

Minutes of the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Dyslexia held via Zoom on Wednesday 3rd February 2021.

1. Present:

Margaret Mitchell MSP, Elaine Smith MSP, Maurice Corry MSP, Stuart McMillan MSP, Rachael Hamilton MSP, Oliver Mundell MSP

Invitees:

The meeting was held via Zoom.

Lynne Binnie, Claire Wilson, Dean Smith, Emma Malins, Gillian Evans, Helen Fleming, Izzy Buchan, Jay Kirkland, Jenny Guise, Louise Elder, Margaret Crombie, Mary Evans, Michael Sinclair, Cathy Mcgee, Fran Foreman, Julie Ross, Joe Moran, Ross Duncan

2. Minutes of last meeting:

The minutes were approved.

3. Business arising from last meeting

It was noted that Martin Davies long standing member and past treasurer of the CPG had passed away peacefully on 22 January 2021.

The Convenor paid tribute to the professional and voluntary work Martin had undertaken over a lifetime of dedication to children with additional support needs particularly around reading and dyslexia. Martin had recently expressed his delight that his final research had been considered by the CPG with a number of members seeking further information from him.

4. Presentation: Lynne Binnie, Senior Educational Psychologist representing the Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES)

Lynne provided a brief introduction outlining the purpose of ADES as an independent professional network for leaders and managers

in education and children's services in Scotland. She explained their role in informing and influencing education policy working in partnership with local and national government, regional improvement collaboratives, Education Scotland, CoSLA and a range of other relevant agencies

Lynne also gave an insight into the work of the Scottish Government led Additional Support for Learning Implementation Group (ASLIG) which works collaboratively to provide advice to Scottish Government, the Scottish Education Council and Scottish Ministers on key issues relating to the implementation of Additional Support for Learning. It has a clear focus on continued improvement, ensuring that every child and young person gets the support they need, when they need it.

Lynne was asked for the views of ADES regarding the recently published Morgan Report. Lynne stated that ADES supported the main recommendations in the report and that ADES is committed to working, with others to ensure appropriate actions are taken to address the issues and opportunities raised.

The Cross Party Group wished to explore two particular issues raised in the report from the perspective of children and young people with dyslexia.

Firstly, the issue was raised regarding teachers undertaking assessments for dyslexia and their training and preparedness to fulfil these responsibility. It was noted that there was a wide range approaches across Scottish local authorities and that the emphasis was on the involvement of a number of professions and parents in the assessment process including, at the appropriate stage, education psychologists. Concern was raised that 'the rhetoric was significantly different to the reality' and Lynne undertook to raise the issue with ADES in terms of the extent to which this issue was being addressed.

Secondly, the issue of quality assurance was raised specifically in relation to the monitoring and evaluation of the consistency of standards of assessments by teachers and significant concerns

regarding the under identification and reporting of dyslexia within the annual Schools Secondary Pupil Census.

The Group noted that over the past eight years, over 37% of local authorities had consistently fallen below the average percentage of pupils identified as dyslexic. The average in the 2019 census was 6%. Examples were given of areas such as East Renfrewshire (12%) and Inverclyde (11%) compared to less than 2% in North Lanarkshire.

Lynne agreed to explore the issue within ADES.

It was noted that on the morning of the meeting John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary for Education had addressed the Parliament's Education Committee to discuss the Morgan Report and that in response to a question from Oliver Mundell MSP regarding the inconsistent statistics relating to the identification of dyslexia and their impacts and potential implications, the Cabinet Secretary had accepted that there was a gap between the 'rhetoric and reality' and that these were 'legitimate concerns' which he would raise with Education Scotland and the Chief Inspector of Schools.

5. Open Discussion

There was a brief open discussion relating to the current needs-based approach to the identification of additional support arrangements rather than the identification of dyslexia being required.

Members also commented on the challenges for teachers by being pulled away to cover for other teachers, the lack of understanding of the impact of dyslexia on non- school aspects of lives leading to stress and mental health issues.

6. Convenor's Remarks

Given this was the final meeting of the Cross Party Group, the Convenor asked the secretary to outline the procedures for submitting a request for the CPG on Dyslexia to be re-established in the new parliament. The Group noted that all current administrative business had to be completed by 24th March 2021.

The Convenor thanked fellow MSPs for their commitment to the group particularly those not seeking re-election. She also thanked the secretary and all members for their passion and dedication on behalf of the Parliament and children, young people and parents across Scotland.

On behalf of the CPG, David Jones, secretary thanked Margaret Mitchell MSP for her consistent support over many years and wished her a happy and healthy retirement from front line politics.