out or to have different learning environments. We have heard from families that might find that beneficial. I ask Sylvia Haughey to pick up on some of those points.

Sylvia Haughney: I will address what parents understand.

My background is in ASN and mainstream provision in early years, and most of my career has been in ASN educational establishments. Early years practitioners aware of the diversity between the neurodivergent child and the neurotypical child and will quickly pick up and develop strategies and practices that they know that the school will have to use. However, the parents are never informed of that and the staff are never encouraged to show the alternative pathway for where that child should attend school when they leave early years provision. The focus is only on the local mainstream primary.

Even though the practitioner staff will know that there are additional support needs establishments within distance that might be more suited to meeting those children's needs, parents are never informed of that and the staff in the early years have never to mention what other alternatives are available. A parent might not be aware of those

alternatives or not understand that they have a voice.

Even parents who have a voice have a fight on their hands. Some definitely want their child in mainstream because they think that it will be better for them for a variety of reasons, but a parent who wants their child in an ASN establishment because they feel the child will be better suited to that environment has a fight on their hands to get there. They absolutely have to involve their local MP and go to their health visitor and their general practitioner to try to get their child where they need to be. That is only the parents who know that they have a voice.

The parents who know that they have a voice will get their children into the ASN establishments, but those establishments are then full to capacity, so there is nowhere for children to go other than a co-located unit within a mainstream school where staff are not trained in the complex needs of the children who come to them. They have to learn on the way.

Also, if the child who has been in early years and has developed their strategies and coping mechanisms moves into a mainstream primary but, even in a co-located unit, cannot sustain that placement, they are then put on a shorter timetable. That means that their parents are disadvantaged—you should speak to parents about that—because they might have to come in late. Although the parents have work to go to, they have to get their children in at 10 o'clock instead of 9 o'clock. That happens for absolutely the right reasons—the child cannot cope with the bustle at 9 o'clock, so they have to come in later—but it means that they have a shorter day in school, which parents find means that their child has been disadvantaged.

The Convener: Willie Rennie has a supplementary question on that.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I am really interested in what you said. Everybody else was nodding when you were saying it. Am I right in thinking that you are saying that it is not so much that there is a presumption of mainstreaming but almost a rule that a child should be mainstreamed?

Sylvia Haughney: Yes.

The Convener: That was nice and short. I like short, succinct questions from my colleagues.

Matthew Cavanagh: That is a good point. I think that it is a default position rather than a rule, but what Sylvia Haughney said struck a chord with me.

It is probably useful for you to know that I am a full-time teacher in charge of pastoral care in an ASN secondary school in Glasgow, and I predominantly work with young people who have learning disabilities. As Sylvia Haughney said, parents' limited ability to access the available resources, their lack of confidence in relation to the language that is used and their capacity to understand what is available are massive issues in terms of inclusion. It is difficult for me to do my job and meet my pupils' needs when I am the only one who can advocate for the rights of that young person and that family. For example, I often support families with disability living allowance applications, because some families struggle with literacy and do not have the necessary social capital—that might not be the correct term—or knowledge that would enable them to access the available resources. In turn, the issue is fed by the view that mainstream provision is best and that, if someone is outside the mainstream, they are somehow in the second division, as it were.

The question goes to the heart of what schools do and what wellbeing is. In terms of my job, what is done beyond my job and the role of the SSTA's ASN committee, wellbeing is something that must be worked on with individuals and families. That touches on what was said earlier about the importance of flexibility and adaptability in the curriculum. We need specialists who know what is out there. In the senior phase, for example, there are lots of qualifications that are suitable for the kind of young people we are thinking of. However, if someone has ended up in a mainstream school by default, it might be that their curricular specialist secondary teachers are not as aware as they could be of things such as personal development awards or independence awards, which might be more suited to the needs of that young person and might allow, for example, their achievements in literacy to be celebrated in a way that matters—I am not an English teacher; that is just an example that came to mind.

Teachers can face a classroom with a great number of pupils, some of whom are struggling to get the best education that they can get. That can limit the breadth of provision that I was talking about earlier. Teachers cannot teach at all sorts of levels in the same classroom—that is not fair on the teacher in terms of their workload, and it is not fair on the individual young people in that class.

If we have greater flexibility and can support parents to understand that flexibility and the range of qualifications and opportunities that exists, we can provide those young people with the education that they deserve.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I am interested in witnesses' views on the relationship between the level of need, the complexity of need and the resources that are allocated, particularly in mainstream settings. For the purposes of this question, I distinguish between mainstream and

special schools. I would be interested in Matthew Cavanagh's experience on the latter issue, but my question is mainly for the other witnesses.

Is it typical in a mainstream setting for there to be an acknowledgement that more complex needs require and therefore get additional resources, or is there a tendency towards a more blanket approach that says that all kids with additional needs in a mainstream setting should get some kind of additional support, with no recognition that some needs are more complex than others? Is there a follow-through between the complexity of need and the resource that is allocated?

Susan Quinn: In practical terms, there will not be. Local authorities have their own means of staffing mainstream establishments. I cannot speak to what happens in all 32 councils, but the local authority in my area has within its staffing allocation a percentage that relates to additional support needs. That is based on the number of children, but it has been the same for well over a decade. It was not a big enough percentage a decade ago, and the allocation is certainly nowhere near a big enough percentage now.

There is a presumption that 5 per cent of everybody's cohorts will have additional support needs, but, in any one year, one school might have 35 per cent and another school might have 10 per cent. If the 10 per cent is in a big school, it could be 10 per cent of 400; the number will be lower if it is 35 per cent of 70. In other words, a bigger percentage of young people could equate to fewer physical bodies.

Furthermore, the percentage will not take account of the range of need. In my 35 years of teaching experience, there has never been consideration of staffing specifically for that need. There are changes among the young people who are in front of us year on year, and the situation can become more complex. Local authorities need to have the ability and capacity, through their budgets and resources, to respond to requests from individual establishments about specific young people with more complex needs. Someone might arrive in a school with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, a bit of pathological demand avoidance and a wee bit of Tourette's. That is a real person, and we need to be able to respond to that need quickly. It is difficult for local authorities always to do that, and it is not necessarily always about finding a place elsewhere, as those places might be full.

From my experience, the simple answer to your question is that there is no differentiation in the resource that is provided at core level. Some local authorities will use different means to address individual need at individual schools, but that lack of differentiation in resources will be raised by headteachers, parents and whoever else.

Ross Greer: If I may pick up on that—

The Convener: Mike Corbett wants to respond as well.

Ross Greer: Yes. If I may, I will pick up on a specific aspect of the points that Susan Quinn has made, and we can then bring in Mike Corbett. Peter Bain is looking to come in, too.

You can correct me if I am wrong, Susan, but, if I understand you correctly, you are saying that, as well as the level of resource, it is a question of having the correct resource. A member of staff in a school may specialise in a particular kind of support but, because of the nature of school, the children with that particular need will move on. A child in another school might have a similar need, but the local authority might not be flexible enough to ensure that the staff are in the right place.

While you were talking about that, I recalled that one of the very first meetings that I had after I was elected was with a 15-year-old with a hearing impairment. On her first day at high school, a member of staff was introduced to her and she was told, "This will be your one-on-one member of staff." That person said to her, "Hi there. It's lovely to meet you. I usually work with kids with autism, but I'm sure we'll figure this out between us."

Susan Quinn: It is not necessarily the case that there is no willingness on the part of local authorities to be flexible. There are a range of reasons why such things can happen. Sylvia Haughney will speak more on behalf of support for learning workers but, even if a worker has been identified to work with a young person and they are lucky enough to get the training, or if they have developed a level of experience with the young person year on year, there will not necessarily be the facility for them to move on with that young person or to move around. There are a variety of reasons for that, some of which are to do with employment law and so on. Another reason is that support for learning workers, in particular, often work in their own communities. We have talked about mainstream provision, and they often live in very close proximity to a local school, so asking them to move to a different school across the city, say, or across a rural area would be of financial detriment to them.

With regard to teaching staff who have developed a specialism in a particular area and are able to move, the number of actual specialists in the mainstream setting has reduced so much that core teachers have developed areas of specialism because they have had a young person with particular needs in front of them for a year. However, a teacher is not going to move to another school because a young person has

moved on. That teacher is still part of the school's core team as a class teacher; they have just developed an area of specialism.

There are, therefore, complex reasons why it is not always easy for local authorities to be flexible. I will be charitable to local authorities on this occasion and say that that is not necessarily for the want of thinking about it and that there are many reasons why that can be problematic. That is why we need more opportunities everywhere. The numbers are growing so much that, even if I was going to lose a member of staff this year because a child had moved on, I could take in another child in August who would require that person anyway.

10:45

Mike Corbett: The research that was published in September contains a lot of interesting things about provision for pupils with complex additional support needs. One thing that strikes me in relation to Ross Greer's question is that, although the services that were involved in the research reported that the model of support is based on need rather than diagnosis, there is a perception among many parents and carers that having a diagnosis impacts on the level of support that a child or young person can access. In other words, there is a perception among many parents and carers that getting a label somehow brings more funding and more support. That builds on Peter Bain's point about getting it across to parents, carers and others that there is support for those who do not have a formal diagnosis.

On the point about resource and how it is used, I would say that it is diverted. In practice, certainly in mainstream schools, when the local authority or the school tries to address the complex additional support needs of a young person who is in their care for whatever reason, there tends to be a knock-on impact. For example, a teacher might no longer have ASN support in their mainstream class because that young person is getting one-to-one support. Other kids with additional support needs in the mainstream class will not quite get the service that they need, whether that is in the specialist hubs or units in mainstream schools. Again, because someone needs more one-to-one support, there is not enough time to give support to others.

Beyond that, resource might be made available to take a single pupil or a group of pupils off site and give them specialist provision, because that is what suits them best. Again, that diverts time and resource away from others in the school who need it.

It is a patchwork picture, as ever. Some schools and local authorities will try to address things and divert resource to where it is needed, but there will be a knock-on impact elsewhere.

Peter Bain: The answer to Ross Greer's question is as complex as the multitude of additional support needs. I agree with Susan Quinn that we have to be charitable to local authorities, given the plight that they face. There is not an endless pot of money, and the level and complexity of additional support needs are growing every year. However, in my experience, the way that local authorities and schools across the country work is inconsistent. There is no single method of allocation of ASN resource to schools across each local authority. I will give an example from my local authority of where I see it working, to a degree, within the limits of the pot of money.

I agree with Mike Corbett that, if a young person has a label, they will automatically get support. If the local authority does not provide that, the likelihood that the matter will go to a tribunal is very high. Local authorities will therefore put all their resources, first and foremost, into ensuring that those who have a diagnosis are supported as outlined by the medical professionals.

People will always say that they do not get enough support, but, in general, we can assume that those youngsters I described earlier, who may be in a severe and complex needs facility or part of a mainstream school, will get a very good level of support if they have severe and complex needs. The trouble for local authorities is that, when more youngsters have that diagnosis and therefore get that level of support, even if the facility is more flexible than most mainstream provision, that diverts most of the money to that cohort of young people and away from the ever-increasing numbers of pupils with mid-range additional support needs in the classroom. Teachers and additional support needs staff are most concerned about that group, because there is a lack of suitable staff and training to deal with the ever-increasing numbers in the mid-range.

To be fair to local authorities, we have to ask how they should decide where the money goes. In discussions between the local authority, central team staffing and school staffing about the individual needs of youngsters in a class or in the school, there will always be a degree of disagreement over the need. For example, a member of staff might try to keep the pot available for 10 schools, but a headteacher or, usually, a depute will make an argument that is based on the needs of their individual school. There is not enough money to provide the level of support that each individual school will ask for, so that dichotomy goes on all the time. That is why nobody is ever happy. Local authorities have to spread the money increasingly thinly, which does not make them look good, and schools are not

getting as much money or staffing as they need to cope with the needs that they see every day, so that is not working either.

On top of that, a political game is played in trying to maintain staffing levels in individual schools even though that might not be the best use of resources for the local authority as a whole. I will give you an example of what I am talking about. If a youngster comes into S1 with a particular level of need, the local authority and the high school might agree that X number of hours will be set aside for that young person. Although it will never be agreed that it is enough, that support, which might be one to one, will stay with the youngster. There is an argument—and there is mention of this in the guidance—that, as they grow in confidence, experience and familiarity with the secondary school setting, they should develop a degree of independence so that they do not constantly need to have somebody sitting with them one to one. In fact, if that was the case for four years, the system would have failed.

For the majority of those in the mid-range, if an ASN member of staff has sat with them one on one for four years, the system will have failed because we will not have prepared them for life after school. That is not to say that we should remove their support by the end of S4, but we should be able to use the ASN member of staff differently, given the appropriate training. I talked earlier about the need to set aside time for such staff to talk to teachers. By S2, some of their time could be diverted to help others in the class. By S3, even more time could be diverted and they could help three or four people.

However, that level of communication requires CLPL and time to talk. That level of nuance, which would distribute the resource better, does not exist. I go back to the point that I made in response to the first question. If we set aside some time to allow that to happen, the resource would be better distributed overall and it would benefit far more youngsters within the limited pot that the Scottish Government and the local authorities will always have.

Sylvia Haughney: Ross Greer asked about the level of need across Scotland. I have some facts from South Lanarkshire that were delivered at an in-service day that I attended. We know that, in society, there are now three times more children with additional support needs. There are various reasons for that. I am not sure whether we will go into them today, but there are clear reasons why more children in society are neurodiverse. There are a third more of those children in primary school.

Let us look at the issue from the perspective of a support for learning worker—I should say a pupil support worker, because that is the name that is used across Scotland—who might previously have worked at Asda or Costa. At Costa, they would have been given two weeks' training before they touched any piece of apparatus and they would have learned about different types of beans and other things that are involved in being a barista. However, when they took a job as a pupil support worker, for whatever reason, they would have gone straight in on day 1, with no or very little induction training. Only some local authorities have induction training for support staff. Pupil support workers do not need any qualifications, any training in child development or any awareness of anything to do with the education system but, from day 1, they can be told, for example, that they are working with a child who is hearing impaired, that they should try to pick up what to do as they go along and that, if the child uses British Sign Language, they can pick up some signs from the interpreter in the class. Alternatively, they might be told that they are going to work with a child who has ADHD.

The majority of pupil support staff in Scotland have 27.5-hour weekly contracts. They start at 9 o'clock and they finish at 3 o'clock. There is no non-pupil-contact time or time for them to look at any training. CLPL is for teachers and early years professionals; it rarely exists for support staff. They are not allocated time to go and research training or to do the training, because the work that they do with the most vulnerable children is so valuable that they cannot be allowed out of the classroom to get training. Therein lies the issue with the 27.5-hour contracts. If support staff had more non-pupil-contact time, they could do things such as look at the risk assessments that are produced when a child starts school.

I do not like to label people, but we must recognise that people have diverse learning requirements. We now have more children who are neurodiverse, and they learn in a different way and require a different style of teaching. We must learn what entices them. They tell teachers that they do not want to be in the classroom situation because it is too noisy, because the lights are bright, because of the noise that someone is making, because there is a smell or whatever. We have to understand the neurodiverse brain, but we are not doing it in schools.

Further, the support staff have to work their way around a minefield in which they are dealing with a hearing-impaired person at one moment, then someone who has ADHD and then someone with Down's syndrome. There is a diversity of needs in schools, but the support staff have not been appropriately trained. The "all behaviour is communication" principle or de-escalation training might be addressed on an in-service day, and it would be advantageous if we could get our members into that training on in-service days

instead of having them cleaning cupboards. However, doing that training once every five years or even once a year is not enough; there must be direct, on-going training.

The Convener: We have heard that view expressed in the past wee while.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I have a brief question, which I will direct to Peter Bain, although others might want to comment on it.

Mr Greer asked about co-ordinated support plans. I have heard that there can be a disconnect between someone requiring a CSP and their actually getting it. I understand that there is a duty on the local authority to put one in place, if statutory conditions are met, but, anecdotally, I have heard that parents can be pushed from pillar to post as they try to get one for their child. Indeed, I have heard of its taking years—up to a decade—to happen. Can you help the committee understand who has responsibility for leading on making CSPs happen, so that they can be held accountable if they do not? Is there any truth to the suggestion that, perhaps because of underresourcing, local authorities might not be able either to assess conditions or to put such plans in place?

11:00

Peter Bain: It very much varies from one local authority to another. For a start, it will depend on the strength of expertise in central teams' ASN areas with regard to the guidance or the policy that is provided to schools on the use of CSPs. That is one limiting factor.

The second such factor is the strength of the partnership arrangements that sit in each local authority area and which work in each school community. By that, I mean that CSPs are dependent on different agencies working together to support the implementation of the actions within them. If there are regular meetings with strong partnership working in a school community—for example, with education staff, health professionals, social workers and educational psychologists; at times, the police come in, too—there is likely to be a more effective success rate for establishing CSPs, because they almost always require interagency support. If strong local partnership working is going on, CSPs are more likely to happen and to be progressed more effectively at the practical level. If such working is not happening locally, CSPs are often not progressed as they should be, because authorities cannot get partners to agree who will do what.

You asked who is responsible. In my experience, across a number of authorities—before I came here, I also read SLS members' responses that we received on that aspect—the issue is that it is school staff who almost certainly take the lead. Right across the education community, the common claim is that teachers have become like social workers, or even that they are verging on becoming health professionals. I am not sure that I agree with that second point, but they are certainly taking on a far more prominent role in those aspects than they used to.

We used to have guidance teachers who would be both subject specialists and pastoral support staff. I do not know what percentage of schools now have full-time guidance staff in place, but it will be really high. Teachers have taken on such roles because the numbers of social workers in local authority areas across the country have diminished so greatly. The numbers of educational psychologists have been cut severely in all areas, too, so we also lack professional-level facilities for diagnosis. People are having to wait for the opinions of educational psychologists, which are essential to constructing CSPs. That is one reason for the delays.

The existence or otherwise of partnership working, and its strength, are therefore factors in whether delay is created or not—CSPs are progressing quite quickly in some local authority areas. Delays in partnership working and in receiving educational psychologists' views are crucial. Speaking personally, I have not come across local authorities inhibiting the establishment of CSPs after that stage, through the negative policy drive that the convener described. Again, it all comes back to the resourcing of schools and of our partners. In the same way as we are complaining that we do not have enough resources, so, too, are social workers, educational psychologists and everyone else.

The Convener: We have a lot of interest in this question. Mike Corbett wants to come in, followed by Matthew Cavanagh and then Susan Quinn. Over to you first, Mike.

Mike Corbett: It might be interesting if I were to quote statistics from a recent tribunal case, which I think are instructive. The judgment says that

"just over 241,000 pupils in Scotland have additional support needs ... Of those, only 1,401 ... i.e. ... 0.2%"

have co-ordinated support plans. Yet, as we heard earlier, and as many of us have been saying, the number of pupils with additional support needs has been growing exponentially, so that does not quite compute.

I was reminded of a case involving a dispute with an employer that related to a special school. When we dealt with the senior people at that employer, we were astonished to find that they initially did not know how many co-ordinated support plans existed at the school. They went off

and did the research, and then came back and told us that this particular special school, which had almost 100 pupils, had one single pupil with a co-ordinated support plan. That seemed utterly bizarre to us, and it reinforces the point partly made by Peter Bain and touched on by Liam Kerr that there are certainly different practices going on in different places. I am not suggesting what the reasons are. I do not know whether it is, as Peter has said, because there is some fear about how resource is attracted, but it certainly warrants deeper investigation, as there is definitely an issue there.

The Convener: Matthew, can you follow on from that?

Matthew Cavanagh: I can, and it leads on well from what Mike Corbett has been saying. What I have to say is, in a sense, anecdotal, because I am talking about my personal experience. I have been in a school where almost all my pupils would have a right to a CSP, but very few actually have one—and that corresponds with the statistics that Mike has just mentioned.

What is more, very few of the pupils who did have one saw any significant difference in the provision that they got. If I were to return to school tomorrow morning to find that those pupils had put on my desk a legitimate question whether a CSP would be appropriate, it would be my job to progress it, and it would involve an incredible amount of stress, time and effort. However, it would not change an awful lot of the provision that I know my pupils get.

I am not suggesting, by the way, that I do not think that having co-ordinated support plans is right; it is right that they are available to my pupils. It is important to realise, though, that because it is up to the schools, on behalf of the local authority, to lead on and take responsibility for the CSPs, the process gets very difficult if we are already working with health services, social services and other partners who have been mentioned earlier. It is useful to add that.

The Convener: Do you want to come in on this, too, Susan?

Susan Quinn: Picking up what Matthew Cavanagh has been saying, I think that his point is well made that, for many young people, having a CSP or, at a lower level, an additional support plan that is written down does not necessarily mean that they will get more resource or time. In schools, particularly mainstream ones, even if no diagnosis has been confirmed, staff are still working really hard for the young people with what they see in front of them.

Some young people might ultimately get a diagnosis of dyslexia, which requires input from a speech and language therapist as well as from other people, but I am not going to say, “We’re no gonnae do anything with that wee one until I get that diagnosis.” Our young people in schools across the country will get as much support as the school can provide, regardless of whether they have a diagnosis or a CSP attached to them.

Peter Bain’s point about the need for co-ordination is really well made. That will be patchy, as it will depend on whether the social work department that the school is associated with is fully staffed. Those departments have their own challenges, and the level of co-ordination will depend on whether it is possible to get everybody in the room at the same time. Referring back to Matthew Cavanagh’s point about that, I would say that everything that we have to do around that takes people away from working directly with the young people. Trying to co-ordinate all those things, with all the meetings that are involved, can lead to that.

There needs to be some simplification, with consideration given to where the value is in doing something that takes people away from working directly with young people. It is important to have records and the like, so that people know what support has been provided and what support is needed, but that cannot happen to the detriment of actually working with the young person. We cannot have staff saying, “I can’t work with you today because I’ve got to have a meeting with everybody to decide whether you need support.” We know that the person needs support and that we need to work together to get them that support, and having a bit of paper does not necessarily address that. That sort of situation comes through a lot from our members across the country, and there is a need to address it.

As for Peter Bain’s point about the social work element, schools will often be expected to attend to things that they are alerted to by social work or health services. We are not always able to get arrangements reciprocated, for a whole variety of reasons.

The Convener: Might things be delayed because of the pressures on teaching staff and their diary management that arise from having to hold multidisciplinary team meetings? Arranging partnership meetings might be a challenge, as health professionals are equally pressed for time. Susan, how do we square the need to get people trained, which takes them out of contact time, with the pressure to have those planning meetings?

Susan Quinn: It is a complex thing to square. It is a matter of additional resource. Sylvia Haughney’s description of the situation with support for learning workers is one that we have seen and heard about across the country.

As a headteacher, I have staff I want to be trained, and we provide them with training, but that takes them away from working directly with the young person they are supposed to be working with. What is happening in that hour or two? I personally know that that training will be of value for the next month. It is a matter of squaring all of that and dealing with the challenges around being able to access support work through other agencies.

As colleagues have said, there has been a change in dynamic around educational psychologists. When I started my career and then went into senior management, there were significantly more educational psychologists available, and they worked with and saw young people much more regularly. They are now being drawn out of that role to provide training in particular areas, because other people are not available to provide that training. That has changed the whole area.

Similarly, the roles of speech and language therapists have changed, too, and things are becoming more problematic in that area. It is all about trying to do more with less.

The Convener: We will move on to questions from Stuart McMillan on the theme of resources.

Stuart McMillan: This morning's evidence has been enlightening, to say the least, regarding the issue of resources. A short time ago, Peter Bain mentioned the limited budget for Scotland and for local authorities, and the issue of resources appears throughout the submissions that we have received.

My first question is about the resources that we have. Clearly, not enough are going in, but do any of you have an estimate as to how much additional financial resource you would require annually?

Susan Quinn: Hunners and hunners. That may be a flippant response, but we need to consider the figures that colleagues have presented here today, including in our written submissions.

On the rising levels of need, there has been a 37 per cent increase in the school population with additional support needs, which is up 2.8 per cent from last year, indicating that we need 37 per cent more resources for additional support needs to start off with. In addition, enhanced specialist provision is down 23 per cent since 2016, so that 23 per cent needs to go back in. We would need to do the complicated maths that calculates that over the relevant period, so the figure will be much higher than 23 per cent. There has also been a 19 per cent decline in the number of specialist teachers in mainstream settings since 2010. That is another figure that tells us how much more we need to put in.

Resources for all those aspects have declined. We need to at least get back to where we were to start with, multiply the resources on the basis of the increase in the range of provisions and the increase in the number of our young people who are now identified as having additional support needs, and then consider how to address the wide range of provisions within that support.

11:15

I will give the real example of a primary class of 20 that includes four young people who are autistic, four young people with a dyslexia diagnosis or dyslexia symptoms who are being supported in the class, three young people who have English as an additional language and a young person who has global development delay because of medical issues at birth. That is one class of 20 and we can multiply that across the country. An individual teacher cannot address all of that in one go without having heavy support.

Therefore, with regard to how much more is needed, we need to look at where the reductions have taken place over the past 10 years, get back to the point that we were at and then say, "We need X more, because demand is now 37 per cent higher than it was 10 years ago."

Matthew Cavanagh: The issue is not just about getting back to where we were in financial terms. I cannot give you any idea of the numbers, but I can tell you that we have a different—and better—view of what schools are, what learning is and what we need to do about inclusion. That view is a lot broader than the education that we have provided through the school system in the past.

Earlier in the meeting, I talked about how we are thinking about wellbeing. Learning is part of our young people's wellbeing. We are trying our best to get all of our young people ready for life in Scotland in the future. Qualifications and that traditional way of thinking about learning and education are very important, but they are not, by any means, anywhere close to what we are supposed to be trying to do in schools.

I will give some examples off the top of my head. We are all much more aware of how important enhanced transitions between the different stages of learning and beyond are in finding positive destinations for our young people. There has been a massive increase in the number of young people who are not attending school for emotional and behavioural reasons. We know that social media and digital literacy needs have exploded and expanded, and that that has had a massive negative impact. That is a pejorative view, but you know what I am getting at with regard to the mental health support that our young

people need because of the challenging digital landscape that we live in.

We need to get back to where we were in terms of the percentages that Susan Quinn talked about, but we are working beyond that—we are doing more—because we have a better idea of inclusion and what learning is for. It is part of something much bigger: the wellbeing of our young people.

The Convener: Everyone wants to come in on this topic, but I have been passed a note about the time. I am keen to ensure that everyone gets an opportunity to speak. However, I need to keep an eye on the clock, so I apologise in advance if I have to interrupt members or I am unable to bring in everyone. I also might not be able to bring in all witnesses to answer all questions. Therefore, it would be great if everyone could be concise with their responses.

Sylvia Haughney: On the budget, I cannot give you a figure for what it would take to recover it all, because there have been decades of cuts to the education budget.

What is education? The education system for children is not just held up by teachers or support staff; it is held up by those in the peripheral services—the speech and language therapists, the physiotherapists, the occupational therapists and, crucially, the educational psychologists.

The other day, an educational psychologist told us that, in Glasgow, there used to be one educational psychologist for every 80 pupils but there is now one for every 698 pupils. That situation is just imploding; it cannot be sustained. That is what is happening with the budget. The Government wants to send the message that teacher numbers are being maintained, so that is what is happening, but everything else that holds up the system is being cut. That money needs to be put back in, and pupils with diverse needs need to be supported.

Peter Bain: The figures that Susan Quinn has put together are excellent. They highlight where we should be in relation to where we were, using the measures of that period.

I also agree with Sylvia Haughney that it is not only the education budget that we need to look at, because all the support services in health, social work and so on are important and are also being cut. If we could reinforce the budgets in those areas, that would support education by default, which would mean that education needed less money, because the support services would be providing an adequate level of care.

It is crucial to consider what we mean by inclusion, especially given that we are talking about 40 or 50 per cent of pupils in a school needing additional support. Earlier, Mike Corbett asked why, given that there are so many kids with ASN—37 per cent nationally—we are treating them as a discrete group. We need to re-evaluate our thinking around the concept of inclusion and the support that is required in classrooms.

We also have to consider what we mean by "curriculum". That goes back to the point about flexibility. Why are we thinking about the curriculum as if we were still in the Victorian age? If we reassess our interpretation of what the curriculum is and what need is in the context of the 21st century, that would alter the support that we are required to provide. That might cost more money or it might cost less, but we need to understand what we mean by the curriculum, what we mean by the school day and what we mean by the school—is it just a building? Thereafter, we need to think about how we can work in an inclusive way to ensure that that modern curriculum is met. Once we have done that, we can think about what we need to put in place before we can get the cost down.

Mike Corbett: I will not repeat all the good points that have been made about the increasing number of ASN pupils and restoring all the cuts, but I will say that, as well as all the other things that have been mentioned, we should not forget the impact of the pandemic, particularly on pupil mental health and behavioural issues, which need to be addressed and will require some resource.

The Convener: We have spoken a lot about training, and I noticed that the submission from the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland said that there is a

"Lack of political will, technical knowledge and capacity in implementing the right to inclusive education, including insufficient education of all teaching staff",

which, as we have heard, can include the support assistants that Sylvia Haughney mentioned.

In terms of developing the skills and tackling the increase in the number of pupils with what Peter Bain called mid-range issues, how often should training be taking place, what should it look like and should it be mandatory? We have heard that, sometimes, even though opportunities to access training are provided on in-service training days, people can avoid that training because it is not mandatory.

Susan Quinn: The EIS is not a great believer in mandatory training, because there tend to be negative connotations around people having to do things, which can become problematic. The challenge around training is the availability of time. Today, we are speaking about ASN, but I have previously spoken to the committee about training for equality matters, and there is also training on the standard child protection and health and safety side of things, as well as what we have to include

in terms of raising attainment and everything else. The issue with training in respect of additional support needs is not to do with a lack of will; it is often just about a lack of time to do that. Leaving aside Sylvia Haughney's point about pupil support workers, outside the five days of in-service training, teachers do not have any time for training within their contracts unless a school builds that in, which, as we have said, can have detrimental effects.

The Convener: I would like to challenge you a little bit on that. Earlier, we spoke about the challenges around de-escalating issues in classrooms and the fact that, if teachers were better able to do that, it would be better for pupils' wellbeing. Therefore, should that training be mandatory, given that it would help the overall delivery of education for everyone, including the teaching staff?

Susan Quinn: It depends on how the individual picks up that training. The issues of where and how it takes place are important. As you have said, de-escalation is different from supporting young people with additional support needs—it is only one aspect of the huge amount of ASN training that is required. Is it worth taking teachers out of their classes for a session on a particular area of ASN training, given that, in a secondary school, not everyone will come across a young person with that need at that time?

We have to strike a balance and deliver training at a time when staff will be working with young people with that need. Otherwise, I could be, for example, trained today to support a young person with Down's syndrome in the context of a mainstream school but it might be years before I meet a young person who has that need and, by that time, I would need to revisit the training. The important issues are what the training is, what it is worth and where we take that.

Training needs to be on-going throughout the careers of teachers and child support workers, but what mandatory training do we put in place? There is no one-size-fits-all piece of training that would meet the needs of all our young people and all our staff.

We have people who get specialist training and gain qualifications in additional support needs, but getting up to a particular level takes them four years of night classes at universities and so on. We need to find the means to provide the quality and the level of professional learning that individual teachers and schools need at a particular time.

The Convener: The argument would be that, if 37 per cent of all pupils have additional support needs, teachers will come across pupils with those needs and, therefore, that training should be part of their compulsory training.

Susan Quinn: It is true that they will come across pupils with additional support needs, but those needs will be different. There is a complexity of needs, and the training that a teacher requires in order to support a young person with dyslexia is different from the training that they need to support a young person on the autism spectrum. You cannot just combine the two sets of training in one session and say that the teacher is now fit to meet those needs.

Teachers and pupil support workers require on-going professional learning to enable them to be aware of the additional support needs of the young people around them. They need to be aware of the complexity of need but, at different points in all our careers, we will require specialist training to support the young people with whom we are directly working.

The Convener: Could there be a discussion of the need for a school's headteacher to develop mandatory training for the teaching staff that reflects the make-up of the young people in that school?

Susan Quinn: I am not sure that a headteacher would necessarily be able to develop a training programme—

The Convener: I mean that they could identify the needs and get someone to provide the training to address those needs.

Susan Quinn: Additional support needs will be part of a school's improvement plan. There is an issue with the use of the word "mandatory". That training will be part of a school's improvement plan if that is the area of need that is required at that particular time. However, if a school has settled staff who have had in-depth professional learning opportunities over a period, because that has been the priority in the school improvement plan, is there a requirement to go through that training every year with that same group of staff, to the detriment of other areas of work? It is true to say that we absolutely need quality professional learning, but the issue of its mandatory nature is more complex and concerns the requirement to deliver training that fits the need that is there.

The Convener: I understand that.

I will bring in Matthew Cavanagh. A number of colleagues have supplementary questions on this issue, but we will see where Matthew takes the discussion.

11:30

Matthew Cavanagh: I ended up in my current school 20 years ago, directly after completing my

probation year in a mainstream secondary school. The reason why I ended up at the school is that I had a half-day visit to it during my initial teacher education experience. That was all that I got. I thought that it was going to be a trip to a school where I would not fit in and that I would not like it whatsoever. I thought that it would not be for me but that it was a good opportunity to see behind the curtain, or something like that. However, it was not like that. I arrived in the school and immediately—I am not joking—I knew that it was the school that I wanted to be in, and I have been lucky enough to be there for a long time.

My point is that schools that are outside the mainstream do not get students or probationers in the same way as mainstream schools do. I have a real problem with that. It is a loss for us and for our schools, because we are not getting the new teachers who have just finished their degrees and who have a lot of enthusiasm and current knowledge, based on the data and the training that they have. Those young and new teachers are not exposed to the opportunities in circumstances outside the mainstream in education. This is for other people to decide but, to me, that speaks to the idea that, if you are not in the mainstream, you are in the second division, and that is not acceptable.

We are thrilled when we get teachers who are relatively new to the profession and who want to work in schools that are outside the mainstream. It is a fabulous opportunity for us and for them, and it is brilliant for our young people. It is not just my school—I know that this is happening in other places. We realise that there is a need, so our teachers shadow teachers in primary schools who work with complex learners, and teachers from primary schools shadow in our schools. Our teachers go into mainstream schools to shadow, and vice versa. Schools are taking that upon themselves, because they know that there is a need and a gap, and they are doing what they can to address it. That is happening. However, I feel that ASN should be considered as part of initial teacher education.

The Convener: I will bring in Liam Kerr for a supplementary question and then Willie Rennie. Perhaps you can direct your questions to panel members who have not yet responded on this issue.

Liam Kerr: I will ask Susan Quinn a very brief question. How many hours of specialist ASN training is given during the postgraduate diploma in education? I have heard anecdotally that it could be between one and three hours. Can you confirm or deny that?

Susan Quinn: I do not know the exact answer, but I know that it will be a fairly small figure, because there is a lot to fit into a very short period. That is one issue that has been raised over the years about the challenges that are faced in the PGDE. People would argue that the same applies to lots of areas of work that have to be fitted into the PGDE. It is about the amount of time that is available, but the figure could be as small as you say. It probably also depends on the initial teacher education provider, because each of those will have its own summary of what is in its PGDE programme. I am not sure whether ASN is a significant element in bachelor and master of education degrees for the primary sector—I am not sure how many hours there are. There is the difficulty of trying to fit everything into a very tight box.

Willie Rennie: Susan Quinn has just brought everything into sharp focus with her explanation of the training that is required. Teachers are specialists, but in many ways they are generalists as well, so they have to cover a range of areas. The depth of knowledge that they require, sometimes for just the one pupil who may come along from time to time, is huge. The enormity of the task is beyond what I initially thought.

Do teachers feel helpless when faced with all of that? Do they think that it is just such a big task that they feel helpless and that they will not be able to get sufficiently knowledgeable to meet all the children's needs, or do they still hope that they can get to that point and provide a good-quality education? What is the feeling in that respect?

Susan Quinn: The stand up for quality education campaign is based on member surveys, so it is no coincidence that ASN is one of its three pillars, given that that is what our members talked to us about. They have told us that they want to help all the young people who come across their paths with a range of provision, whether they be a wee group of wee ones in an early-years setting, a class of 33 in a primary school or in a secondary school—and, indeed, even in our specialist provision, where there is a changing dynamic.

Helplessness is something that we try to overcome, but the position is very challenging at the moment. Even if someone is trained to work with a young person, that does not mean that it will solve the problem; they still have to be able to find the time in the working day to do that work. Working with young people with dyslexia to enhance their literacy skills is a labour-intensive process—that is the nature of the specialist provision that is required. Even if an individual class teacher is trained to provide that support, that does not necessarily mean that they will have the time to do it for that one young person in their class when they have 30 others who have to be supported in their learning, too.

There is a real challenge around the work to be done in this respect. I think that there are things

that can be done, and we have talked this morning about the alternatives that can be provided, the additional need and the support that needs to be there. However, teachers and support for learning workers recognise very clearly that the range has changed and that things are now much more challenging. Indeed, it has become even more challenging since Covid, because the need that we are addressing is of a volume that we have never encountered in the past and that leads—

The Convener: I am sorry, Susan, but Mike Corbett, Peter Bain and Sylvia Haughney want to come in on my original question about the mandatory nature and frequency of training. I will bring in Mike first.

Mike Corbett: I will get to that question, convener, but first, on the point about teachers being overwhelmed, I would say that they are being overwhelmed by many things although, as the evidence that we and others have submitted makes clear, there is a keen desire for training. What do they do if they do not get it? Most of them go off and do whatever they can to help. There are teachers who have refugee children in their class and who, facing a lack of English as an additional language support, are having to go on to Google Translate at night. They are doing their absolute best, but most of them would rather have the training. It does not need to be mandatory, as some of them will have come from other places where they got suitable experience, but most of them want that training.

Initial teacher education is vital if we are to get a proper base, but I also have a question about the quality of provision. I was struck by something that I read recently about the number of young women in their 20s who are getting diagnosed with ADHD, which suggests a lack of knowledge or ability in the medical profession. We cannot expect teachers to take all of this on when others do not know exactly what the best approach is themselves. That said, the quality of the training is a vital factor, too.

Sylvia Haughney: I want to make two points.

I can speak from my personal experience, having worked in complex needs schools. At that point, I was what was called an instructor—it was a support for learning role. Teachers would go off on the sick or on long-term absence and cover would have to be found, but the fact is that people do not need specialised training to work as a teacher in an ASN or complex needs school.

In order to be a secondary school biology teacher, you must have a degree in biology. However, it does not matter what degree you have—you are allowed to work with any pupil with a complex need. A teacher who had no awareness of complex needs would be expected to walk in and get started with no training at all.

If the children were all operating at pre-birth level or we used on-body signing—we used Makaton signing—the support staff would teach the teacher the on-body signing. We would teach the teacher the Makaton signings to meet the basic needs of the child. For example, if the child wanted to go to the toilet that would be communicated using augmentative communication, because they could not communicate verbally. That is the position that we would be in, and that has not changed. Children in ASN establishments should have the right to specialised teaching.

Training for support for learning workers in mainstream education should be mandatory. You are employed to work in a job. If you were employed by Costa, there would be mandatory training on how to operate coffee machines. We work with the most vulnerable children but we are not given any basic training. Psychologists in our field have developed training—there is an abundance of training available—but whether support staff can access any of that training comes down to the leadership of individual schools. It is a lottery based on where you are at the time and how many children there are in that school with ASN. People who work with the most vulnerable children in society should be trained to do that—it should be mandatory.

Peter Bain: I will quickly give everyone an idea of how much time is available for such training. There are five in-service days. The first will inevitably be mandatory training on child protection and getting the school up and running after teachers have been off for six weeks. That takes up one of the days. There will always be a learning and teaching in-service day in some form, because that is the bread and butter of every school. In the case of secondary schools, there will almost certainly be some moderation activity that takes place across multiple schools, so that will take up another day. There might be an assessment-driven in-service day, because we are driven by attainment stats in secondary school, and there might be one that is set aside for whatever ad hoc thing comes under the school improvement plan. There you go—that is five in-service days away already, and we have not touched on any ASN work.

There is a working time agreement, under which each school can agree to distribute its 195 hours to particular needs that staff and the school improvement plan deem to be most prominent. The school might or might not have included ASN work in that, but that might be only 20 hours a year. That might be an hour after school every second week. In those 20 hours, you will have

departmental work and you might have to discuss career standards, developing the young workforce or the introduction of artificial intelligence. Of those 20 hours, if you are lucky, five might be directed towards ASN training.

I agree with Susan Quinn that there should not be universal mandatory training for everybody. We should not just say, "Right, everybody is getting dyslexia training," or, "Everybody is getting EAL." We have professionals in our schools who know the youngsters in front of them, and they should have the ability to choose the areas in which they need to be upskilled and more knowledgeable. A mandatory number of hours should be set aside to ensure that our professionals—teachers and support staff—can look at what they believe to be their greatest training need in order to deliver to those youngsters, who deserve that level of expertise. That should be a minimum of an hour a week.

Willie Rennie, you are quite right—going along with Susan Quinn's point—that we will never be truly a professional in each discrete area. However, can we spend an hour a week upskilling ourselves in EAL or dyslexia to the level that we can better support young people? Whether we get that—

The Convener: I am sorry, but I need to stop you there. In this role, I have my eye on the clock, and we still need to cover a whole lot of stuff.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I want to ask about Angela Morgan's report, which, according to the feedback that I got, documented what parents often already knew. She called for mainstream education to be "redefined" to reflect the needs of pupils who have additional support needs. What needs to change in our schools so that we can achieve that for all pupils?

11:45

Matthew Cavanagh: A wider conversation needs to be had about what schools are for and what they do. Often, when we talk among our friends, families and the wider public, expectations are placed on schools with regard to attainment, qualifications and getting on to a good job. That needs to be challenged massively, because it is not the be-all and end-all of education. The longer that we persist with—[*Interruption*.]

The Convener: Something strange is going on with broadcasting. Is it Stephanie Callaghan who needs to be muted? [*Interruption*.] Stephanie, could you mute, please? We are hearing some background noise.

I am sorry, Matthew—carry on.

Matthew Cavanagh: That is all right.

We need to challenge the view that I mentioned. I know that it is hard to get a grasp of, given how the media look at league tables, for example, and with parents and families seeing such-and-such a school as a good one and others as not as good. However, if we are talking about the need to redefine mainstream education, I am strongly persuaded by the broader view as a way forward.

We have to think about what the purposes of education are. It is about preparing all our young people to work together in a diverse society and to be ready to take on the world after they leave. We should not persist with a system in which the gold standard is to get however many highers; we need to get past that and, indeed, that is what inclusion challenges us to do as a society.

Susan Quinn: The Morgan review did not comment on the resources that would be required to do the kinds of things that she highlighted. That is one of the key points for us now.

I agree with Matthew Cavanagh. If we are going to redefine education and consider the Hayward and Muir reviews and all the proposals that have been made, we will be delaying change. One of the sticking points is the range of delays making it difficult for schools to move forward and change.

We need to consider how we communicate a changing view of the system. It is problematic that the higher is the gold standard and that results day is celebrated to the detriment of any other qualifications or achievements, not only in secondary schools but in our primary and early years settings. As a country, we have not yet found a way to get over the fact that that is what happens. Whenever we try to do something different, we go back to the idea that "Highers worked for me, so they should work for everybody." They did not work for everybody when they worked for me. When I was in school all those years ago, there were young people they did not work for, and they still do not work for everybody.

We need to celebrate every young person in our system, but we have to have the resource to do it. You cannot expect a teacher in a secondary school to be able to deliver their subject in lots of different ways without the proper time and space to do it. Multiple-level classes are just not working in the way that people thought they would at that stage. That relates to the national qualifications, which are supposed to be slightly similar, but if you try to introduce other things, they will be different again and will require teachers to have the space and time to get up to speed and to consider how to do them. We need the resource for that sort of thing.

The Convener: That is probably part of another education reform theme that we might look at later.

Mike Corbett: Again, we have touched on this briefly, but we might need to look at the terminology that we use and try to get away from a sense of people with additional support needs being different and being treated like a minority. As others have said, that broader approach to recognising achievement is important. Obviously, there is work going on in that respect, but it seems to have stalled for the moment.

An important point in the Morgan review that we have not mentioned today is career progression for additional support needs teachers and those in that area, including, for example, the lead teacher. At the moment, there is no opportunity for someone to specialise as a lead teacher in additional support needs.

We have not touched on them much, but bodies such as Education Scotland and regional improvement collaboratives are supposed to give more support to classroom teachers. They are supposed to give such support generally, but they also could and should give that support with regard to training resources in the sphere of additional support needs.

The Convener: Stephanie Callaghan, is there anything that you want to pick up on?

Stephanie Callaghan: Thank you, convener. I was trying to unmute earlier to make a more specific point, but I could not get through.

Is this really about making wellbeing something central? Susan Quinn was talking about schools being assessed on highers and national 5s, but, quite frankly, as a parent—and as a parent of autistic children and young people—I think that a lot of parents are actually more concerned about the wellbeing aspect. Is that something that we should be looking at and giving feedback to the community on?

Peter Bain: Yes—very much so. Everyone around the table has already heard me banging on about curriculum developments in the Hayward review, for example, so you know my views on that.

What are schools for and how are we measured? Matthew Cavanagh mentioned league tables, which are killing the system. The problem with measuring wellbeing is that we do not have an agreed understanding of what it is. If you were to ask 100 headteachers, they would all give you different answers, and you could multiply that with the answers from teachers, support staff and, of course, parents.

What do we mean by wellbeing? It is a word that we use all the time, but I do not think that we universally understand it, so we need a very consistent understanding of that term before we can start to measure it. That is what we have to overcome, first and foremost. It is, of course, linked to mental health and the desire to move forward with careers and life after school. That is what I think, but not everyone agrees.

Stephanie, my only answer to your question is that, until we all agree a definition and understand what wellbeing is, we cannot go anywhere with measurement.

Sylvia Haughney: On the point about redefining mainstream education, we have all agreed that more children in society with additional support needs are in mainstream schools. However, it means that more children who are not able to function or be educated within the mainstream setting, such as a typical class, are being educated out in corridors, separate areas, cupboards and other spaces found within a school that are more adapted to their needs. We now have 21st century children being taught with 20th century teaching styles in what are, in some cases, 19th century buildings that are not suitable. My answer to that question, then, is yes, we absolutely need to look at redefining education within Scotland.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning, panel, and thank you for the information that you submitted in advance. It has been hugely helpful, even though it has, at times, made difficult reading, because of the gravity of the situation in our schools.

Picking up on the theme of reform and reviews, I know that countless reviews have looked into what we need to do here. We have mentioned the Morgan review this morning, and there are plenty of others. What does the panel think are the barriers to implementing them?

Susan Quinn: As I have said, the key barrier at the moment is the underfunding of the reforms that have been put forward. We have, both this morning and in more detail in our submissions, set out figures for the cuts that have been implemented to the support for young people with additional support needs, and they come on the back of an increase in the complexity of the support needs in our schools. As I said earlier, this is not just about the cuts, but about that complexity.

We need a long-term, sustainable funding plan for additional support needs that makes them something that cannot just slip away. That is problematic. As I have said—and I am being charitable to local authorities and others—they make their cuts where they can do so, because they cannot make them in other places, and nor should they. However, that is part of the problem.

In 2017, the committee's predecessor acknowledged the need to properly resource and consider additional support needs. Successive independent researchers have said that there is a need to have better resource and to properly organise around additional support needs, and, indeed, predecessor committees in the Parliament have said the same thing. Over time, however, we just have not got it right. It has been an area where cuts have been made and, on top of that, there has been the increase in the identification and complexity of needs in our young people.

As has been said, there are cuts to other services, too, such as child and adolescent mental health services, which support our young people with mental health issues. That is a growing area of additional support but, as far as I can see, the lowest waiting list is two years, while people in some areas have been talking about a five-year waiting list for young people to be to be seen by CAMHS. As others have said, all of those resources could support education to move forward if we were able to access them. It is about resource.

Mike Corbett: As Susan Quinn has said, it is all about finance and resource. It is also about giving more time to teachers, which we have touched on; access to effective training, which we have mentioned; and effective support from external agencies, whether they be educational psychologists or Education Scotland. It is also about supportive changes in future education reform.

One issue that was touched on early in the meeting is the need for a level of honesty and trust. As you will have seen in our written submission, some of our members feel that they are doing their absolute best and yet they are still being blamed for not doing enough or that the situation is somehow seen as their fault. We need to get away from the culture of blame and be open and honest about what the challenges are, if we are to try to address them.

Peter Bain: Obviously, I agree with Susan Quinn that this is about resource, resource, resource but, equally, at this particular time in education, given the multitude of proposed reforms—we have talked about the Muir, Hayward and Morgan reports, and I would add the Withers report to that list—we do not know where we are going. We have multiple recommendations, many of which are cross-pollinated in all the reports that I have mentioned and included in the original Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development work, but we do not know which recommendations will move to the next stage.

My recommendation is that we choose a forward direction of travel and start to put together some implementation groups. To take Hayward as an example, I think that the SDA—the Scottish diploma of achievement—would give us a focus and help redefine aspects of the curriculum and support within it, because the SDA has component parts that help with wellbeing, inclusiveness and so on. If we knew that we were going forward with even half of the 26 Hayward recommendations and if we could then start an implementation group for each of them, we would have a better idea of our direction of travel and therefore a better idea of what support we need to put into 21st century education.

At the moment, however, as Sylvia Haughney says, we have an eye on 21st century education but we are just sitting about, so we do not know where we are going.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I know that Sylvia wants to come in on my original question but, on that particular point, how important to the ASN agenda are the reforms that have been suggested?

Peter Bain: They are crucial because, if we have new education parameters, and within them a completely different qualification system with wellbeing components, a level of support will be necessary to achieve not just the SDA qualification but the ideal that sits behind it, which is to have a more holistic appreciation of what education is all about. It is not just about highers, which are one of the SDA's three component parts.

12:00

Sylvia Haughney: In relation to barriers, I think that it is great that we are all talking about Angela Morgan's review, which took place about four years ago. I have to say, though, that I go into schools quite a lot and, when I ask about that review, very few people know about it. That awareness is filtering down, at least, but it is happening very slowly.

I spoke to a group of support staff about the review, because it specifically looked at pupil support staff across Scotland, 27-hour contracts and remits. It is great that a sub-group is working on that but, when I brought up the report, one person said that there are multiple meetings and pieces of legislation on ASN and the presumption of mainstreaming. She said that she does not need to look at any more paperwork; she just needs more people to give her an understanding of how to do her job. That is what it comes down to. Instead of cuts, we need more resources and more people. We do not need more paperwork being thrown at us, when nothing happens as a result of it.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: That brings me nicely to my next question. In your submission to the committee, you said that the Scottish Government's claim that there are record numbers

of additional learning support assistants in schools should be interrogated. Why do you feel that that is the case? Can you explain the situation, as you see it, in schools?

Sylvia Haughney: You will have read the "Behaviour in Scottish Schools 2023" report, which shows that support staff are more likely to be abused than anyone else in schools, because they are out of the classroom and work solely with children with the most dysregulated behaviour. If there has been an incident, they want to report it. Whether they are allowed to do so is one issue.

We encourage our members to report every incident in which they have felt threatened or abused in their workplace, but our members feel that they will be blamed, as Peter Bain said. They feel that they will be asked what they did to upset the child: people will say, "They were fine before you came in, so what did you do?" That happens time and again. If there is a blame culture, staff are less likely to want to report incidents.

In Glasgow, there is massive underrecording. People will say that they are reporting such incidents, but they do that only if they are allowed and are shown how to do so. Debriefing, which is crucial, is not about blame, but about working out whether we can learn from the incident in order to minimise the chance of it happening again. It is not about asking, "What were you doing? Where were you? Don't you be sitting there. Have you read the risk assessment?" when nobody has seen a risk assessment. There is a blame culture, so support staff feel that they are interrogated—that is, if they are asked, because they are sometimes not even asked how they are after an incident; it is just a case of being told, "Back to class. In you go."

Pam Duncan-Glancy: My colleague will ask about some of the experiences that you have described in relation to behaviour and so on.

You made the point that support staff do not necessarily have sight of plans or information. Can you talk a bit more about that? What do support staff need in order to do their job appropriately?

Sylvia Haughney: A typical child who comes into school will not display any distressed or dysregulated behaviour, so they will not have a behaviour support plan or a risk assessment. However, more children in society now display such behaviour. Support staff are not deemed to be worthy—this does not happen across the board, so I ask the headteachers who are sitting at the table not to take offence—so, more often than not, such information is not cascaded down to them. They are told that they will be working with a pupil with autism spectrum disorder, but the only information that they are given is that the pupil is a wee bit tricky, so they should be careful. That is as much as they know—they are not given any more information.

Regardless of whether the child has a diagnosis, the issue is what the child needs. The child will have a risk assessment and a behaviour support plan, which is where staff would find the developed strategies and coping mechanisms for working consistently with the child, but they are not given access to those. We fight continually for our members to be able to go straight to their line manager and ask, "Where is the risk assessment? Where is the behaviour support plan?" and to say, "I cannot go back into that situation until I fully understand who I am going to work with and what I need to keep me safe in my job and to support that child in the school."

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I thank all our guests. We have covered parental involvement and engagement to some extent, but it is an important factor. How are parents and carers of pupils with complex needs encouraged to be involved in discussions about their children's education, and what is required to ensure that that works well? How do people work together to bring that about? How are pupils informed about their rights to support, dispute resolution and legal remedies, such as tribunals—if things go that far? Obviously, people want to avoid going to tribunal. Where there are queries, how are parents informed about what to do next and what can most benefit their children?

Susan Quinn: Where there is good practice, schools will have developed positive relationships with parents in order to engage with them and fully support them, and to make sure that they are as well informed as possible. The school might signpost them to other areas of support if something is beyond what the school's advocacy role can provide. We can direct people to social work and to provisions under disability legislation.

In cases of dispute, local authorities have complaints processes. If a parent wants to raise a complaint, they will be informed about the local authority's complaints process, including with regard to whether a case should go to tribunal. Those processes should be clear in every local authority.

I would expect schools, in the first instance, to develop nuanced relationships with parents to ensure that they can support them to the best of their ability. Sometimes, that means passing the matter on to somebody else to advocate or to take other action, because a case might go against the local authority. There are such nuanced areas.

One of the challenges can relate to where parents see themselves within the system. Poverty and parents' positions can make things difficult—for example, if parents have already put up

barriers to engaging with the school because of their personal experiences. It takes a bit of work to break those barriers down, which is why, among young people in poverty with some of the more significant challenges, we see higher numbers of cases in which challenges are not addressed as quickly as we want them to be addressed. That is because we have to guide parents along a bit more and coax them into such action. That can be a barrier. However, in the first instance, I would expect schools to develop relationships, then provide parents with direction.

Bill Kidd: Obviously, everybody would want to avoid disputes and all that sort of thing.

Susan Quinn: Absolutely.

Bill Kidd: I suppose that such provision of information about why their children are in the situation in which they are being educated and a bit more bringing of parents and carers on board would avoid having to take things to that advanced position.

Susan Quinn: My experience is that, where schools can work with parents, it minimises disputes—certainly in this area. However, parents believing that their young person should have a place in other provision will always be a challenge. Such provision is not in the school's gift—that is a local authority decision. We can only guide parents, tell them what processes there are and encourage them however we can.

Bill Kidd: I suppose that Matthew Cavanagh has a comment on that.

The Convener: Thank you, Bill. You are reading my mind.

Bill Kidd: I was going to be taking over your seat anyway. [*Laughter*.] I am sorry—carry on.

Matthew Cavanagh: It is absolutely about relationships and communication with families: that is what pastoral care teams across Scotland deal with every day. My day is made up of phone calls with families to find out what their needs are, and organising transition meetings, reviews and ad hoc meetings with social workers, and referrals to social work. All those things happen all the time. From my point of view, it is as simple as that. My job and the job of people in pastoral care teams is to find out what is going on and to be the person who is known to the family, the residential house or whatever. We can be a shoulder to cry on sometimes, as well as somebody who can get access to a translator or a school nurse team, for example.

On tribunals, for example, I go back to the fact that there is an inequitable situation in that there are families who are better equipped to resort to accessing their legal rights. That means that decisions that I see being made in my work might not be the most equitable decisions. That is just a fact of life. The job of schools is to work with that—within the law, obviously—and to support the procedures. However, there are some times when working with families whose expectations and demands are inappropriate or unrealistic is very challenging. Again, that is a skill that pastoral care teams acquire through the work that they do.

Bill Kidd: That is very helpful. Thank you very much.

Peter Bain: I have a tiny point to make on the flipside of that. What Susan Quinn said would be my answer, but there is a tiny bit on the other side of that relating to parents.

We have a lot of parents who, quite rightly, have high expectations for their children, but, equally, a significant number of parents refuse to accept that their children have any issues despite their clearly having a number of issues that impact on themselves, their fellow classmates, the teaching staff and the ASN staff whom we have to put into place, although parents refuse to accept that there is any need for them. They will refuse to have any level of diagnosis undertaken and refuse the child having a discussion with an educational psychologist, a health professional, a social worker or anybody else. They will dig their heels in and say, "Ma kids are normal. Put them in a class and they'll get on wi it." There is a significant number of them. Because we cannot get the young person in front of a professional from outwith the school, we are unable to access the level of support that they deserve. That is because the parent simply refuses to accept the situation. There are a fair few of them, and the impact on the wider school community can be significant as a result. That is just a wee extra thing that we should be aware of with regard to parents.

Bill Kidd: That is very useful to know.

The Convener: I thank Peter Bain for those closing remarks, and I thank all the witnesses for their evidence this morning. We could have gone on for much longer, as you could sense.

We plan to take further evidence in the inquiry later this month and in our meetings in early March. We will then produce a report that is based on what we have heard, with recommendations for the Scottish Government.

That concludes the public part of our proceedings today.

12:14

Meeting continued in private until 12:51.

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