



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 23 May 2018

Session 5



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

16th Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- *George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)
- *Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)
- *Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
- *Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP)
- *Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
- *Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
- *Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
- *Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)
- *Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

- Gail Copland (Education Scotland)
- Gayle Gorman (Education Scotland)
- Elizabeth Morrison (Education Scotland)
- John Swinney (Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills)
- Louise Turnbull (Education Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 23 May 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Attainment and Achievement of School-aged Children Experiencing Poverty

The Convener (James Dornan): I welcome everyone to the 16th meeting in 2018 of the Education and Skills Committee. I remind everyone present to turn their mobile phones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting, please.

Agenda item 1 is an evidence session on our inquiry into the attainment and achievement of school-aged children experiencing poverty. Before we start, I put on record my thanks to everyone who attended our meeting at the Muirhouse millennium centre in north Edinburgh last Wednesday. All the members who attended found the discussion very useful.

This meeting is the inquiry's fifth and final evidence session. We have two panels, the first of which comprises representatives from Education Scotland. I welcome Gayle Gorman, chief inspector of education and chief executive; Elizabeth Morrison, interim strategic director; Louise Turnbull, Her Majesty's inspector and interim assistant director; and Gail Copland, attainment advisor. I say to the panel at the outset that if you would like to respond to a question, please indicate to me or the clerks and I will call you to speak. I understand that Ms Gorman would like to make a short statement.

Gayle Gorman (Education Scotland): Good morning, colleagues. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this topic with the committee. As the committee knows, the issue of poverty and attainment is a priority for everyone who works in education. I am joined by my three colleagues who work directly in the area, and we will be able to give the committee first-hand evidence and testimony on the work that is going on across Scotland.

Improving attainment is at the heart of Education Scotland's new role and remit. Our curriculum specialists and inspectors are focused on that key priority work across Scotland. Our inspectors are discussing pupil equity fund planning and impact with school leaders, who are aware of how to monitor and gather robust evidence on interventions and the impact of

outcomes on Scotland's children. In some cases, our school leaders are indicating that early evaluation of the implementation is showing a positive impact on children and young people. Through our inspections, we are gathering evidence that we are reiterating in our inspection reports.

We support teachers and schools across Scotland through a wide range of channels, such as glow, the national improvement hub and our interventions for equity. Our curriculum teams are gathering evidence from schools and practitioners and are sharing examples of interesting practice so that we can spread best practice and impactful work across all classrooms in Scotland. There is still a gap between the progress that is being made by those living in Scotland's least and most deprived areas. Tackling the poverty-related attainment gap is an issue for every school and local authority in Scotland and it is one of the highest priorities.

However, we recognise that education alone cannot solve this deep-rooted societal problem. Effective multi-agency partnerships, involving the national health service, social work, community learning and other third sector organisations, are essential. We are seeing more and more of such partnerships as part of a coherent package at school level.

Education Scotland will continue to improve the reach and impact of our work. Currently, there is a team of named attainment advisors for every local authority, and those teams will be working more collegiately across regional improvement collaboratives to share best practice and learning and to inform schools of the impact of working in this challenging area. Through all those activities, we will continue to prioritise improving attainment, reflecting our new vision for Education Scotland, which is to work for Scotland's children with Scotland's educators. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this important area with the committee.

The Convener: Thank you very much. We have a lot to get through today, so I ask that questions and answers be succinct—that has nothing to do with Gayle Gorman's statement, by the way.

To date, what have been the best interventions in schools to support children who experience poverty? What have you been doing to roll out such interventions? I know that you have mentioned some of that.

Gayle Gorman: We are gathering lots and lots of evidence of best practice across Scotland. No one element will raise attainment and reduce the poverty-related attainment gap in a unique way. It is about the best support at a local level. What works in one school with one group of children and young people might not work in another school.

Some of that work is transferable and some is not. We are looking at Scottish and international evidence and the feedback that we are getting from our attainment advisers, who are able to recommend and share what is working well across Scotland. However, that work needs to be tailored and made bespoke for children and young people in each individual context. My colleagues who are involved in PEF will be able to say a bit more about that.

Louise Turnbull (Education Scotland): As Gayle Gorman said, it is about those local responses and schools working with their partners to identify a clear rationale for the different interventions that they put in place. We have many examples of things that are happening across Scotland.

In Larbert high school, for example, the staff have worked to use their PEF funding alongside their NIF support team to look at—

The Convener: Sorry, but for the benefit of the general public and committee members, can you explain what NIF is?

Louise Turnbull: Sorry. NIF is the national improvement framework. There is a team of people who have specific roles within the national improvement framework as well as a team who are working to support PEF and develop it. At Larbert, staff have taken a multilayered approach to interrogate the data that they had, identify the gaps and identify the needs. They have worked with their partners to identify the interventions that they feel will make the biggest difference. They have looked at training their support for learning assistants to deliver high-quality support in English and mathematics lessons. Alongside that small, targeted support, there is training in peer support for older learners and staff training in pedagogical approaches for learning and teaching and how to develop them. In addition to that, the staff in Larbert have appointed a welfare officer to improve attendance.

That multilayered approach looks at the needs in the local authority area. The impact of that approach has been strong outcomes in relation to wellbeing for learners. Larbert has highly effective approaches to inclusion, equity and equality and, in a recent inspection, almost all of the school's young people said that they were well supported and able to achieve.

The Convener: That is a good example of PEF. A lot of my colleagues will ask questions about PEF later, so I would rather not dwell on it at this stage. We will move on to questions from the rest of the committee.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): Can the witnesses give us a flavour of what they believe to

be the impact of poverty on education in Scotland, especially in terms of attainment?

Gayle Gorman: The impact of poverty on children across Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: Yes. What is your organisation's view of that?

Gayle Gorman: Sorry. I am not quite clear what you are asking. Are you asking about what Education Scotland is doing or are you asking about the impact on children? Can you clarify that for me?

Richard Lochhead: What is Education Scotland's view of the impact of poverty on children?

Gayle Gorman: Thank you for clarifying. We find that there are significant differences. Our results and data across Scotland show us that there is significant improvement in certain areas. The children from our most deprived areas are making rapid improvement, which we would call accelerated progress, and we have seen a significant improvement in core areas in that regard. However, there is still an attainment or achievement gap between our most deprived and least deprived children. We are seeing an impact in terms of the vocabulary gap, their core skills in literacy and numeracy and their confidence in terms of approaches to learning. Over three quarters of headteachers reported recently that they are feeling confident that the work on the Scottish attainment challenge is beginning to have an impact. Over 90 per cent of headteachers are saying that they feel that they are going to see a significant impact in the next five years.

We therefore see an impact in terms of the attitude to learning, willingness to learn, ability and the vocabulary gap. We are seeing that significant impact beginning to move through the system as it becomes a core feature of school improvement plans across Scotland. Some of my colleagues might want to talk about specific examples that show how that is moving forward.

Gail Copland (Education Scotland): Given my work as the attainment adviser in West Dumfries, I would like to speak to you about the approaches to learning through play. That initiative has been funded by the Scottish attainment challenge and it focuses mainly on the vocabulary gap for children in that area. All early years workers and primary 1 teachers received extensive training in word aware, which focuses on key words and used a research-based approach to developing literacy. As a result of that, there was a 100 per cent increase in performance of the children living in Scottish index of multiple deprivation 1 and 2 areas. To involve the families, a text messaging service was introduced whereby parents were alerted to the word of the week. As a

result, there has been a statistically significant increase in the children's assessment results.

Richard Lochhead: My final question is on inspections and your duties in that regard. We have had a lot of evidence from teachers and various organisations that, over the past few years, poverty has been rising and having a greater impact. Have you identified any trends in your inspections or come across those issues?

Elizabeth Morrison (Education Scotland): When we are out on inspections, we see the impact of poverty. Gayle Gorman has described how we see the impact of poverty on attainment and achievement. We are making significant progress across Scotland in closing the attainment gap, and we are seeing the emerging positive impact of the work that has been done through the Scottish attainment challenge. However, inevitably, when we are on inspection and we look at attainment, we see the gap. We know that it is there and that it is not good enough, but we are working very hard on that.

We see a lot of hard-working teachers right across Scotland who are really making a difference for individual children and young people and supporting them to achieve and attain as highly as others. We are also seeing the impact at the other end, because more of our young people from areas of deprivation are going on to university, which is really positive, and more leavers from areas of deprivation are going on to positive and sustained destinations. We are also seeing the impact at Scottish credit and qualifications framework levels 4 to 6, where the attainment gap is narrowing. We see the impact of poverty, but we are pleased that progress is being made to address that.

Gayle Gorman: In inspections, we are seeing increased use of children's performance data and pupil tracking, through which schools are becoming much more familiar with the strengths and weaknesses in the child's learning so that they can then target the next step in that. School leaders are using that much more effectively to target intervention and resources. Over the past 18 months, that has become a recurrent theme in our inspection reports. We are finding a much more focused and sharper approach to improving attainment using teaching and learning approaches. It is also about evaluating when to stop doing something. It is about trying an intervention, looking at the impact on learners pretty early on, being aware of that and monitoring and evaluating it, and then, if it is the wrong thing, adjusting it to meet the needs of the children and young people. There has been a significant focus on that in the classroom activity that we are observing and in the senior leadership

discussions, which are understanding of individual pupil progress.

The Convener: I have a brief question on inspections. You say that you find all these great teachers doing great work. I have absolutely no doubt about that, but do the inspection reports show that? In another piece of work, we heard evidence that inspections seem to concentrate on the negative rather than the positive and on what people still need to achieve as opposed to what they have achieved. Given what you just said about teachers, which we are all aware of, are the inspections starting to show that?

Elizabeth Morrison: We see a lot of strengths in inspections. I mentioned the hard work and the impact that it is having on learners. People sometimes focus unduly on the negatives. Naturally, we identify areas of strength. We are seeing lots of areas of strength across Scotland in relation to leadership, the experience that young people have and wider achievement, on which there has been real progress in Scotland. There are opportunities in the senior phase to do the Duke of Edinburgh's award and modern and foundation apprenticeships. We recognise all those strengths but, naturally, everybody can improve, and we identify areas for improvement.

The Convener: I think that it is my fault, but I was really referring to the reports rather than the inspections. I was asking whether the reports highlight the good work that is going on rather than concentrating on the negatives. However, I am happy to move on, as we have a lot to get through today.

Gayle Gorman: I am aware of the time, but I would like to come back briefly on that. Of the 120 national improvement framework schools that we sampled in the previous academic year between August and June, 92 per cent were evaluated as being satisfactory or better on raising attainment and achievement. So, we are celebrating that.

In each inspection report, we have areas of strength and areas for development, because inspection is about an improvement process. We would certainly want to emphasise that the paperwork, the discussions and, fundamentally, the evaluation that headteachers send back to us following an inspection talk about the quality of the professional learning that has taken place during that process as being among the best in their career, and it is highly evaluated. It is as part of that improvement dialogue that those discussions would take place. As Liz Morrison said, we certainly want to celebrate the quality of the hard work that goes on every day in classrooms across Scotland.

10:15

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):

One of the things that has become clear during our inquiry is how important it is that teachers understand how poverty impacts on pupils and their attainment and achievement. Can you set out for the committee what materials Education Scotland provides on that? Also, in relation to continuing professional development, what professional learning programmes are available for teachers on that topic?

Gayle Gorman: I will kick off on that and my colleagues will be able to go into some of the detail on specifics.

We have been talking to all schools, school leaders and teachers, as have many colleagues across Scotland. In particular, we have been talking about adverse childhood experiences and the impact of those on children's learning. There has been significant professional learning and CPD across the country at local authority level, at regional improvement collaborative level, and from Education Scotland. The aim is to bring together the professionals such as social workers, health workers and allied health professionals and use their professional knowledge to upskill education teams on the impact of trauma and chaotic lifestyles, and some of the issues that children and young people bring to school with them. That learning is a significant and important factor in supporting children's attainment and achievement.

We have done significant work on that—we had a range of conferences recently that we delivered jointly with the NHS, which were hugely oversubscribed. Education Scotland and the NHS worked with teachers and practitioners, looking at how to work collectively to address these issues and making teachers more aware of some of the challenges that young people face daily. My colleagues can say a little bit more.

Elizabeth Morrison: One of the things that I want to focus on is that Education Scotland is moving away from creating masses of stuff to put on our website that is not meaningful. We are moving towards working with teachers and other practitioners in the classroom; it is very much about working on the ground and rolling up our sleeves to work with teachers to improve outcomes for children and young people. Gail Copland is a good example of that.

Having said all that, we have a wide variety of information on our national improvement hub. Some of that is gathered as a result of inspection processes and is good practice. We also share a lot of information from some of the very good work that is happening in our local authorities. For example, City of Edinburgh Council did a one in five project, which focused on the one in five

children in Edinburgh who were living in poverty. The council produced a very helpful document called "Tips for teachers" to support teachers directly working with children who were living in poverty. We have been able to share that nationally, which means that every teacher in the country has access to that material.

Louise Turnbull: In addition to that, the committee will be aware that the Scottish College for Educational Leadership has become part of Education Scotland and its programmes—such as the framework for educational leadership and the teacher leadership programme—all have elements that address teachers' understanding of poverty and its impact.

We have mentioned a lot of national support and we also provide a lot of support locally through attainment advisers. The role of the attainment adviser is a unique role because colleagues who work in that role work in the classroom with learners and teachers and they work in the schools with headteachers and senior leaders, but they also work strategically with local authorities to develop that shared understanding of the impact of poverty. As Elizabeth Morrison has already said, the hands-on way that they work in schools is important.

The attainment adviser role is a crucial part of support for closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The role will be different depending on where people work, but there is a real focus on developing understanding and career-long professional learning as part of it. I will hand over to Gail Copland to give you a specific example.

Gail Copland: Without doubt, working in schools with headteachers, teachers and children is by far the highlight of the role of attainment adviser. In my work in West Dunbartonshire, I work alongside the improvement team. I have a clear role in supporting that team and I work in individual schools and across all the schools in West Dunbartonshire. That gives me the opportunity to see how well the interventions are working, to hear what people are saying on the ground, to hear what teachers are saying and to share the national messages with those people. It also gives me the opportunity to identify the good practice that is going on in West Dunbartonshire and share that with the other attainment advisers at team meetings. We have presented at the national events in order to celebrate the success in West Dunbartonshire. Working on the ground with teachers and children is by far the highlight of the job.

The Convener: I remind you that we do not need every member of the panel to answer every question, because—

Gayle Gorman: I asked my colleagues to comment just to illustrate the layered approach across Scotland.

The Convener: Yes—I do appreciate that. It is just that we have an awful lot to get through. Liz Smith is next.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I have just one question at the moment, convener. To whom is a headteacher accountable when he or she makes a decision about how to spend PEF money?

Gayle Gorman: Money for PEF was designed to go to schools and to work entirely at a local level, so headteachers and classroom teachers are best placed to make the decisions about the choices that they have.

Liz Smith: To whom are they accountable?

Gayle Gorman: They are accountable to the children and families that they have within their school.

Liz Smith: And nobody else?

Gayle Gorman: Well, they would be accountable in terms of best value practice to the local authority, but for the pupil equity funding very clear guidance was produced, which went out to schools to support their work and make sure that there is local decision making—

Liz Smith: I am sorry to interrupt you, but I want to be absolutely clear about this. Do the guidelines come from you or from local authorities?

Gayle Gorman: There is a combination of guidelines. Some local authorities have been asked by headteachers to work collectively to help them with some of the challenges around procuring and gathering the resources that they wish to buy if a number of schools want to take part in that. Other local authorities, such as West Dunbartonshire Council, have provided best practice models. There is also guidance from the Scottish Government on funding, as well as the PEF case studies and the approaches that we have put out. We want to put some information in the system to enable schools to learn from best practice and make decisions at a local level about the children and families that they have in front of them. That is entirely the focus of pupil equity funding—it is money for schools for that local decision making.

Liz Smith: Okay—thank you. That means that there are quite a lot of lines of accountability.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Good morning. My questions will sound simple, but they are probably not. We have had the attainment challenge for a couple of years. What challenges have you faced over those two years, and how has Education Scotland addressed them? What

have you learned over that period that you can take forward?

Elizabeth Morrison: As you say, we have faced a number of challenges. We are now in a good position in that we are recruiting a number of staff, but we have had to move staff around, which has been a challenge for us. We are fortunate in that we have just issued contracts to 10 new attainment advisers, and those permanent appointments will really help to support us. We will also be recruiting in the next few weeks. Gayle Gorman and I will be interviewing a number of candidates who have come with very good application forms, and we hope to be able to appoint more.

We have faced a challenge in coming together, but, as an organisation, we have taken collective responsibility for coming together to meet the Scottish attainment challenge so that every authority has a named person whom they can refer to.

Gayle Gorman: In the past couple of years, we have seen a scaling up of people's engagement with the programme to meet the attainment challenge. In the beginning, a lot of information had to be given and there was a lot of confidence building around schools' approaches and expectations. However, over the piece, we are seeing confidence growing and some of the concerns easing around expectations, how progress will be measured, what people are looking for and where the gaps are in schools and in teachers' subject knowledge. At the beginning, we developed understanding of the expectations and the focus on the attainment challenge, and we are now gaining momentum and moving forward quite confidently.

Louise Turnbull might want to talk about some of the work that has grown and emerged over the past two years.

Louise Turnbull: There are always challenges in education, but, as Elizabeth Morrison has said, it is about how we work together as an organisation. One of the big successes has been the increased focus on collaboration—schools and local authorities being supported to collaborate and challenge each other. There has also been collaboration between the attainment advisers and local authorities, as well as a partnership with the Scottish Government. The attainment adviser has had a pivotal role in supporting that collaboration and in developing and extending collaboration with partners.

It takes time to develop and embed that work, but we are beginning to see a real impact in those areas. As we move to new regional models, that collaboration becomes even more important.

George Adam: I am sold on the idea of having attainment advisers across Scotland, but where is the join-up between the front-line educators and the attainment adviser? What is Education Scotland's role?

Nancy Clunie from Dalmarnock primary school, who came to the committee, is a dynamic go-getter who has created a community herself, but not everyone will have that kind of personality. How do Education Scotland and the attainment advisers—who, I am sure, will be key—link with the expertise of people like Nancy Clunie and others who work in education to ensure that we have that kind of delivery, although not uniformity, throughout Scotland?

Elizabeth Morrison: We are in a very positive situation at the moment, and we are recruiting. We are getting 10 new people in, and we hope to recruit another 10 people in the current recruitment round. When we get those people together, the induction will be critical. We have plans for the induction process, so that we can build on some of the excellent practice of Gail Copland in West Dunbartonshire and challenge our new people to come together.

We also work in teams across regional improvement collaboratives; we take a blend of skills, so that people who work primarily with one local authority will share their skills and experience across the regional improvement collaborative. It is a really exciting and dynamic situation in which to work together. We also need to build on the experience of our current attainment advisers and consider how they have worked.

Challenges have been mentioned, and one of the challenges that we have faced relates to consistency in teachers' professional judgment. Education Scotland and the attainment advisers have done a huge amount of work in getting groups of teachers together to look at moderation and to share samples of children's work so that we get a solid understanding of the standards.

Louise Turnbull: It is also important to consider how we capture that practice and share it, as well as how we support people to do that. We cannot just take something and transfer it somewhere else. We use the national improvement hub as our online resource to capture practice so that people can learn with and from each other. The attainment advisers are critical in gathering that expertise and experience, which Education Scotland then shares nationally.

The attainment advisers work together, and we come together regularly to build on those examples and signpost headteachers and schools to good practice. We make connections so that, for example, someone can visit Nancy Clunie, have a conversation with her and learn from her.

We have a role in connecting people so that they can share their experiences.

10:30

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I hear what you say about good things happening but, with respect, I am struck by the gap between what you have said and all that the committee has heard when we have gone round, listening to teachers, parents and our communities. I do not know whether you are constrained by what you can say about Government policy, which you implement and inspect, but our experience of speaking to professionals who work in education and to families has not been like yours. You spoke about there being 10 more attainment advisers at a time when there are fewer teachers, support teachers and support staff in schools. Are you aware of a gap between what you think is going on and what is being said in the education community?

Gayle Gorman: I visit schools regularly and will continue to do so, and I do not recognise the conversations that you have reflected. Our evidence, from conversations with hard-working colleagues, is that they are absolutely focused on and dedicated to children and young people and that they are working very hard to make a difference.

Johann Lamont: I was suggesting not that anyone lacks dedication but that they are not given the support that they require to do their jobs.

Gayle Gorman: I certainly do not recognise that. There is a need for further support and professional learning, which is why we are developing a new, enhanced Education Scotland in terms of the offer for children and young people and their teachers. We want to continue to do that, which is why, as Liz Morrison mentioned earlier, the focus is on working directly in schools with attainment advisers and others to widen our curriculum team and the front-line support for teachers around literacy and numeracy.

Johann Lamont: With respect, people are not saying, "I wish we had more support from Education Scotland." They are saying, "I wish we had more staff and support staff in schools."

I have a question about PEF figures. Again with respect to Louise Turnbull, her examples of PEF-funded measures, such as a home links teacher, support for individual young people and somebody to train staff to be aware of special needs, were interesting but, in my job 20 years ago, I would have regarded them all as mainstream. Do you share my concern that PEF is potentially substituting for what would have been mainstream provision in the past?

Gayle Gorman: With PEF, schools are making local decisions about where they want additional capacity and additional reach, which varies from one school to another.

Johann Lamont: In your inspections, would you explore the reality—if it was the reality—that people were using PEF to substitute for a loss of funding? Would that come out in your reports? If somebody decided to use PEF for something that, in the past, was funded through mainstream resources, would your reports highlight that and say that it was unacceptable?

Gayle Gorman: Our inspection framework in the fourth version of “How good is our school?” looks at the impact on the attainment and achievement of children and young people, which we would report on.

Johann Lamont: With respect, that is not what I asked.

Gayle Gorman: You asked whether our inspections would report on whether schools were using PEF in that way, but that question is not for Education Scotland inspection teams, because they would not know the previous capacity of the schools. We report on the impact on children’s and young people’s attainment and on whether an effective model is being delivered with a strong model of leadership and capacity to improve. That is what we look at.

Johann Lamont: We could establish that it is good practice to have support staff supporting teachers with young people who have additional support needs—we know that there is evidence for that. In the past, that support existed in schools and was funded by the local authority, but that funding has stopped and PEF money is being used to do that job. Is that an acceptable use of PEF money?

Gayle Gorman: As I have said, it is about the local context for the headteacher. They look at the suite that is offered for children and young people and how it fits the offer of local authority funding and the local decision making and democratic processes around the funding per capita and around additional support funds. That process takes place locally. Inspection focuses on the role of schools and the capacity of the leadership to improve and raise attainment and achievement among all of Scotland’s learners.

Johann Lamont: It is clear that Education Scotland is incapable—that is the wrong word. I apologise. Education Scotland is unable, because of its role, to comment on the impact of Government policy on local authority funding on what is happening in local schools. However, Education Scotland follows Government policy and then inspects it.

Gayle Gorman: No, we are about improvement. Education Scotland is an improvement service that supports teachers and learners to improve outcomes for children across Scotland. Inspection is part of the scrutiny process. Through our inspection, we look at improving outcomes for children; it is not our job to focus on policy delivery through inspection. We are clear that inspection is an independent process that is about making improvements in schools for learners, and we use a suite of other scrutiny opportunities on our improvement journey.

Johann Lamont: It is not possible for you to say that the best way to secure improvement in our schools would be to resource local authorities in a different way.

Gayle Gorman: That would not be for me to comment on.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I will talk about teaching approaches. PEF has been given to schools and, as you rightly say, it is up to the headteacher and the school team to decide how to use the funding. However, I have spoken to some people, and there is a concern, particularly among those in the third sector who have been involved with schools, that PEF is perhaps not being used in the most appropriate or best way, that its use might not involve partners or that a headteacher might have traditional views about teaching and learning. How do we approach that situation? A headteacher, who is the leader of the school, can make an individual choice, but if PEF is being used in a way that does not tackle attainment, how do we deal with that?

Gayle Gorman: A round of seven PEF events have recently taken place across Scotland, which have brought together headteachers, depute heads, the third sector and other partners, in which a series of workshops have been run on best practice. The workshops are sector led—that is, they are run by the schools—and many feature third-sector partnerships or joint multi-agency work with social work or other agencies. That is the model that is being used.

For the past 100 days, there has been a daily tweet about what a school is doing with PEF. Many of the measures go beyond the traditional methods that you have mentioned—the schools are looking beyond those methods and are supporting community work, in particular. My colleagues will give examples and will talk about how we are addressing the issue that you raise.

Gail Copland: To return to the point about improving learning and teaching, my experience in West Dunbartonshire is that the teachers are totally focused on using PEF to raise attainment and to narrow the poverty-related attainment gap. They are using the money creatively, being

innovative and using it in exciting ways not only to develop their teachers' professionalism but, above all, for the children, and they are involving parents.

An example from West Dunbartonshire was celebrated at the national events. Levenvale primary school used part of its PEF to provide a residential experience for families that was focused on developing literacy skills. Parents and children were learning together all weekend, both indoors and outdoors. The parents were involved in all aspects of the work, and, through effective partnership working with the family support worker, the children reported that their relationships with their parents had significantly improved. The support worker said that she had made better connections with the families over that weekend than she would have achieved in a year. Above all, the parents gained confidence in supporting their children with literacy at home. Copies of the books that were used were provided for every family. As a result of the programme, this year we are seeing a significant increase in the use of the school library by parents and children.

Gillian Martin: That is a positive experience, and you are obviously working very hard in West Dunbartonshire, but not all schools across Scotland are at that stage. What is Education Scotland's role in ensuring best practice and giving support to schools? A few people in our focus groups told us that there is a bit of nervousness about how to spend the money and who to go to. They did not want to spend the money in one area in case that did not work. There is almost a sense of their feeling accountable to the community about how the funding is used. What support do you give to schools? Do you directly suggest partnership working?

Gayle Gorman: At the PEF events, we launched an Education Scotland guide to working with the third sector, which we wrote in partnership with third sector colleagues. It was a guide for headteachers and senior leaders about how to work, how to engage and who to contact to support their PEF and the range of activities that would be available. We launched that guide and shared it at the PEF events. Liz Morrison might have more to say on that.

Elizabeth Morrison: There is also work around the Education Endowment Foundation—I think that the committee heard from one of its representatives at a previous meeting. The Scottish Government and Education Scotland invested in the Education Endowment Foundation and we now have a Scottish version of the teaching and learning toolkit on our national improvement hub. That is easy for teachers to access and they can look at various international and Scottish interventions—increasingly, they are

Scottish ones. They can see the impact of a particular intervention and its cost, so they can easily see what the likely impact is for the amount of PEF money that they will spend. We have promoted that resource heavily at the PEF events, which various people have mentioned, and somebody from the Education Endowment Foundation spoke at all the PEF events to raise awareness of the resource. When the attainment advisers are working with schools, they encourage staff to use the resource and they use it with the staff in schools so that they can make informed decisions about their spending. However, there must be a clear rationale for their spending that is based on their evaluation of the needs in their local context and the needs of the learners in their establishment.

Gillian Martin: My final question is about traditional practices in school education that might have a negative effect on families because of their lifestyle. For example, the parent in a single-parent family might be struggling to hold down a couple of jobs, so having to go to their child's school at any point would seriously impact on their day and cause them considerable stress. Dealing with things like their children's homework and attending school for particular interventions could be very inconvenient for them, given their other responsibilities, and there is also the cost of the school uniform. Schools can be set in their ways and do things traditionally. What is Education Scotland's role in getting schools to look at different ways of working that might support families who are struggling with the effects of poverty rather than add to their worries?

Louise Turnbull: Education Scotland has done a lot of work, both locally and nationally, on developing not just parental involvement but parental engagement in learning, because we recognise that that has a significant impact on children's learning. One way of supporting families is the development of family learning. We have done a lot of work with third sector partners to develop family learning approaches, and Education Scotland pulled all that work together with some case studies in a review in December 2016. The review pulled together examples of family learning approaches across Scotland in order to support discussion of that work. As Liz Morrison has said, the EEF and its materials are not about lifting an approach but about providing evidence to inform schools' decision making on the approaches that will best support them.

From the work that we have been doing around family learning, we recognise that further support is needed. Therefore, we have recently launched a family learning framework that supports schools in working with their partners, parents and communities to develop a range of approaches and see what those approaches might look like,

how they might be created and developed in partnership and how that programme of work might be evaluated. We recognise that we have a role in supporting some of the work that I have described, and we have been doing that.

Gillian Martin: What about the traditional approaches that I mentioned, which might have a negative effect? Is that sort of thing picked up by attainment advisers and inspectors as a possible area for development when they go into a school?

Louise Turnbull: While we are on inspection, we look at how schools identify barriers to learning, how they overcome those barriers and how they work with families to do that, so we would look at that as part of our inspection process.

10:45

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I want to follow up on that by asking about the non-formal education that some of our more thoughtful schools are engaged in, as opposed to the more traditional approach that is taken in formal education. In her introduction, Gayle Gorman talked about youth work and developing the pupil in the round. In the course of the committee's inquiry, headteachers have repeatedly spoken to me about the difficulty of accrediting non-formal education, such as in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, in the system to help the children and young people who would especially benefit from that. What work is Education Scotland doing with the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Scottish credit and qualifications framework to bring recognition of such informal education into the system so that schools can see it and use it in a way that would be helpful to the learner or young person, as much as it would be to all of us?

Gayle Gorman: We are fundamentally committed to working in partnership with the agencies that you mentioned, because we are aware of the significant role that such education can play in giving our most vulnerable learners aspiration and confidence. Liz Morrison can provide some detail on the work that is being done on that.

Elizabeth Morrison: That is an area that I am particularly passionate about. We must recognise wider achievement in a more formal way. Over a number of years, we have worked with the awards network to ensure that that information is captured. The introduction of the Insight tool with the new qualifications was extremely positive because it enabled us to capture not just all the good results that are achieved by way of SQA attainment, but all the awards that are SCQF levelled. Providers were supported to go through the levelling process and the awards that they

offered became part of the SCQF and were therefore reported using the Insight tool, so—

Tavish Scott: Yes, but the point that headteachers have made to me is that the choice that is available for schools to take up is still quite limited.

Elizabeth Morrison: I will go on.

In December 2017, as part of the year of young people, there was a debate in which young people said that they wanted all their qualifications, achievements and awards to be recognised, so we have been working with the awards network and Skills Development Scotland to ensure that we capture everything. Each young person will have an online learner account, which will capture everything. That work is under way, but it is at an early stage.

Tavish Scott: Will those awards be recognised? The review of youth awards that was carried out in 2015 said that Education Scotland should

“extend the use of youth awards”

and make sure that they are recognised. Will that happen?

Elizabeth Morrison: We have done a lot of work on that; we have worked with the awards network to ensure that as much as possible is recognised. For example, we have done a lot of work to promote the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, which is not SCQF levelled, but which will be recognised under the new online account.

Tavish Scott: As you rightly said, schools are still judged using the Insight system, and I am told that headteachers will not put any PEF or attainment money into anything that does not form part of the Insight system. I can understand their point of view: they will get no benefit from providing something that is not recognised on the Insight system, despite all the good things that it might do for young people. I am not suggesting that it is an easy process, but are you trying to close that gap?

Gayle Gorman: Yes. Through the network of support that Liz Morrison mentioned, we are working with many of the partners that are seeking recognition for their awards so that they can be registered and added to the accreditation portfolio. That will enable such achievement to be celebrated. It should be; it is sad that it is not. The situation is very much as you described it.

We continue to have dialogue with the SQA and other partners. We continue to advocate wider learning and parity of esteem for that wider learning.

Tavish Scott: That was helpful. Thank you.

In your submission to the committee, you give us the measures of the attainment gap. I have counted 11. Is that right? Are there 11 measures to assess progress in closing the attainment gap?

Gayle Gorman: Yes.

Tavish Scott: None of the measures relates to the issue that we are discussing. Is there a good reason why? Should we not also include non-formal educational achievement?

Gayle Gorman: Our criteria include health and wellbeing, and much of the work that you describe would fall under that. One of the issues is to do with how we capture information nationally. The process of looking at the suite of national measures and national outcomes was not designed to undermine the importance of the health and wellbeing of young people, which is central. Wider achievement plays a significant role in that.

Tavish Scott: Practically, how are the 11 measures used? Does this stuff go down to headteachers, or are they just national statistics that people like us obsess about? Really, what I am asking is this: what difference do they make to a school?

Louise Turnbull: There is a basket of measures, because we recognise that we cannot use just one thing in closing the attainment gap. As we have outlined in a lot of the things that we have talked about, including in the conversation that you have just had, we are looking at literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and at learners as they move into formal education and the learning that takes place there. There is a wide range of things that need to be taken into account in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The 11 measures that you refer to are the Scottish Government measures that are outlined in the national improvement framework.

We are working with schools on developing the appropriate measures for them and their learners in order to identify the impact that the work is having. Through school improvement planning and PEF planning, we have been looking at, first, the rationale for particular interventions, as Liz Morrison mentioned, and then at the desired outcome of those interventions. That involves a school identifying what it wants to be different and by how much and how it will record and measure that.

We have been looking at schools' sets of measures. In fact, one of our attainment advisers in Dundee has been working with a group of headteachers to identify a range of school measures. Part of that will involve things such as participation, evaluation, attendance and inclusion and exclusion statistics but, fundamentally, it involves considering what the outcome will be of

an intervention that is put in place, and what the school will do to measure that. We have been doing a lot of work with schools to support that work.

That will feed into the national measures, because it will feed into teachers' judgment of curriculum for excellence levels, which is one of the 11 measures. It will increase the robustness of and confidence in those judgments. We have to look at the issue from both ends of the spectrum; we have to consider what will support learners in the classroom and how to gather the national information.

Tavish Scott: That is fair enough. On attainment moneys, 23 local authorities are not getting any at all, so I guess that you are arguing that all the schools in those areas just have to get on with it. I take the point that you have appointed an attainment adviser in each of those 23 areas, but there is no extra money for them.

Louise Turnbull: The pupil equity funding is in 95 per cent of our schools in Scotland—

Tavish Scott: I am talking about the attainment fund that was announced yesterday.

Louise Turnbull: The pupil equity fund is part of the overall attainment Scotland fund. The Scottish Government is putting £750 million in the attainment Scotland fund over this session of Parliament. Some of that money is distributed through the challenge authorities and schools programme, and some of it is through pupil equity funding—it all comes from one pot. Scottish Government colleagues are probably better placed to discuss the money side. We focus on the education and improvement side of the pupil equity fund and the attainment challenge—

Tavish Scott: But you cannot have one and not the other, can you?

Louise Turnbull: Education Scotland's focus is on how we support schools to make the biggest difference, to make educational improvements and to choose the right interventions that make a difference for them.

Gayle Gorman: The programme has three layers. There are the targeted local authorities that have the Scottish attainment challenge money, there are the 74 schools that are not in those funded authorities, and there is the universal offer, which is—as Tavish Scott said—about the attainment advisers, but is also about training events and access to networking and collaboration. That support work will develop over time. In some areas it is already developing through the regional improvement collaboratives. Tavish Scott is correct that there are schools that are not funded through the universal offer, but there is funding for attainment advisers, for

conferences and events that happen locally, and for the collaboration work that is now being underpinned regionally. The system has three tiers—the two that I mentioned previously and the universal offer.

Louise Turnbull: As I said, Education Scotland has a national role of gathering some of that practice and sharing it widely so that everybody across Scotland has access to examples, materials and support to take forward that work.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I want to return to the point that 95 per cent of schools get pupil equity funding. In my constituency, which is very rural, the figure is not 95 per cent. There are a number of small schools that have very little discretion. Given that rurality and poverty often go hand in hand, that limits pupils' opportunities. How are those schools meant to deliver that best practice?

Gayle Gorman: In a country such as Scotland, rural deprivation is a significant element. A lot of work has been done, nationally and locally, on indicators of rural poverty and the unique factors in that regard, and to consider how the education community can come together to support practitioners in such situations and ensure that they get the same levels of support and the same examples as—

Oliver Mundell: But if they get no PEF funding, headteachers in such schools have far less discretion to deliver the local solutions that you have been talking about.

Gayle Gorman: Work that the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, Education Scotland and others have done has looked at indicators of rural poverty and considered how we can use them to apply PEF funding, so that a greater share goes to rural communities. We are doing that work and the Scottish Government is—

Oliver Mundell: Do you accept that the model is not right at the moment?

Gayle Gorman: Distribution of the money is based on free school meals, which is the only national statistic that is available to be used as an indicator. However, work is on-going and there has been a committee discussion—I am not talking about this committee—about how to reflect the whole of Scotland in the PEF community. Significant work has been done, and this year PEF funding has gone to more schools across Scotland. However, further work could be done to reflect rural poverty and deprivation, because significant parts of Scotland fall into that category.

Oliver Mundell: Overall, do you have enough data on PEF funding and the attainment challenge to enable you to understand what works? We have heard a lot of examples of good practice today. Is

there detailed research and analysis to back up such examples, or do you just use anecdotal evidence to produce case studies? Do you drill into the evidence to see what delivers the most change?

Gayle Gorman: Of course there is an evaluative process; it would not be based on anecdotes. Education Scotland's approach is evidence and research based, to drive improvement. That is the nature of the education improvement cycle.

It is early days for PEF and the interventions that are being put in place; the question is when we will see the impact of such interventions on children and young people. Evidence is emerging and we are gathering it, but it is not consistent at the moment. We are focusing on gathering evidence through our inspections, and we have an evaluation strategy.

Headteachers are reporting that they are confident in their expectations of the impact. We will wait to see what outcomes are delivered. Louise Turnbull might say more about that.

Louise Turnbull: I do not have anything to add.

Oliver Mundell: Gayle Gorman mentioned inspections. Given the scale of reform and the number of things that are going on, are you doing enough inspections to get a clear and accurate picture of what is going on in schools in different parts of the country?

Gayle Gorman: We use sampling methodology, as the committee is aware, and next year we will increase the number of inspections to 250. Inspections are our main activity, but they are part of a range of scrutiny activities. A strength of Scottish education is that scrutiny is sector led. It is about self-evaluation with headteachers, local authorities and others collaborating in the process.

As Liz Morrison said, we are recruiting additional inspectors. That will allow us to do more of our thematic reviews. For example, if we are looking at mathematics across Scotland, we will take a sample across different layers in the system—schools, teachers, headteachers, parents—and look at what is happening, using evaluative methodology. We will reflect back into the system what we have found in order to drive improvement.

We already do a significant number of inspections every year and we are increasing the number.

Elizabeth Morrison: We also have attainment advisers in local authorities, who produce quarterly reports of activities in their authorities. Increasingly, the reports are evaluative and we see signs of impact in them, so we get a comprehensive quarterly view of what is

happening in each local authority through our work with the attainment advisers. They work with practitioners in classrooms, so we get that view from them.

11:00

Oliver Mundell: Throughout our inquiry, we have heard about huge variation and disparity between local authorities and between schools within local authorities. Schools that we would expect, based on their demographics, to perform in the same way are not doing so. What are you doing to pick up on that? How do the evaluations that you talked about identify where things are not working well?

Elizabeth Morrison: It depends on how we identify such things. For example, if we identify them through an inspection activity, we will work to support the school, which might involve brokering support with another school, revisiting the school, putting in some of our staff to provide support or asking attainment advisers to provide support. We can do a range of things. We know that schools differ and that things within a school can differ.

We must also remember that improvement is a statutory responsibility of the local authority, which has to secure improvement in all its schools. We might work with the local authority to enable it to do that.

Oliver Mundell: Do you recognise that there is patchy provision or a postcode lottery, in effect, with regard to how schools are performing?

Gayle Gorman: That is not how we would relate to or characterise the situation. It is about looking at the improvement journey of a school and the community that it works with. Some schools face significant challenges, given their communities and deprivation and poverty issues. Others face challenges around the quality of education that they provide.

It is about the cycle of improvement that schools go through and across, and we want to be there, working in partnership with our colleagues and the people in the institution to make sure that they are supported on whatever the next step of their improvement journey is.

Schools, by their nature, reflect the communities that they serve, and they all aspire to be the very best that they can be. Our job is to support them to ensure that we have the highest possible outcome for excellence and equity for all children.

Oliver Mundell: Thank you.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Education Scotland sets out a number of entitlements for all young people under curriculum for excellence, with good stuff such as personal

support to enable them to gain as much as possible from the opportunities that CFE can provide. Forgive me if I misunderstood your answer to Johann Lamont's question, but if, during an inspection, you are unable to conclude that the entitlement to personal support is being met—as a result of understaffing or underresourcing—how are you effectively inspecting against those entitlements?

Gayle Gorman: That is not what I was representing. I was saying that the focus is on attainment and achievement and the leadership of that on inspection, the quality of teaching and learning, and our quality improvement indicators.

Of course, if we felt that learners' needs were not being met, we would comment on that in our inspections. We have a duty to do that. It is one of our core quality improvement indicators, so we would indicate that very clearly.

Ross Greer: So you are able to clearly indicate that the needs are not being met because of understaffing, if that is the case.

Gayle Gorman: If that were to be the case, it would be about what the school was doing to rectify that, if anything; what mediation was in place; and the impact of that on learners, because that is our focus—the impact on the outcomes for children and young people.

Ross Greer: Just to be completely clear, are there school inspection reports in existence that make reference to understaffing or underresourcing as an issue?

Gayle Gorman: We talk about the impact on learners. That could be due to a number of factors, so—

Ross Greer: But if you cannot identify what the factor is, how can the improvements that are needed be made?

Gayle Gorman: We do that in talking about areas for development and areas for improvement.

Ross Greer: So there are school inspection reports out there that identify understaffing or underresourcing.

Gayle Gorman: I would need to go back and talk to colleagues about that. There will be comments about improvement in terms of the learner journey, consistency in learning and the quality of the curriculum—whatever the particular impact happens to be. Under the core quality indicators—which are very clear in terms of the criteria, because it is a shared, open and transparent framework—we are clear about identifying the issues, the risks and the successes of the work in that area.

Liz Morrison might want to say more about that.

Elizabeth Morrison: As Gayle Gorman said, we would need to go back and talk to colleagues. However, although such a point might not make it to the report, we also have a summary of inspection findings that sits behind the report. That is open as well; we publish it for anyone to look at. It is possible that resourcing is not addressed in a report, but that there is a comment on it in the summary of inspection findings.

Ross Greer: It feels as though you are doing that with one hand tied behind your back. I will move on to a different point.

In a previous inquiry, we took substantial evidence on the link between poverty and additional support needs. The inspection regime has come under criticism in the past for a lack of focus on additional support needs provision in mainstream schools. What work have you done to address that and ensure that inspections take account of that provision and identify whether additional support needs are being met effectively?

Elizabeth Morrison: We have examined that on every inspection. It is a key area. My background is in additional support needs, so I am particularly passionate about that area. One of the quality indicators that we consider on every inspection is about ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion. We give the school an evaluation of how well it is doing on that. That goes right across the system. It picks up additional support needs.

We look at additional support needs in terms of individual children, so we might take an individual child in a secondary school and follow them throughout the school day to see how their needs are met in different curricular areas. We also work with the support staff and guidance staff to see what adjustments are put in place in classrooms to enable that child to access the whole curriculum. We consider what support the school provides. For example, in a secondary school, we examine whether the school makes alternative assessment arrangements for the SQA examinations.

Every inspection considers additional support needs.

Ross Greer: I understand that that should be the case, in theory. However, do you recognise the criticism from organisations such as Kindred Advocacy, which is that inspections do not consistently pick up the quality of additional support needs provision?

Elizabeth Morrison: That is not something that I recognise. When my colleagues are out on inspection, they consider the additional support needs of the children in every school that they inspect.

Johann Lamont: I am interested in what you are able to say on the context for the lack of support for young people. Enable and other organisations have said that some young people are theoretically full time but actually have half a day or a day a week. What happens if you identify that a young person is not being supported adequately and the headteacher says to you that they understand that they should give the child more support but they are unable to do so because they do not have the staffing or resources to do it? I understand that you want to say that the headteacher needs to give that young person support, but does the inspection report reflect the fact that the headteacher has told you that they would love to do that but that they cannot because they do not have the appropriate resources?

Elizabeth Morrison: That is a really interesting observation. You mentioned part-time timetables. If we were to find a school where children were on part-time timetables, we would have a discussion with the school. We might well have a discussion with the local authority that was responsible for those children. We might also be able to point the school to alternative arrangements. For example, we have mentioned work with the third sector. We have seen some very good work throughout Scotland in which young people with additional support needs are being supported to achieve and attain.

Johann Lamont: Do you understand that my question is not about specific individuals but what you do if you see a pattern of additional support needs not being met within a school or schools? Yes, there are individual measures that you might suggest that the school take for those individual young people, but I suspect that the staff will already have thought of them. If there is a pattern of schools indicating to you that they are unable to do what they would like to do to improve the learner journey for the individual child because they do not have the resources, would that be reflected in an inspection report or would you feed it back to the Scottish Government and the cabinet secretary in your private advice?

Gayle Gorman: It would probably be a combination of all those actions. As Liz Morrison indicated, that would be reported and discussed with the quality improvement officer who attends the feedback meetings at the end of the inspection process; the local authority usually attends those meetings. We have an area lead officer for local authorities. If, as you said, a pattern was beginning to emerge through inspections, that would immediately be highlighted to the area lead officer so that they could bring it to the attention of, and discuss it further with, the local authority.

There would be a range of layers of reporting, including the school inspection report—

Johann Lamont: If the local authority says that the issue has arisen because it does not have enough money, what happens?

Gayle Gorman: We would gather evidence and feedback on any emerging trends in the chief inspector's annual inspection report and feed back to Scottish Government colleagues on policy matters and our discussions about improving the system.

The Convener: Gail Copland talked about best practice in West Dunbartonshire. What would the attainment adviser's role be if the schools were not using PEF in the way that you described to Gillian Martin? Would you feed back that information? Where is your role in that process?

Gail Copland: West Dunbartonshire has a clear focus on improving—

The Convener: I accept that, but what would happen if a local authority attainment adviser saw practice that was not best practice? It does not necessarily have to be Gail Copland who answers.

Louise Turnbull: As we have outlined, that is a matter for local decision making. The attainment officer's role, first and foremost, is to understand the school's self-evaluation and its rationale for interventions, to look at the outcomes and measures that are in place and to provide that support and challenge to prompt headteachers and teachers to think critically about the difference that an intervention is making.

If there is evidence that an intervention is not making a difference or, indeed, is having a negative impact, the attainment adviser's role is to support the school through challenging conversations. In addition, our guidance says clearly that, if a school has started a programme and its monitoring of its progress clearly shows that that action or set of actions is not making a difference, it should stop that action and refocus. We provide support for the school to do that.

As Liz Morrison mentioned, we pull together information on what is happening across all the local authorities in our quarterly updates and we can pick up any issues through that process. We also have regular discussions with attainment advisers, so if a pattern emerges, as we have mentioned, we are alerted to that and use our area lead officer and other networks to provide support.

The Convener: My last point is on the underfunding of or lack of staffing for inspections. I presume that your first port of call would be to local authorities, which are responsible for staffing in schools.

Gayle Gorman: Indeed.

George Adam: We have heard that parental involvement is one of the most important elements

in helping to raise attainment. Our challenge is that a lot of parents have had a negative experience with schools. I am looking at some of the support that Education Scotland provides and I can see that you provide a parental engagement toolkit; you also have a parent zone. My kids are now adults, but if my kids were of school age, I might not go anywhere near that zone. How do you engage parents? How can you make what you provide relevant to parents and ensure that they are involved?

Gayle Gorman: I recognise your point. Local activity is central. The best parental engagement happens between the teacher, or the headteacher, and their local community and the parents whom they work with, because they have formed a relationship. The educators and parents also have a relationship with the same child, so they are able to have those local-level discussions.

A lot of our materials are designed to provide guidance and support, which draw on best practice, for local headteachers, teachers and others to work with locally. That includes opening up a school to various events and schools going out to community events. Lots of initiatives have been taking place, including maths and munch and pizza and literacy, which are about engaging different parents in different ways—that might include those parents who do not come to the front door of the school for the very reasons that you stated.

There is guidance available and creativity is happening locally at school level. Our remit is to provide the guidance to celebrate the best practice and to make those connections, but local delivery is very much an interaction between the school and the parents whom it serves. That relationship is central in supporting family engagement, and some of the family learning work and the guidance that we have provided facilitate and support that.

11:15

George Adam: Do the attainment officers provide support to headteachers?

Gayle Gorman: They do in some cases.

Elizabeth Morrison: One of the big successes of recent years has been the focus on family learning. With the fourth edition of "How Good is Our School?", we introduced a new quality indicator on family learning. That has focused schools' attention towards that area.

One of the drivers in the national improvement framework is parental engagement, which you have been talking about. One of the key levers in the Scottish attainment challenge is about families and communities. We have a drive from different

perspectives, or lenses, towards focusing on how parents can support their children more effectively.

Family learning also includes intergenerational learning and looking at how people learn together. We know from our reports that that area is developing well. Gayle Gorman has given a couple of examples of that, and Gail Copland has another example to share.

Gail Copland: We have noticed that the interest in developing family learning alongside school improvement is prevalent in headteachers' discussions. A successful intervention in West Dunbartonshire has been a step-up four-year project, in which the team worked hard to overcome the barriers for parents and ensured that transport to the venues, food and crèche facilities were available. That was an effective partnership between primary school teachers who are highly trained in the best methodology for mathematics and, working alongside them, a dance specialist, so it took a creative approach to the teaching of mathematics. The aim of that family learning was to give parents confidence in supporting their children in numeracy. As a result—the data has shown us this—within a year, confidence increased from 10 to 87 per cent.

Across West Dunbartonshire, we are seeing headteachers sharing the same terminology. The first was called a beyond-the-bell activity. We are now hearing that phrase across schools—they are asking what they will do beyond the bell and how they will involve families and the community.

The Convener: That brings us to the end of our session with our first panel of witnesses. I thank you all for attending today.

11:18

Meeting suspended.

11:21

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome John Swinney, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, and Scottish Government officials Fiona Robertson, who is director of learning, and Graeme Logan, who is deputy director of strategy and performance. Thank you for coming along. Cabinet secretary, I understand that you want to make brief opening remarks.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Thank you, convener. I welcome this opportunity to contribute to the committee's inquiry into the attainment and achievement of school-age children who are experiencing poverty.

Let me start by reaffirming the Scottish Government's commitment to improving Scottish education and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Our work in that regard is part of the wider getting it right for every child agenda. We want every child or young person and their family to be offered the right help at the right time, from the right people.

The Government is taking a broad-based approach that draws together the contributions of various policy areas, including health, justice and housing. The focused approach of the Scottish attainment challenge represents the education aspect of the agenda, which is set in our national improvement framework vision of "excellence through raising attainment" and "Achieving equity" for all in Scottish education.

We have committed to putting £750 million into the attainment Scotland fund over this parliamentary session and to supporting schools and local authorities to tackle the attainment gap. We are providing £120 million of pupil equity funding on an annual basis. That money goes straight to schools, for headteachers to spend on supporting children and young people who are affected by poverty to achieve their full potential.

The approach that we are taking with the funding is designed to empower schools with the means whereby we can address the challenges of the poverty-related attainment gap. Naturally, the approaches that are taken will vary according to the individual circumstances of schools around the country; it is for schools to judge what is appropriate for the needs of their pupils.

Over recent weeks, a range of approaches to utilising pupil equity funding has been shared widely across social media channels, as we have encouraged consideration of the most effective interventions for improvement in performance.

We are already seeing the impact of the Scottish attainment challenge and the pupil equity fund. The policy is making a real difference in classrooms across the country and it is impacting on the lives of children and young people. The recent attainment Scotland fund evaluation showed the positive impact on schools in Scotland's most deprived communities.

The national improvement framework is giving us more data than ever before, which is enabling us to gain a deeper understanding of strengths and weaknesses at all levels of the education system. Our consultation on a framework for assessing our progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap established that there is a broad consensus that a single measure cannot properly describe the attainment gap. It also confirmed that there is general support for a package of indicators and improvement goals,

building on the range of measures that are already in place.

There is great strength in Scottish education, but we must do more for children who are affected by poverty. That is why we are investing in the attainment Scotland fund. I look forward to considering the committee's conclusions on the subject, which will have value in informing forthcoming Government policy.

The Convener: I remind everyone that we have a lot to get through today, so questions and answers should be as succinct as possible.

Richard Lochhead: One of the committee's motivations for holding the inquiry was the recognition that what happens outside the classroom as well as what happens in it has an impact on closing the attainment gap. How has the Scottish Government increased its understanding of the causes of the increase in poverty in Scotland and the impact that that is having on its policy intention of closing the attainment gap?

John Swinney: The poverty-related attainment gap has been a persistent feature of Scottish education for many years. The Scottish Government has decided to make doing as much as it can to close the poverty-related attainment gap a principal focus of its policy programme in the current parliamentary session, but we recognise that it will be a longer-term journey that might take in the order of 10 years.

That level of priority is significant in policy terms because it signals to a group of ministers whose responsibilities go wider than the field of education and skills how important it is for other areas of Government to be actively involved in supporting the work that we are engaged in. The measures in the delivery plan under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 are extremely important in identifying what wider interventions we might make.

There is also the work that we are doing on adverse childhood events. For example, a few weeks ago at Bellahouston academy, along with several other ministers, I hosted a discussion with a range of stakeholders who are involved in addressing adverse childhood events, because we recognise that, if we do not tackle that issue, we will not address the obstacles to learning that affect young people who have gone through such experiences. The same rationale extends to young people who experience poverty. Within Government, there is a broad understanding of the significance of policy concerns that relate to poverty, adverse childhood events and other significant impediments to the ability of young people to learn as part of their education.

Mr Lochhead asked about the pattern of poverty. There are wider factors over which the

Scottish Government has no control. For example, the policy framework of the United Kingdom Government and its emphasis on welfare reform and reductions in benefit entitlement in some circumstances will undeniably contribute to making our challenge ever greater. However, we have in place a policy framework that is clearly focused on addressing the substantial issue that he raised.

Richard Lochhead: Much of the evidence that we have received has shown that, if anything, the trend in poverty in Scotland is going in the wrong direction. Many of the witnesses from whom the committee has heard have pinpointed the UK Government's welfare reforms as the key reason behind that unfortunate trend.

As the education secretary, what are you able to do to explain to the UK Government that its policies are impacting on the attainment gap in Scotland's schools? At the moment, the argument seems to be that education is devolved and welfare reform is reserved—albeit that we are now getting more welfare powers in Scotland—which means that people are not identifying the link between those responses to closing the attainment gap.

John Swinney: I have two points to make. First, the Scottish Government makes active representations, publicly and privately, to the UK Government on welfare reform. We consistently set out our concerns about the welfare reform agenda and its implications for children and families in Scotland. We do that in a range of ways. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution will undoubtedly communicate that message to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in relation to the forthcoming spending decisions. That will be a constant feature of our discussions and dialogue with the UK Government. The Scottish Government makes every endeavour to encourage the UK Government to take a different course of action. That has been demonstrated by the contributions that we have made to the debate over time.

11:30

My second point is that the Scottish Government has opportunities to use our policy instruments to address that trend. That is not cost free; before the acquisition of our new social security powers, we are having to spend about £130 million to ameliorate some of the effect—and I stress that it is some of the effect—of the UK Government's welfare reforms. Through the work that we are undertaking on the implementation of the social security legislation, we have the opportunity to put in place measures that will more adequately reflect the policy approach in Scotland and complement our devolved responsibilities,

where we can do so under our social security powers.

That combination of trying to encourage the UK Government to take a different course and using the responsibilities that we have to affect the situation is the approach that the Scottish Government is taking.

Richard Lochhead: You clearly have a great deal of sympathy for my position: you will have a lot more calls on your budget to deal with the fallout of the poverty that will be caused by UK Government welfare reform policies, and the Scottish budget and the education budget can go only so far. However, we have heard many good ideas from witnesses about the influence that the Scottish Government's policies can have over tackling poverty and closing the attainment gap.

I want to raise the issues of the provision of quality food and breakfast clubs in schools. There are many fantastic initiatives across the country that help make our children fit for learning as a result of having a decent meal, not only during the term, but particularly during holidays. I do not know whether you have had the chance to see the evidence from our witnesses, but would you be willing to explore further how that best practice could be spread across Scotland?

John Swinney: I am pleased to encourage consideration of those options. I visited St Francis primary school in Dundee some weeks ago, where I saw an example of how pupil equity funding was being used at that primary school. The school has put in place holiday provision for a combination of play, food and learning for young people during the summer break. Because the school collected data on young people's performance, it could show me their attainment in the August to December period before it introduced the summer holiday play, food and learning proposition, and their attainment in the August to December period after it had done so. The impact on the learning of young people was remarkable, and the school attributed that to constancy of nutrition, the development of young people that comes out of play, and the opportunity to enhance learning and teaching. That is just one example of an individual primary school that has undertaken such a scheme.

We have just completed a series of pupil equity fund events in all parts of Scotland, and we have used those occasions to highlight examples of best practice, of which St Francis in Dundee is a very good one.

An interesting proposal has come into the Scottish attainment challenge for the 2018-19 challenge authority programme from North Lanarkshire Council, which we have supported and jointly agreed. It will mean young people

having access to nutrition during the school holiday to support their wider learning. It is a good initiative from North Lanarkshire Council, and we are pleased that the Scottish attainment challenge is being used in an imaginative way to extend the impact and capacity of education to transform the lives of young people who are in poverty.

Oliver Mundell: I understand that the cabinet secretary watched some of the Education Scotland evidence on pupil equity funding. My point concerns whether the current model serves rural communities well. In my constituency, there is a large number of primary schools, particularly small primary schools, that do not get any pupil equity funding and, therefore, the headteachers lack the flexibility and discretion to introduce measures that they know would work in their schools.

John Swinney: I think that I have rehearsed some of these arguments with the committee previously. The key point relates to the decisions that we have taken on the allocation mechanism for pupil equity funding. In essence the choice available to us was whether to use the Scottish index of multiple deprivation or eligibility for free school meals. I opted not to use the Scottish index of multiple deprivation because although it is a good measure for identifying substantive groupings and areas of poverty, it is not good at identifying individual instances of poverty. The free school meals eligibility criteria give us a more comprehensive presentation of the prevalence of poverty, which results in about 95 or 96 per cent of schools receiving some pupil equity funding.

As I have said to the committee before, eligibility for free school meals is the most comprehensive mechanism that is available to me. I am happy to engage in dialogue about how we could find a more comprehensive mechanism because I fundamentally accept the point that Mr Mundell makes about the prevalence of poverty possibly being more difficult to identify in rural communities. In smaller schools, families might be reluctant to come forward and say that their children are eligible for free school meals because such eligibility is slightly more obvious in a school of 20 pupils than it is in a school of 200 or 300 pupils. I have openly said that I am happy to engage in that discussion but, so far, I have not seen mechanisms that would provide us with a more comprehensive approach than the one that we are taking. However, I remain open to considering the point if such evidence emerges.

Oliver Mundell: To me, an obvious solution would be to have a mechanism that allowed headteachers in those schools to bid for funding, or to identify where, within their pupil base, they believed there to be underlying poverty. Such expertise already exists in some of those schools.

The broader problem for me is that some schools find that other schools a matter of miles down the road get large amounts of pupil equity funding, and some parents are now deciding which school to send their children to based on the opportunities that are available because of pupil equity funding. Because those opportunities are not available to all pupils, does it not create a different type of inequality in those rural communities?

John Swinney: I am not familiar with data of that type. However, the fact that pupil equity funding is reaching 95 per cent of schools in Scotland indicates substantial coverage of the country.

Oliver Mundell: It is not 95 per cent in rural communities. There is a big difference in the percentages in such communities.

John Swinney: The mechanism covers the extent of poverty in a wide number of locations in the country. As I said, I am happy to consider ways in which we can demonstrate that we have the broadest coverage possible, but the suggestion that Mr Mundell makes would involve having a range of eligibility criteria to determine which schools could apply for certain amounts of funding. One of the policy points that we have accepted in principle is that, if we want to close the poverty-related attainment gap, we have to target increased resources to make a difference where that poverty presents itself. If we accept that policy point in principle, we have to have a policy rationale for some other mechanism to determine eligibility.

One of the lessons that I take from pupil equity funding is that it has been very beneficial in empowering schools to take decisions that make a difference to the experience of individual young people. Therefore, we will certainly consider what degree of flexibility over wider budgetary arrangements might be suitable for headteachers to be able to exercise some of the flexibility that Mr Mundell talks about.

Oliver Mundell: Throughout the inquiry, we have heard mixed messages from different organisations—third sector organisations and some education professionals—about how much flexibility exists. In some local authorities, a lot of direction is given to headteachers and there is a lot of scrutiny of the individual decisions that they make. We heard from Education Scotland that it provides guidance but does not really have a role in the matter and that the approach is meant to be localised. However, it does not always seem as if the decision-making powers lie solely with the headteacher.

John Swinney: That is a significant issue. The guidance that has been issued on it has been

agreed between the Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and Education Scotland. There is one central piece of guidance that should provide the necessary framework for decision making by individual headteachers. That is pretty clear.

Local flexibility is a condition of grant for pupil equity funding so, if I see practice that does not work within the spirit that I am about to talk about, the money can be held back. On one occasion, I have held money back from a local authority because I was not satisfied on exactly the issues that Mr Mundell raises. The spirit of PEF is that headteachers must decide, in consultation with their staff, parents and pupils, what will make the biggest impact in their schools. As I go around the country, I see very good examples of that happening.

If there are examples in which that is not happening and headteachers feel that they do not have flexibility, I would be happy to hear about them because that is not in the spirit of the pupil equity fund and it is definitely not in line with the grant conditions. Those conditions matter and are to be applied in how the funding is deployed. When we distribute the money to a local authority, the condition of grant is that the money will go off to the school and that the headteacher and school community have to decide how it will be used. If that is not people's experience, that is a breach of the condition of grant and I would want to know about it.

Liz Smith: Mr Swinney, you have been clear that the pupil equity funding goes direct to schools and that the responsibility for making the decision rests with them. The committee has also been clear that there are good examples of how that funding is improving the situation that we are all trying to address.

I want to be clear about the lines of accountability for how that money is spent and how you measure its effectiveness. With the earlier panel, we had a little bit of doubt as to whether the responsibility lies with the headteacher to be accountable to parents, young people and the communities or whether it lies with the regional collaborative or local authority. In an answer to a question from Gillian Martin, there was a bit of doubt as to exactly who is responsible if there is any problem. You just said that you would want to know if there was a situation in which the money was not being used appropriately. It seems to me that we must be careful to allow headteachers to have far more control but, at the same time, there is an implication that the central Government or local authorities might be prepared to step in and say

that they should not spend the money a certain way.

11:45

John Swinney: I say to Liz Smith, with the greatest respect, that she misinterprets my answer to Oliver Mundell, in which I made the point that spending decisions on PEF are intended to be made by headteachers following engagement with teachers, pupils and parents in their school community. The decision-making power on how to spend the money rests with the headteacher.

The hard public finance accountability for the spending of the money rests with the local authority, because it is the recipient of the grant. Why is that the case? I judged that it was more efficient from an administrative point of view for the money to be sent to the local authority, with the amounts for each school stipulated, and for the local authority to have the public finance accountability instead of creating 2,500 administrative systems in 2,500 schools for the handling of what can, in certain circumstances, be quite substantial sums of public money. When it comes to public finance accountability, the local authority will be held accountable by Audit Scotland. We have had discussions with Audit Scotland and local authorities about those arrangements, and they are satisfactory.

The lines of accountability are very clear. The decision-making power rests with the headteacher in the school community. They might choose to collaborate with other schools, with the local authority or with the regional collaborative on certain things—it is entirely within their discretion to do so—but responsibility for meeting the public finance accountability requirements rests with the local authority.

Liz Smith: I want to pursue the logic of that, given what you said in your answer to Gillian Martin. Are you saying that the local authority has the overall say on how well the money is spent?

John Swinney: No.

Liz Smith: Who do you believe has that final responsibility? Where does the line of accountability for the spend lie?

John Swinney: That is why I answered the question in the way that I did. The decision-making power on how the money is spent rests with headteachers, as does the responsibility for how effectively it is spent. That is the shift in thinking that has taken place with PEF. We are saying to headteachers, "Here's some money to use in a focused way to close the poverty-related attainment gap. Make the best professional judgment you can about how those resources should be spent."

The public finance accountability—the judgment about whether the money has been spent on the purpose for which it was intended; that might be the best way to express it—rests with the local authority.

The Convener: We have a number of questions on PEF, so I ask members to make them as concise as possible.

George Adam: Good morning. Much of the debate during our inquiry has been about how PEF is spent. That is probably summed up in what Martin Canavan from the Aberlour Child Care Trust told the committee. He said:

"there is real inconsistency in the understanding of PEF—in how it is being interpreted and applied in different schools. It works well where teachers are engaged and supported to use the money in the best way that they can."—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 9 May 2018; c 12.*]

How do the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and local authorities work together to ensure that that support is there for everyone?

John Swinney: We do that through the Scottish education council that I established, which brings together all the players that I need to have around the table to create a consistent direction in Scottish education. It includes our local authority partners, the leads of our regional improvement collaboratives, the local authority chief executives, the directors of education, the schools of education and—crucially—parents, pupils and the professional associations. I use that body to create a consistent direction. A real strength that we have at the moment is that we have a clear and consistent policy direction on how to proceed with the aspects of education that relate to closing the attainment gaps.

All that dialogue is designed to inform the support that is put in place at local level for individual schools. That will be undertaken through the collaboration that is supported by the regional improvement collaboratives and the work that local authorities undertake with the active participation of Education Scotland, whose role is to improve the performance of Scottish education.

The support package for schools exists and I want to ensure that it is visible, because the enhancement of learning and teaching, the enhancement of leadership in schools and the enhancement of family and community involvement will have the biggest effect on closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

George Adam: Cabinet secretary, we are all different. Nancy Clunie from Dalmarnock primary school came along to give evidence; she is a total dynamo and we all loved her. However, not everybody is Nancy Clunie. She took a community by the scruff of the neck and said that she was

going to create a community with her school at the centre of it. That is fantastic and it works in Dalmarnock. How can we take that best practice and share it throughout the country? PEF was one of the things that she mentioned. She said, "I want some of that, and this is what I am going to do with it." Not everybody will have that dynamic personality, but how do we get that kind of approach throughout the country?

John Swinney: First, we need to ensure that we celebrate and promote evidenced best practice. If we have examples that are clearly having an effect on closing the attainment gap, I want to ensure that they are widely understood in Scottish education. The regional collaboratives exist to help us to do that and to ensure that there is much wider sharing of achievement and best practice throughout the system. I am pleased with the way in which local authorities have embraced the concept of regional collaboration and are now working to ensure that it makes a greater impact on individual classrooms.

The second point relates to your question about Nancy Clunie and concerns the enhancement of leadership in education. There are a number of ways in which we support that investment in leadership. The Scottish College of Educational Leadership now has a much stronger presence in our system as part of Education Scotland so that the real strengths of educational leadership can be supported and enhanced throughout the country.

Another aspect is the work that we are undertaking through Columba 1400, which is a third sector venture. The Government and the Hunter Foundation fund a leadership development programme in which cohorts of about 20 to 30 headteachers or aspiring headteachers work with Columba 1400 to develop stronger leadership skills. I spent some time on one of those programmes last year, which I found to be a richly rewarding experience. The headteachers and aspiring headteachers to whom I spoke fed that back to me and the evaluation supports that as well.

The investment in leadership is important. We need dynamic people such as Nancy Clunie. I reassure Mr Adam that there are other people like her in other parts of the country who are demonstrating that vibrant leadership. Pupil equity funding has given a means and flexibility to enable that to reach a new level and Scottish education is benefiting as a result.

Johann Lamont: I will raise an issue about pupil equity funding. My sense is that there has always been innovation in Scottish education and some people are now getting the opportunity to fund those innovative ideas, some of which might be things that fell by the wayside in the past for the want of funding. However, I am sure that you

would be concerned if pupil equity funding was being used to substitute funding for something that was resourced through the main stream in the past but has been cut.

I will give you a particular example. Dundee City Council has ended its in-school swimming lessons. We can have a separate argument about whether that was a wise move and it is not my place to decide that. A Dundee City Council spokesperson said:

"Head teachers have been given the opportunity to explore how swimming lessons can be delivered through the Pupil Equity Fund and Leisure and Culture Dundee's Family Swimming Initiative."

Is that an acceptable use of pupil equity funding?

John Swinney: No.

Johann Lamont: Does that mean that, if that were done, it would be your responsibility to say that it breached the conditions of grant and remove the grant? I am interested in the process.

John Swinney: That is exactly correct. I will give some background. My officials have spoken to Dundee City Council—I suspected that the matter would emerge in our conversations.

In dialogue with headteachers, the council has examined the provision of swimming lessons. Swimming is an important life skill, but it is not prescribed in the curriculum. We prescribe two hours of substantive physical education per week for every pupil. In Dundee, to obtain a 20-minute swimming lesson, young people were missing out on learning and teaching for two hours, and the local judgment was that, at a time when we were pressing to enhance learning and teaching, that was not the best way to use two hours. That is a judgment to be made.

We have made it clear to Dundee City Council, and the point was accepted this morning, that it is not acceptable to issue guidance such as the example that Johann Lamont read to me saying that it is acceptable for a school to use pupil equity funding to provide swimming lessons. I hope that that helps to put into context where the issue has come from and what the judgment would be about the use of pupil equity funding to, in essence, replace a service that was provided before.

Johann Lamont: I wonder, then, whether you regret the ending of the Scottish Government's swimming lesson fund, which was directed towards deprived communities, and regret the cuts to local government that, perhaps, led the local authority to do that. I do not know whether you think that that is an issue.

Will you talk me through what you would do if there were another example in which it looked as if somebody was using pupil equity funding in a way that you did not think was in the spirit of the fund

or in accordance with the conditions of grant? You said that it is about the school, headteacher and community making the decision and the local authority managing the money—I presume that you just mean in accounting terms. Where is the judgment made? You are now saying that you made a judgment on Dundee City Council's decision so, even if a headteacher wanted to do it, it would be unacceptable. What is the mechanism for that judgment to be made and relayed to the local authority and the school?

John Swinney: That is all set out in the guidance, which makes it clear that pupil equity funding must be used for additional purposes, not as a replacement. It comes back to the point that anybody who considers how to use the pupil equity funding must be mindful of the condition of grant and the guidance that goes with it.

Johann Lamont: How does that work?

John Swinney: Ultimately, we are relying on the professional judgment of headteachers. That is the shift that I want to take place in Scottish education. We have leading professionals to whom we entrust the responsibility to lead the education of our children and young people throughout the country. If we are trusting those individuals to lead the education of our children, we should trust them with a degree of budgetary flexibility over their schools. We provide guidance for that and we provide the assistance to enable headteachers to make wise and considered decisions about that.

Some things that are done under pupil equity funding will not work. I accept that. We have to learn from that and move on to better use of the funding. I distinguish between something that breaches the condition of grant—which a replacement swimming lesson would—and a judgment that I might think is not the best way to approach a matter. If the headteacher thinks that that really is what their children need, who am I to say that I know better than they do?

12:00

Johann Lamont: This will be my final question, as I appreciate that you want to move on. You say that we are trusting professional judgment. A headteacher might say that they need support staff, a home links teacher and someone who can work with young people. They might say that they used to have X number of learning support staff, but that they no longer have them because of cuts. The use of pupil equity funding for that purpose would be substitution.

In such circumstances, would you reflect on what was being said and consider how to mainstream resources to schools through local authorities with a view to enabling them to do the

things that they want to do and that they believe are their core business but which they are no longer able to do, with the result that they are tempted to use pupil equity funding to support them?

John Swinney: There are a number of points to make in response to that, some of which relate to points that Johann Lamont made earlier.

I accept that there has been a period of financial constraint in the public sector. I was the Government's finance minister for many years, so I know the budget inside out and I know what financial pressures we faced. We were simply addressing the challenges that were presented to us by the UK Government's austerity programme. It is clear that we have taken other decisions—on, for example, pupil equity funding and the Scottish attainment challenge—which, in addition to the welcome steps that local authorities have taken, have resulted in significant increases in expenditure on education. All those factors will play into the decisions that headteachers will make about pupil equity funding.

What is really refreshing about the period that we are in at the moment is that headteachers have responded with enormous enthusiasm to the opportunities of the Scottish attainment challenge and pupil equity funding and are giving very thoughtful consideration to how that could be best used to meet the needs of young people.

Johann Lamont: Of course they are—it is the only game in town. It is the only funding that they can access, and they can see the gaps in their provision. As a committee, that is what we have been told. People know what the challenges are and they are aware of the constraints that they are working under. I accept that innovation and the opportunity to try something new works, but I urge you to consider what I think is a more significant question, which relates to the inhibitions on teachers and support staff when it comes to carrying out their core business. We are talking about more than financial constraint; it is a significant lack of resource.

John Swinney: Over the past year—in fact, I think that this has probably been the case over the past two years—there have been real-terms increases in the funding that local authorities have allocated to education. That is very welcome. We are now in year 2 of pupil equity funding and we are going into year 4 of Scottish attainment challenge funding. There has been a general increase in resources.

I appreciate Johann Lamont's point that there has always been innovation in Scottish education. I accept that, but what is different in character about the impact of PEF is that we have given a signal to headteachers around the country that we

want them to think creatively, with their school communities, about what will have the most profound impact on young people. From what I see around the country, I know that schools and headteachers are responding to that challenge, and Scottish education has been strengthened as a consequence.

Tavish Scott: I would like to pursue the revenue issue a little further. I presume that you have read the briefing that the Scottish Parliament information centre has helpfully published in the past few days on the reductions in the money that is available to local government.

John Swinney: I have.

Tavish Scott: So when you said that there has been

“a general increase in resources”,

were you referring to the £750 million that you mentioned in your introduction, or were you taking account of the SPICe briefing, which gives a factual explanation of the position?

John Swinney: I was referring to the combination of funding such as pupil equity funding and the general allocations that are made through the budget process, which are resulting in a real-terms increase in the resources that are available to local government. That is certainly a feature of the Scottish Government’s budget for 2018-19.

Tavish Scott: You said that £750 million is available for the whole parliamentary session. Is it possible to allocate the fund now for the whole session, rather than have year-by-year allocations?

John Swinney: If we allocated the pupil equity funding for the whole of the session, we would create a situation in which we locked in there being no change to eligibility for free school meals, school by school. If we take, for example, the allocation for this year and say “That is what you are getting for 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21”, that would give me no flexibility to take into account the fact that there may be movement in eligibility for free school meals around the country.

Tavish Scott: However, allocating for the whole session would allow teachers to be recruited on long-term contracts.

John Swinney: The Government’s commitment to the availability of pupil equity funding, as part of the Scottish attainment challenge, over the duration of this parliamentary session should enable individuals to be recruited for that length of time.

Tavish Scott: Why then did the Educational Institute of Scotland tell the committee in an earlier evidence session that 500 teachers who are

employed directly through PEF are all on either one or two-year contracts?

John Swinney: In my judgment, it would be fair for anyone to conclude that, as the Government has given a commitment to £120 million of pupil equity funding for this year, the next and the year after that, it would be a reasonable and considered public policy decision to recruit those teachers on a longer-term contract.

Tavish Scott: Are you saying that headteachers are getting it wrong? They are not putting those teachers on three-year contracts, which you have suggested they could do.

John Swinney: It would be reasonable to come to the conclusion that, with the constancy of that funding, those individuals could be recruited and given contracts for that period.

Tavish Scott: That is fair enough. Therefore, is your guidance to every headteacher who you meet when you go around Scotland, “Please recruit PEF teachers on three-year contracts?”

John Swinney: I certainly think that that would be a reasonable conclusion.

Tavish Scott: Why do you think that headteachers are not doing that?

John Swinney: Individual judgment will be applied—I am certainly not going to criticise people for that. I am saying that people can rely on continuity of funding for the duration of this parliamentary session.

Tavish Scott: That is fair enough. However, if there is continuity of funding, that presumes by definition that there would not be much change in an individual school’s allocation over those three years.

John Swinney: In the light of that information, it would be reasonable to recruit teachers for that length of time.

Tavish Scott: Therefore, not much will change to an individual school’s allocation.

John Swinney: Mr Scott is asking me two different things. I have given the technical argument why I cannot lock down the precise sums of money, which is that schools could lose out because of movements of population, and I am sure that, if that happened, I would hear all about it from this committee. I am trying to respond to the actual circumstances that schools experience. However, the Government is committed to constancy of funding over that period. A reasonable conclusion to draw from that would be to appoint teachers for that length of time.

Tavish Scott: I do not necessarily disagree. I am just puzzled about why the EIS has told us—

John Swinney: As we often find, Mr Scott and I are in violent agreement with each other, although it may not quite sound like it.

Tavish Scott: Okay. I will have one final attempt—as usual this morning. The committee is assessing how your policy prescriptions might affect child poverty, and we have been told that child poverty is rising, which is greatly worrying. Primary teachers are asking me if it is right to test the number and reading skills of five-year-old kids who come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and who are living in poverty. They ask if they could have more flexibility to get out of the testing regime when there are much better things that they could do with their group of five-year-olds. Is that a reasonable argument?

John Swinney: I am very sensitive to the argument about key 1 assessment. I acknowledge the debate about that point, in which I am taking a very careful and close interest. I am listening to what people are saying to me about it.

More than 400,000 Scottish national standardised assessments have been undertaken so far. I am hearing some feedback about the P1 assessments, but I am not being inundated with it. However, I am open to the question. We have got to get it into its proper context. The P1 assessment, if properly handled, will be a pretty straightforward experience for a child, because it is not presented in the exam circumstances that the Scottish Qualifications Authority specialises in. It should be done in a relaxed environment within the classroom, it should not take any longer than 40 minutes, and it happens once a year.

I do not say that to trivialise the issues in any way, because I am alert to the concerns, but one of the reasons why we want to do this is to help to inform teacher judgment about where young people's educational development needs the greatest amount of support. It is to inform the professional judgment of teachers about how they can then deploy their professional skills. It will help us to assess how much progress we are making year by year in closing the poverty-related attainment gap, because we all accept that the earlier that we can make an impact on the poverty-related attainment gap, the better. While we are expanding early learning and childcare, one of the key aspects of the measurement framework for the closure of the attainment gap is the evidence that emerges from the 27-month vocabulary check that is undertaken by health visitors. It is an indication that we want to identify and address children's needs as early as possible, so that, by the time the children do the primary 4 assessment, we do not find that we have a bigger gap to close than if we had been able to identify those needs and inform the judgment of teachers about what would be effective at that early stage.

When I viewed the roll-out of the standardised assessment, I did so with a group of teachers and we worked our way through the P4 assessment. Then we were shown the information that gets portrayed about each individual child coming out of the assessment. The teachers in the room with me were amazed by the fine quality of information that it highlighted about the strengths and weaknesses of young people as they navigated their way through the assessment. They viewed that as high-quality information that would inform what they would do in their teaching practice to make a difference to those young people.

That is why we are doing this—to give teachers the information to better inform their steps, so we can close the poverty-related attainment gap. However, I am happy to acknowledge that I am sensitive to the issues that have been raised about the P1 assessments, and I will listen carefully to the feedback that we get after this experience.

Tavish Scott: I am told that teachers in busy, growing classes of five-year-olds, often with as many as 30, have to take an hour—not 40 minutes—to deal with particular children who are disadvantaged, because by definition they may need more help. That is the point that I want to make. I can take all the rest of the arguments, and there is a different debate about national testing per se. However I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary could reflect on the situation for teachers dealing with young children whose presence in the class is a challenge, never mind having to deal with a test, because there are some real issues there for teachers, and therefore also for parents and for the pupils themselves.

John Swinney: I am happy to take those points on board. The specific point that Mr Scott raised latterly, about the impact on disadvantaged children, is something that educational professionals should take into account in the judgments that they make about how to proceed with the assessments.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): A lot of what I wanted to ask has been covered, but I have a couple of brief questions. Tavish Scott asked about the recruitment of teachers using the additional funding that schools get. I want to be really clear about this. Is the guidance that headteachers get on how they can use the funding the same guidance as is given to local authorities? I have evidence of a headteacher wanting to recruit a teacher and being told by the local authority that they are not allowed to do that.

12:15

John Swinney: The guidance that is available for the implementation of pupil equity funding is jointly agreed between the Scottish Government,

COSLA, ADES and Education Scotland. I think that those are all the players that are involved.

If there are particular local dimensions that a local authority feels need to be highlighted to schools in its area, it can do that in a fashion that is complementary, not contradictory, to that guidance.

Mary Fee: So if a headteacher wants to take on a teacher, the local authority should not say to them that they are not allowed to do that.

John Swinney: That is correct, yes.

Mary Fee: That is correct?

John Swinney: Yes. There should be no impediment to a headteacher making that decision. If a headteacher wants to employ a teacher—

Mary Fee: Using the funding?

John Swinney: That is perfectly all right.

Mary Fee: That is helpful.

The other concern that has been raised in relation to PEF is the lack of knowledge about or support through the procurement process that is available for headteachers. The concern was raised in evidence by North Ayrshire Council and by Aberlour Child Care Trust that headteachers, when they are given this funding, are almost automatically expected to be able to navigate their way through the procurement process.

Would you say that that is a fair reflection of the situation? How will you make sure that headteachers are properly supported when they go through the procurement process to make sure that they get the best value and the best use out of the funding that they are given?

John Swinney: This is new territory so, inevitably, there is new ground to be covered by individual headteachers in acquiring the skills that they need to have to take these decisions.

We have held a series of events with headteachers. We held events in spring 2017 and we have held them again in spring 2018 to discuss all the issues arising out of pupil equity funding. The events have been really well attended and have involved discussions with headteachers around the country.

I did not want to send out 2,500 bank transfers to individual schools because that would have involved those schools having to establish financial systems and I suspect that the committee would then have said to me, "Wait a minute—there is too much bureaucracy at school level." I therefore took the decision to channel the funding through local authorities, but what comes with that is that there must be an observation of local

authority procurement procedures. That support from existing local authority procurement arrangements is available for individual headteachers when making their decisions.

I can quite understand that there might be a nervousness as headteachers are going through this because it is new territory but I think that there is enough support there to make sure that headteachers are well supported.

Gillian Martin: I would like to move the conversation away from PEF, which many people have talked about, to the impact of poverty on educational attainment and the root causes of that.

We have been to a lot of focus groups; I have probably been to about five focus groups with various stakeholders. In every session, the stakeholders have said that there has been a noticeable increase in child poverty as a result of UK welfare reforms. Obviously, we are feeling the impacts of that in our education system and in wider society. The UK Government is saving quite a lot of money with its welfare reforms. Has the Scottish Government been given any additional money to mitigate the impact of child poverty on attainment?

John Swinney: We get the funding allocations that come as a consequence of UK funding decisions. If the UK welfare bill reduces but the incidence of poverty increases, unless there is a consequential investment in public services in England that then generates a financial benefit for the Scottish Government through the Barnett formula, we do not get any additional money.

Gillian Martin: So, although more children might be going without food over the weekend or overnight as a result of welfare reforms or a situation in the household that means that they cannot be fed and are coming into school hungry, there is no extra money coming to the Scottish Government to enable us to address that situation in our schools.

John Swinney: No.

Gillian Martin: Okay. Thank you.

I want to ask you about the universal policies. We have talked about PEF, but there are also Scottish Government universal policies that are actively targeting the poverty-related attainment gap, the first of which is the policy on early years provision. There is also a policy that might look as though it has a micro impact on poverty but that actually has a big effect on it, which is the introduction of the free provision of sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities. Can you give an assessment of the impact that some of those universal policies might have on the poverty-related attainment gap?

John Swinney: We have expanded early learning and childcare since we came into office and we are involved in a substantive increase of provision—we are almost doubling it—over the course of the current parliamentary session. One of the major drivers of the expansion of early learning and childcare is to provide us with an even stronger platform for closing the poverty-related attainment gap as early as we possibly can. In that respect, much of what I said in my response to Tavish Scott is relevant here, because the earlier we can provide support, particularly to young people who do not get the appropriate support at home, the better.

The focus on expanding early learning and childcare is a significant part of that agenda. We are in a position now in which we have reached agreement about the funding of that with local authorities, which I very much welcome, and we are now actively focused on the implementation. As we go through the parliamentary session, more and more provision will move towards 1,140 hours. That will not all happen in 2021; it will happen as we work our way through the parliamentary session. As a result of that, we will begin to see the beneficial effect of early learning and childcare in closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

There are other interventions, as Gillian Martin correctly identified. We continue to provide education maintenance allowance in Scotland. There is a demand-led budget for that, so young people who are eligible for EMA are able to take it up, and it will support them while they are in education.

The point about the availability of free sanitary products is important, because the lack of money in a household to afford such products might be another impediment to a young person participating in education. The whole rationale of our policy approach is to try to overcome any obstacles that are an impediment to a young person's learning.

Such an obstacle might be to do with nutrition, in which case a school could decide that it wanted to put in place breakfast provision for its pupils. For example, Dalmarnock primary school was running a breakfast club when I visited it, but it was contemplating maximising the impact by providing after-school food—I do not know whether it has decided to do that—for young people, along with structured play and homework assistance. I had a joyous morning with the young people there and took part in their structured play, which the school provides along with breakfast before 9 o'clock in the morning. The young people are in the school at 8 o'clock in the morning for breakfast and structured play to get them ready to be able to start learning. As I said, the school was

contemplating extending the school day through the provision of structured play, food and homework before the young people went home at night. The purpose of that work was to address the wider context that was undermining the educational achievements of those young people. We have to be open to such interventions.

Gillian Martin: Let us go back to the issue of sanitary provision. I am very clear that free access does not mean just free products; it means not having to ask for them. For the past eight months, North Ayrshire Council has had free provision of sanitary products in all the toilets, so that young women and girls do not have the double stigma of having to ask for them, whereas another local authority has retained the status quo, whereby it is necessary to go to a school nurse. That is a barrier to the education of the young women in question.

What can we do to ensure that we have good practice throughout Scotland? Aberdeenshire Council's education committee has decided to retain the status quo, so girls and young women still have to go to a staff member to access products that should be freely available. When there is not parity throughout the country when it comes to taking down such barriers, what can we do to influence those decisions and get them overturned?

John Swinney: We wrestle quite frequently with the issue of individual approaches being taken by local authorities and whether there is a rationale for a national approach—or rather, a consistent approach in every part of the country. There will be arguments for and against that on different issues. On this particular issue, I am very sympathetic to Gillian Martin's point about the need for the discreet provision of sanitary products so that young women are not embarrassed by the difficulty of gaining access to them. The issue is being actively taken forward by my colleague Angela Constance, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities. As is often the case, that work will involve a collaborative discussion with our local authority partners in an effort to get to an agreed model of best practice. We have such discussions regularly, and I know that Angela Constance is having them with not just schools but colleges and universities.

Ross Greer: I recently released data that showed that the ratio of additional support needs teachers to young people with identified additional needs has moved from 1:18 to 1:55. That is partly because the number of young people with additional needs has risen, but it is also because the number of ASN teachers has fallen recently by 100 full-time equivalents. In response, the Scottish Government said that it was inaccurate to single out support for learning teachers. Why is that the

case? Does the Scottish Government not recognise the specialist support that they provide?

John Swinney: That is not the case. The answer lies in the earlier part of Mr Greer's question—it relates to the expansion in the number of young people who have been identified as having additional support needs. The definitional changes that were made in 2011 expanded significantly the range of circumstances that may suggest that a young person has additional support needs, and a broader range of members of staff will provide support in schools to such young people.

Ross Greer: I would understand that answer if the ratio had risen simply because the number of identified young people had increased, but part of the reason for the rise is the fact that the number of specialist ASN staff has fallen. Do you recognise that it is not fair to place an expectation on classroom teachers, in particular, to provide the same level of specialist support for young people with complex additional needs as a specialist additional support needs teacher would provide?

John Swinney: It depends on what particular needs are being supported. I will give Mr Greer an example. Yesterday, I visited Clydebank high school in the region that he represents, and I saw some very good work being done in the field of nurture. All the young people who were involved had identified additional support needs, which were being met in a very focused fashion to enable them to access their education. They did not need a particularly high level of specialist support; what they needed was assistance to help them to overcome some barriers to learning. The staff who deliver that intervention, the effect of which is really compelling, judging by the evidence that I saw yesterday, would not be captured by the traditional definition of additional support needs staff.

12:30

Fundamentally, the matter comes back to whether we are satisfied that we are fulfilling our duties under the getting it right for every child approach. Are every child's needs being met as part of their participation in the education system? That judgment must be made on a child-by-child basis. It involves determining whether a young person's needs can be satisfied in a mainstream school and, if so, what support is required. If their needs cannot be met in a mainstream school, we must be open to alternative provision. Of course, a range of alternative provision is available.

Ross Greer: The report on additional support needs that the committee completed some time ago shows clearly that, too often, we do not meet every young person's needs. I am still not entirely clear exactly what you are trying to convey. Are

you suggesting that the 100 full-time-equivalent additional support needs teachers that we have lost were simply not needed?

John Swinney: No. I am trying to say that a broad range of staff will be involved in supporting a more broadly defined group of young people with additional support needs in Scottish education.

Ross Greer: Has the loss of those ASN teachers had a negative impact on the support that is available to young people with additional needs?

John Swinney: That should not be the case.

Ross Greer: Has it been the case?

John Swinney: Each young person's needs should be assessed to determine whether they are being met in the education system. There is a series of mechanisms to test whether that is the case, including the Additional Support Needs Tribunals for Scotland. That body exists to hold the public sector to account on the judgments that it makes about whether young people's needs are being met properly in the education system.

Ross Greer: Do you recognise the findings of our previous inquiry that, too often, the needs of young people with additional support needs are not being met?

John Swinney: I look carefully at the evidence that the committee gathers on such questions and actively encourage local authorities to determine what steps they will take to ensure that they fulfil their statutory duty to meet young people's educational needs.

Ross Greer: I have a brief question on another point that we explored with Education Scotland. If, in the course of an inspection of a school, the inspectors find that young people are not getting their entitlements under the curriculum for excellence, such as the entitlement to personal support through their education, and that is clearly due to understaffing or underresourcing, would you expect that to be clearly stated in the inspection report?

John Swinney: Yes, I would expect that to be reported.

The Convener: I bring the evidence-taking session to an end and thank the cabinet secretary very much for attending. I also thank everybody else who has appeared before the committee to give evidence as part of our inquiry into the attainment and achievement of school-age children experiencing poverty.

12:33

Meeting continued in private until 12:40.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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