

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Visits and Focus group Notes from Glasgow 15 January 2018

Introduction

The Education and Skills Committee visited Glasgow on 15 January 2018. It undertook a series of visits and meetings, which were largely focused on the Scottish Government's proposed education reforms. During the visit, the Committee:

- Visited the Royal Conservatoire Scotland, where members met the Senior Leadership Team and students from the Conservatoire along with staff and students from other Higher Education Institutes. This visit gave members a real sense of what is happening at HEI level on widening access including the actual experiences of young people. A link to meeting notes is [here](#).
- Held focus groups with headteachers from across Glasgow and other local authorities
- Held a formal meeting with representatives of Glasgow, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde Council to discuss the reforms
- Held discussion groups with young people, parents and teachers who attended the formal meeting.

Notes of all of the informal meetings were taken and can be found below.

The Official Report can be found here:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11305&mode=pdf>

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Visit to Keppoch Campus – 15 January 2018

Members of the Committee visited the Keppoch Campus on 15 January 2018. Keppoch Campus is home to Saracen Primary School, St Teresa’s Primary School, Broomlea Primary School (ASN), Keppoch Nursery and Stepping Stones Family Learning Centre (a voluntary group for families and children under three).

James Dornan, Mary Fee, and Ruth Maguire attended the visit.

Briefing from Saracen Primary School Head teacher

The Committee was met and briefed by the head teacher of Saracen Primary School, Evelyn Gibson.

Ms Gibson explained that within the Keppoch campus, each school had its own space but shared the ICT suite, library, games hall, the main hall and general rooms. Ms Gibson noted that this can mean that lunchtimes are tight and scheduling enough time for PE can be a challenge.

Children eat and play together, albeit children at Broomlea have their own play area. The schools on campus undertake joint projects, for example in tackling sectarianism with the aim of getting children and parents of working together.

Saracen Primary School (around 240 pupils) received £180,000 of pupil equity funding in 2017/18, St Teresa’s Primary School (around 170 pupils) received £92,400 PEF and Broomlea Primary (around 40 pupils) £13,200.

Ms Gibson said she had discussed with her staff how to best use the PEF. She has used the fund to employ an additional member of staff. The school also identified non-attendance as an issue to be addressed and sought support from the third sector to deliver projects. Saracen and St Teresa’s have jointly funded a family support worker.

Ms Gibson noted that she has experienced a learning curve in her dealings with outside organisations, e.g. negotiating contracts and agreeing service level agreements. She suggested that there could have been a little more support available for this. Overall she welcomed the additional accountability and responsibility; however, she also noted that attainment gap has a number of social causes which her interventions may not be able to overcome.

Ms Gibson noted that while Saracen PS was able to fill a post using PEF, St Teresa's has been unable to do so due to lack of available teachers.

Ms Gibson explained that the role of head teacher has been moving toward a more business-manager role and less of a focus on children. She has to devote a great deal of time in the evenings and at weekends to her work.

In terms of the proposed head teacher's charter, Ms Gibson highlighted that having more of a say on staffing will also be a learning curve. She would welcome more clarity on what the charter might include and work in practice. She also would be reassured if heads were involved in the development of the charter.

Meeting with teachers from Saracen Primary School

Ruth Maguire MSP and Mary Fee MSP and asked for their views on the proposed reforms.

The participants noted that the education reforms give more control to head teachers to address local problems in a targeted way and this was welcomed. It was noted that head teachers will require support to use the additional powers and funding effectively.

In this regard, it was noted that local authorities play a valuable role in providing a strategic approach to recruitment and have many of the skills required to use funding effectively, such as contract management and human resources management. Head teachers' roles are moving more towards being a business manager and as such they will need support to be effective in their role.

The participants noted that there are other challenges that may affect the implementation of the proposed reforms, such as the shortage of available teachers.

Support to close the attainment gap

The participants noted that access to specialist services is essential for schools in areas that experience high levels of deprivation. In this regard, it was noted that many pupils within the school's catchment experience challenges in their learning, such as not speaking English as a first language; attachment disorders; alcohol foetal syndrome; or autism. The participants noted that infrastructure is also important and noted for example that the school does not have a nurture room.

The participants explained that it would be beneficial to have specialists on call and an integrated IT to support pupil's learning and experience. It was also noted that a child's early years' experience can have a big impact on their attainment and that compulsory nursery would help put pupils on a more equal footing.

Regional collaboration

The participants said that Glasgow already has a good collaborative working culture. For example, Glasgow City Council has introduced the "Literacy for all" and

“Glasgow counts” programmes. These initiatives mean that each school has a leader of learning who anchors expertise within the school and also engages collaboratively with peers across the local authority.

The participants said that regional improvement collaboratives could help to disseminate better assessment guidance for the Curriculum for Excellence, which the participants explained has been difficult to interpret leading to diverging practice.

Role of head teachers

The participants noted that head teachers will be taking on a more administrative or corporate role and it would be unfortunate if they lost their pastoral role, which is valued by staff and pupils alike. The participants stated that not all head teachers will be performing in their role to the same level. In this regard, some participants expressed concern about individual head teachers having a heightened level of control over the curriculum, such that the delivery of the curriculum within individual schools could be narrowed to meet specific performance targets. In the participants’ view, it is important that subject choice is not narrowed as an unintended consequence of the reforms and remains broad.

The participants also noted that the teaching profession is very hierarchical by design. In this regard, participants explained that any measures to encourage teachers’ participation and input into their school’s strategy for raising attainment would support morale and performance. The participants were concerned that the Scottish Government’s proposals do not mention protecting teacher views and participation in this regard.

Parental engagement

The participants also explained that parental engagement is very important to raising attainment. Saracen Primary has piloted a number of innovative initiatives to encourage parental engagement, such as a “soft finishers” parent-pupil programme in which pupils discuss their school work with their parents before leaving school every fortnight. The school has also led a programme that takes pupils and parents to football. Parents are also issued with questionnaires to complete at parent teacher evenings to ascertain their views and needs. These methods have been much more effective than a formal parent teacher council, which has not been sustainable due to lack of parental engagement.

Meeting with pupils from Saracen and St Teresa’s Primary schools

James Dornan met with pupils from Saracen and St Teresa Primary Schools.

The Scottish Government’s consultation [Empowering Schools: A Consultation on The Provisions of the Education \(Scotland\) Bill](#) states:

“We will include provisions in the Education Bill to ensure that the principles of pupil participation are pursued in every school.”

The pupils told Mr Dornan that Saracen Primary School has a pupil council, whereas St Teresa's pupil voice is heard through the heads of houses. The pupils said that they would be confident in raising ideas or concerns with their teachers or head teachers.

Mr Dornan asked the pupils he met for their ideas on how they would improve the life of the school. Mr Dornan was given a number of very good ideas on areas where the pupils thought there could be improvement. For example:

- Arrange for someone to regularly pick up broken bottles that are found in the school grounds;
- more "volunteers" to come to school (e.g. external speakers, peripatetic music teachers);
- more information about staying healthy (the pupil said this particularly in the context of drugs misuse);
- a "chill out" room where children who were upset could go to regain their composure.

The pupils also had concerns about a lack of resources, suggesting that there should be:

- More classroom assistants;
- More school trips; and
- More stationary.

The pupils echoed Ms Gibson's comments that lunchtimes can be rushed and PE lessons squeezed. The pupils also agreed that it was good to be on the one campus where you can make friends with pupils from different schools and of different faiths.

Meeting with Teachers at Broomlea Primary School

James Dornan met a number of teachers who work at Broomlea Primary School, a specialist school supporting pupils with additional support needs.

The main concern of the staff was a lack of teachers. They said that Broomlea had for some time been working with less than its full complement of teaching staff and that this is due to insufficient numbers of teachers wanting to work in the sector.

The teachers suggested that initial teacher education had, in their experience as student teachers, not offered sufficient options for students to learn about teaching in specialist schools. One must first qualify as a mainstream primary teacher and transfer into the specialist sector. The teachers said that mainstream teachers can have a negative view of specialist ASN teaching, largely due to a misunderstanding about what it involves. The teachers noted that ASN teaching is very individualised and rewarding and that work should be done to dispel mainstream teachers' concerns.

The group was concerned if major changes took place while there are too few ASN teachers.

Another concern raised was the staffing ratio for their pupils. The view of the group was that the minimum staffing ratios were too high for the children they worked with who have complex needs.

The group also discussed parent and pupil participation. The catchment area of the school is relatively large, which is a barrier to parental participation. Pupils are involved in making decisions about their learning; often, however, this engagement would need to take account of the children's capacities. One teacher observed that her pupils' behaviour is how they influence how they learn.

In terms of the head teachers' charter, the group thought that it may bring benefits if it led to less bureaucracy in decision making, but also voiced concerns that it might lead to the role of head teacher becoming more stressful.

Meeting with a family support worker and parents

Ruth Maguire MSP and Mary Fee MSP met with a family support worker and a pupil's parents.

The family support worker explained that she works for Barnardo's and has been engaged to work for the two primary schools at the Keppoch campus using funding from the PEF. The schools are able to refer pupils to her directly so that she can assess what factors are affecting the pupil from reaching their potential. The family support worker is able to support families in numerous ways to access any additional support they may need, such as making appointments with the local authority to find housing or learning how to use software to boost their child's learning (such as "sum dog" maths programme). In her view, it would be helpful if family support workers were rolled out more widely.

The parents told members that a number of the school's initiatives have helped them engage with their daughter's learning. This includes the "story sack", which is a free resource that includes books and other items that parents can use to play with their children. In their view, informal activities that bring parents together with their children is a good format to get parents more involved with the school and their child's learning.

Meeting with head teachers and deputy heads from Broomlea and Saracen Primary Schools

James Dornan, Mary Fee and Ruth Maguire met with senior management of Broomlea and Saracen Primary Schools.

The senior team agreed that they were best placed to know the need of their pupils and it would be a positive outcome for them to have more power to respond to local needs. However, there is much outwith their control, e.g. staffing ratios and insufficient applicants to fill vacancies. The participants also noted that head teachers in charge of schools with a large staff body may have to spend a lot of time on human resource issues, such as managing sick leave, which could detract them

from focusing on their projects to raise attainment. The participants noted that a number of very experienced head teachers have taken early retirement.

The senior staff spoke about the importance and challenges to ensure that all parents voices were heard. At Saracen, there is a challenge in maintaining a formal parent council and there isn't one currently. In terms of Broomlea, the headteacher, Fiona Shields, reiterated her staff's view that the large catchment area of her school can hinder parental involvement.

The group noted that there has been significant changes over the past ten years in terms of the financial position of the local authority, the numbers and roles of support staff, mainstreaming (which was considered to be a positive, but sometimes children found themselves in an unsuitable school), and the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.

The group's view was that there may be a number of positives in establishing regional collaboratives. These included the possibility of more rigorous advice, guidance and support on progression and assessment. There may also be economies of scale, particularly in ASN provision where, for example, there would be greater resource to develop elaborated curricula.

Focus group with head teachers The Lighthouse Glasgow, 15 January 2018

Members of the Committee held a focus group with head teachers from across Glasgow and beyond on 15 January 2018. The notes below reflect the questions asked and the discussions of those head teachers.

The members present at the focus group were, Johann Lamont MSP, Liz Smith MSP, Gillian Martin MSP and Tavish Scott MSP.

1. what do you think the main positives of the proposed reforms would be?

Positives identified were the focus on collaboration and some of the work undertaken as a result of the Pupil Equity Funding.

Some thought that the Regional Improvement Collaboratives could be positive in enabling people to see practice outwith their own local authority.

2. what sort of support would your school need in bringing in the reforms, and when do you think your school would be in a position to make changes (the earliest changes will take place will be into 2019)

It was generally agreed that there was already a great deal of collaborative work already being done across the region, and people were unsure what the added value of the Regional Improvement Collaboratives would be especially across such large geographic areas.

In discussing support, participants raised the broader context of issues in education including:

- pay and conditions,
- workload and bureaucracy
- low morale – partly as a result of negative media coverage of teaching
- trying to include children with ASN in mainstream provision without adequate support
- unrealistic parental demands
- lack of teaching staff, including supply staff
- lack of support staff – in schools and in councils
- lack of knowledge amongst student teachers due to poor quality of some ITE courses
- increasing demand for pastoral care

They considered that issues such as these reduced capacity to collaborate or work with further reforms and suggested in adding responsibilities additional support would be required or, one suggested, other responsibilities would need to be removed / deprioritised.

3. what will the different impacts of the reforms be on different types of schools (for example primary, secondary, special education schools)

The group discussed the different level of management and pastoral care resource available to a secondary compared to a primary school. One secondary school head acknowledged that he had the time and space to be strategic partly because he had a senior management team. It was suggested that there was some spare time in secondary schools at some times of the year because of the exam timetable. This was not the case in primary schools.

4. do you consider the reforms will contribute to closing the attainment gap, and are there other measures you would also suggest?

Rather than the potential of the governance reforms to affect the attainment gap, the group discussed Pupil Equity Funding. The PEF funding was welcomed but it required a lot of work, including in areas head teachers were unfamiliar, such as procurement. It was also noted that difficulties recruiting staff meant that it wasn't always possible to use PEF funding as they'd like. One head teacher described PEF as both terrifying and exciting. One though, thought that, while welcome, it merely topped up resources to where they were 10 or 12 years ago.

5. what would you want the new regional improvement collaboratives of education authorities to do for your school or education in your area (ideas include assisting information sharing and communication between authorities and also between schools)

The extent of existing collaboration has been mentioned above.

The short timescale for developing the draft plan was criticised, as this meant it could not be developed in consultation with schools and teachers. It was hoped that future plans would be developed using a more 'bottom up' approach.

There was concern that the regional plan and the regional collaboratives were adding layers to existing structures and so would make it more difficult to achieve change. However, one head teacher referred to the National Improvement Framework and thought that if all the various plans fitted within that framework then they would be coherent.

The size of the West Partnership was noted and there was some scepticism in the group as to the practical different the Regional Collaboratives would make in the classroom.

The role of Education Scotland was also raised, and, in response to a direct question, group members agreed that it would be better if the inspection and curriculum development functions were separated.

6. what do you think of the headteachers charter proposals (more control over CfE decisions, staffing, funding etc)?

Some in the group stated that they already had control over the curriculum, but would like more control over recruitment. The level of decision making on staff recruitment varied both by local authorities, but also within local authorities and throughout the year. While some head teachers in the group said they were able to

choose staff others said that they had sometimes been allocated staff with no say in who was appointed.

One caveat to giving head teachers control over recruitment was that this might lead to competition in recruitment between schools.

One headteacher asked why it was specifically a headteachers charter as opposed to a school / teachers charter as they were concerned this would give the impression of additional work for the role of headteacher and exacerbate the issue of attracting more people to apply to become headteachers.

7. how do you think your role and the role of your education authority might change as a result of the head teachers charter?

There was considerable concern that the reforms would add to head teachers' workload, that they would have extra responsibility without having the extra resource or support to enable them to meet those responsibilities.

The support and direction received from Glasgow education authority was very much welcomed. Some headteachers had concerns that the support they currently received from the local authority would be diminished.

On this theme, cuts to local authority funding were discussed. It was felt that Glasgow local authority had 'protected' education budgets, but that this had meant that the support that used to be available from health and social work funded services was no longer there.

8. what do you think increased parental and community involvement in schools should look like?

Group members noted the large amount of effort that they put into trying to involve a wider range of parents in school, often to little effect. One head teacher said that the parents in her school were very wary of taking responsibility. There was concern that the different levels of ability and willingness to get involved might result in a greater 'equity' gap between schools.

Some group members felt that 'family learning' activities were more important than parents being involved in the parent council. Others felt that parents were not disengaged so much as just trusting the school to educate their children.

9. what do you think about a proposed duty on headteachers to promote and support pupil participation?

Head teachers considered that they were already supporting pupil participation. There were some comments that the language in the Government's consultation document was vague, generating questions as to how different proposals would work, and often showed little understanding of the day to day reality of schools.

10. do you have any views on the proposal to create the Education Workforce Council for Scotland that would replace the GTCS?

There were very strong views in the group that the GTCS should not be changed into a more general workforce council. Referring to views canvassed from colleagues before the meeting, participants said that teachers valued the professional recognition from having a specific professional body. They didn't understand the rationale for a single education workforce body, and were concerned it might dilute the perceived professional status of teachers.

Informal discussions following formal meeting at The Lighthouse, Glasgow, 15 January 2018

Below are a number brief notes covering the main themes that arose during discussions Members of the Education and Skills Committee had with groups of young people, teachers, parents and others on 15 January 2018 on the topic of education reforms.

Focus group with young people

James Dornan MSP convened an informal meeting with young people from primary and secondary schools, some of whom were members of the Scottish Youth Parliament, on their views on the Scottish Government's proposed education reforms.

Head teachers' role

The group was generally supportive of proposals to give head teachers more power over how their schools are run, as long as that did not swing the balance of power too far in one direction. It was noted that neighbouring schools, especially in areas such as Glasgow, can have different needs and that head teachers would be able to make informed decisions based on their school's individual needs. However, while recognising that most head teachers did their best for their school, some saw head teachers as quite remote figures and questioned whether they were best placed to make certain decisions, with one person commenting that "leading and teaching are different things".

Parental and community involvement in schools

People were keen for increased parental and community involvement in their schools. One person felt that apart from through parent teacher meetings, parents had little opportunity to influence the sort of education their children received. Some expressed concern that too few parents were on parent councils and that there was a stigma around those who were, as they were sometimes regarded as "pushy parents". However many felt that when there were meetings on specific issues of concern participation by parents and the community could be quite high.

Young people's participation in schools

Many of the young people were active in their school communities and members of various student councils and groups. It was felt that these worked best when they concentrated on a specific subject or concern and did not have too wide a remit. People thought that information on what types of groups, and what approaches, worked should be shared with other schools in order to spread best practice. One person was concerned about how frequently their pupil council met, complaining that there had only been "one meeting since August", and that the agenda had been chosen by the deputy head with little input from pupils. Therefore more pupil-led groups and councils was seen as a good idea.

Closing the attainment gap

People were pleased that the intention of the education reforms was to close the attainment gap between more and less deprived children. One person who helped run a breakfast club was concerned that cuts in breakfast provision would disadvantage poorer children and make closing the attainment gap more difficult. Concerns were also raised on the quality and range of healthy food provided in schools.

Additional comments and concerns

The relevance of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education was raised. The general view was that PSHE lessons did not prioritise the correct issues - there being an outdated and narrow focus on smoking, drugs and alcohol when the problems of bullying, especially on social media, should be top of the agenda. One person did not think that some teachers took the lessons seriously and admitted, "I did my homework in PSHE class today".

The availability of courses was also a matter of concern. One school had stopped teaching advanced higher courses without providing a proper consultation. One person complained that they had to go to three different schools to be able to do the subjects that they wanted and, although admitting that that was an extreme case, felt that their experience had discouraged others from choosing the subjects that they wanted.

Although people regarded the education proposals as generally promising, they found it difficult to say what impact they would have on their schools and what sort of support their schools would need as it was so early on in the process.

Focus group with Primary and ASN teachers

This discussion was chaired by Richard Lochhead MSP. Also present was Mary Fee MSP.

There were a number of themes discussed by the group: the role of head teachers and the proposed head teachers' charter, additional support needs, resources, regional collaboration, the role of the GTCS and the education system more generally.

(NB this group was also attended by a parent and another representing a publishing firm.)

Role of Heads and Head Teacher Charter

There was a mixed picture of how the role of head teachers has been changing, one participant said that their experience, heads were taking on a quality improvement officer role (a role normally undertaken the local authority centrally), and another stated that heads were spending more time in the classroom. The suggestion in both cases was that this is taking away from the head teacher role as a leader of learning in the school.

One head teacher of an ASN school noted that she had been succession planning and supporting a senior member of her team to work toward headship, however, the complexity and associated stress of the role has discouraged him from this career path.

There was support for schools to have a level of autonomy because teachers in the school will know the pupil population best. It was argued that this autonomy already existed in Glasgow. One example of this was that Glasgow teachers are given a budget of "points" (i.e. salary points, reflecting the seniority of staff) and heads could design their leadership team within this budget.

There was a concern expressed by a number of teachers that a focus on head teachers within the reforms was misplaced. It was argued that this misses the collegial nature of schools and would promote the idea that "super-heads" are required to bring about improvements. One classroom teacher said that the head teachers' charter was "insulting" to classroom teachers who support the running of the school. It was suggested that the charter should be broader and incorporate the whole school – an education charter.

Whether the charter should have a basis in law was questioned. The group noted that much of policy in education is taken forward on a non-statutory basis and asked why the head teachers' charter would need to be statutory.

Another idea from the group was that there should be a pupil guarantee – a rights-based approach covering what every child will receive in respect of his/her education and teachers and schools should adapt according to the pupils in the school at the time.

Resources and autonomy over budgets

Members of the group discussed the possibility of heads competing for teaching staff. Several took the view that this sort of competition would be detrimental overall.

One member of the group's view was that pupil equity funding has led to a "cat fight" for resources, and that the third sector support services that schools are seeking to employ do not have the capacity to meet every school's needs. It was argued that there should be a more strategic approach which might include putting money into other services that support areas of deprivation and families and young people with complex needs (e.g. social work).

The group noted that the Government consultation does not mention resources and members of the group argued that more resource and smaller class sizes are key to attainment and without addressing this, the reforms will not substantially affect the attainment gap.

Regional Collaboration

There were differing views about the value of regional collaboration. Some Glasgow teachers did not see the benefit, given the size and diversity of the City of Glasgow. However, a teacher from East Renfrewshire noted that her school served a deprived area within a relatively prosperous local authority and she would welcome more partnership working with schools in Glasgow.

There was some concern raised about the changing role of local authorities, which were seen as providing valuable support to head teachers and having a key role in communicating with schools and teachers. The group was unclear what the link between the regional collaborative and the school would be.

There was concern that a regional collaborative was another structure the head teacher will be expected to engage with, further impacting on their time.

Another member of the group argued that collaboration should be at classroom teacher level, as well as head teachers.

Additional Support Needs

The provision of Additional Support for Learning was discussed. There was general support for a mainstreaming approach. However, there was also agreement among the group that there are too few specialist ASN teachers and not enough training on ASN for mainstream teachers. One participant stated that many ASN teachers had been replaced by ASN classroom assistants. Several members of the group thought that ASN provision was not meeting the needs of children in many cases.

Prestige of the Profession

Mr Lochhead asked what changes could be made to improve the esteem in which teaching is held and make the profession more attractive. One teacher suggested that the standard for entry should be increased so that Higher Maths as well as

Higher English be required. It was also argued that higher pay would make the profession more attractive, particularly in STEM subjects where the pay of teachers struggles to compete.

One member of the group suggested that more needs to be done about assaults on staff. Another noted that this is connected to adequate ASN provision.

General Teaching Council for Scotland

There was disappointment from teachers at the proposal to bring the functions of the GTCS into a wider body (the Education Workforce Council Scotland). The teachers in the group hold the GTCS in high regard and value it as a member-led organisation.

The teachers also questioned whether classroom assistants might be put off by the bureaucracy of joining a professional body.

Parental and Community engagement

The teachers valued parental and community involvement in their schools. It was noted that building good relations “takes tenacity, time and staff”.

It was also noted that a range of other services can support parents, e.g. social work, educational psychologists, CAHMS.

Curriculum for Excellence

One member of the group, who was not a teacher, argued that the reforms are a response from the Scottish Government to the failings of CfE. While the teachers agreed that there had been issues implementing CfE, they said that teachers are now enjoying being able to work creatively and the system is now “rising from the ashes”. They said that the key question is finding the correct balance between professional freedom and accountability. The teachers also robustly defended the profession, pointing to achievement at Highers (or equivalent) as evidence that the education system is doing well.

Focus group with secondary school teachers

The following gives a brief note of the key themes emerging from the discussion with secondary school teachers. The group did not have time to work through all the questions posed. The main theme raised was the need to take account of the other pressures and changes in education when considering any further reforms.

Positives of proposed reforms

Group participants mentioned flexibility and hoped that they really would provide teachers the opportunity to be leaders of learning.

Support required to deliver reforms

Pressures that will impact on the potential of the reforms to have an impact, include

- staff shortages – both teachers and support staff. It was noted that staff shortages had hampered the implementation of Pupil Equity Fund initiatives
- lack of support for ASN pupils in mainstream classes
- issues with CfE including: N4 exam, workload for teachers and pupils, over assessment and lack of good quality support from Education Scotland
- the amount of change over recent years. Participants hoped that these proposed reforms would not themselves be changed after a short while.

Measures to close the attainment gap

Some participants considered that giving more autonomy to head teachers could increase the attainment gap between schools, as it would reflect the strength or weaknesses of individual head teachers.

PEF funding was mentioned as very welcome, although there was frustration from some that it was hampered by difficulties in getting staff.

Role of Regional Improvement Collaboratives

Participants were unclear about the added value of the reforms and how the Regional Collaboratives would affect their day to day practice.

Subject teacher networks were also mentioned as a valuable, existing, method of sharing ideas between classroom teachers.

Head teachers' charter

Participants suggested that the 'head teacher charter' should be a 'school' charter or 'learner' charter to reflect the importance of the whole staff team in creating a good school.

Many of the proposals were things that were already happening – such as head teacher autonomy to select their own staff and develop the curriculum. (It was noted that this may be different in other local authorities).

There were strong concerns about existing lack of transparency over recruitment and promotion decisions and that this could be exacerbated if head teachers were given more autonomy.

Participants were also concerned about how issues with weak head teachers would be addressed. Local authorities were considered to have a valuable role in this at the moment.

There were concerns about fast track promotion if it meant promotion of staff with very little class room experience.

Role of education authority

Participants were unclear how the support they receive from the local authority would be affected and what level of support would be provided by the Regional Collaborative. There was a suggestion that it appeared to be a move back towards regional council structures.

Concerns included:

- that the support available to head teachers and schools generally would be diminished as a result of the reforms. If a head teacher had more autonomy, then would the 'checks and balances' of the local authority be lost?
- additional workload from these reforms, particularly for head teachers
- whether the 'direction of travel' was towards an English model of executive heads and a 'hire and fire' culture for head teachers

Parental and community involvement

Participants were unclear whether a 'duty' around parental involvement would be too prescriptive about the type of involvement expected.

Suggestions included that parental involvement should not only be about parents coming into school, but also means providing report cards, returning calls and parents being clear how to contact the school. It was noted that some exercises in parental involvement had too little return for a great deal of effort. Some participants suggested that it was necessary to ask parents what kind of involvement they wanted rather than imposing a particular model that might not work for them.

General Teaching Council for Scotland

Participants had strong concerns about the proposal to replace the GTCS. They considered that there should be a professional body for teachers that was separate from other education workers.

Focus Group with parents 1

Gillian Martin MSP was joined by a small group of parents to discuss the proposed education reforms.

Parents' role in raising attainment

The participants noted that a different approach is required for primary and secondary pupils, which reflects the different stages of their education.

It was agreed that engaged parents are easy to reach, whereas non-engaged parents are often hard to reach and involve in their child's education. Many participants explained the extent to which they are engaged with their children's education and the contact they have with their children's teachers.

It was suggested that many non-engaged parents may not understand the concept of family learning and that they have an important role to play in their child's education.

The participants agreed that the parent council model is not effective in engaging a diverse range of parents and that other models need to be explored by schools, such as models that are underpinned by a human rights approach.

The participants noted that the needs of parents must be understood in terms of the barriers they may face to becoming involved in their children's education. These barriers may include negative experiences of their own education; learning difficulties; illiteracy; disability; working patterns; family breakdown or violence; and sectarianism.

Pupil engagement

The participants agreed that schools do a good job of engaging their pupils.

Head teachers' roles

Some of the participants explained their experience of dealing with teachers and head teachers and the issues that can arise in addressing individual pupil's needs, such as in cases where pupils have additional support needs, experience bullying, or have poor mental health.

The participants raised concerns about the accountability that will be built into the proposed reforms. In this regard, the participants explained that parents need to understand the complaints and appeals process if they do not agree with decisions made by head teachers, such as the provision of subject choice within a school.

It was noted that head teachers need to understand their equalities duties and the legal framework that underpins those duties. Concerns were expressed about the additional workload that the proposed reforms may place on head teachers and whether they have the expertise required to manage their additional powers in relation to human resource management and contract management. The participants

were also concerned that many head teachers appear to be very young and may not have the experience required to manage the proposed powers.

The participants also commented on the accessibility of the proposals for the head teachers' charter. In their view, the proposals need to be communicated to parents in accessible language and the lack of detail within the existing proposals makes it difficult to comment on.

Encouraging more people into teaching later in life

The participants commented that they do not support programmes for accelerated entry into the teaching profession. There was agreement that part-time courses for teaching qualifications could encourage experienced career switchers to enter the profession. It was noted that some professionals are barred from retraining because they need to be employed by the local authority already to undertake the required qualifications and training.

Other ideas for reform

The participants commented that there has been a lot of change in the system recently and that a period of stability would help teachers embed the existing reforms. The participants noted that they supported the 'Getting it right for every child' approach and that the focus in schools should remain on achieving this with an emphasis on the diverse range of destinations available to pupils, such as vocational training and higher education.

Focus Group with parents 2

The following gives a brief note of the key themes emerging from the discussion with the parent group that was led by Tavish Scott after the Committee meeting in Glasgow on 15 January. The group had 8 participants; all were parents including a Local Councillor and a representative of the National Parent Forum Scotland.

Head teacher's role

Several parents were concerned with how accountable the head teachers would be with more autonomy; as one parent said "what are the checks and balances in these proposed changes".

One parent said it was so important that any changes should include parents' views to get a balance.

Another parent was concerned that the head teachers already hold a lot of power and felt that the parent's voices would not be heard. Another suggested that heads are already working at full capacity and therefore it is unfair to ask that they take on more responsibility.

There was also a general agreement of the importance of transparency if head teachers powers are changing and then more community involvement needs to be in place to enable and review this. There was also a concern that giving heads more power would reduce the opportunity parents to seek redress through the local authority.

Although Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) was welcome, concern was raised that the PEF is already being used in so many different ways and there had not yet been an evaluation of this. The view from this parent was that the government should wait until outcomes from the PEF had been evaluated.

Another parent said that he felt that there was no need to reform the head teacher role as they were already working at capacity and the local authorities are already moving funds to meet needs.

Parental and community involvement in schools

The participants noted that getting parents involved would be the biggest challenge. They felt that some parents' experience of education tainted how they felt about engaging with their children's school.

The participants felt that a different approach is required for primary and secondary pupils, as parents are not at school gate as the children get older and this poses a challenge for engagement.

There was discussion of the types of involvement parents have in schools and whether parents from particular backgrounds were more likely to be actively involved. One parent said that in her experience most parents were engaged at some level with the school.

Another suggested that parents should be involved in curriculum design which would make elements of the curriculum more relevant to real life.

The group felt that schools could play a bigger role in their wider communities. One parent was frustrated at the level of community involvement of her local secondary school and described an 'us and them mentality from the school.'

Several parents suggested that schools should teach about values, citizenship, philosophy and politics, arguing that this would increase community involvement.

Pupil participation

Two of the parents had children involved in the year of the young person, but had heard about this through their work and not the school. They felt that this was illustrative of a lack of engagement with young people

Several parents said that pupils need to feel their engagement is worthwhile and the group thought that pupils would engage if there were involved in co-design and influencing their school day.

Some in the group contrasted good engagement at their children's primary school where many pupils had a role in school groups, such as eco group or pupil council, with secondary schools when children did not feel as engaged or heard.

Ideas to improve schools

The participants thought that reaching out to the community and involving outside organisations would bring benefits to the schools.

One participant said we need to think about how we get inspirational teachers into the system and how you retain them. Teachers are frustrated they are expected to teach in flexible way but with the curricular restrictions 'it's the elephant in the room'.

Some in the group were critical of the curriculum and argued that vocational learning should play a greater role. It was suggested that young people should learn topics they like and are passionate about. Several parents suggested that schools should teach about values, citizenship, philosophy and politics, arguing that this would increase community involvement.

One parent said the implementation of the CfE was an issue and that schools were not prepared for change and the new assessments.

Several participants said that easing exam pressures and using different ways of recording outcomes; especially for children with ASN would be welcome. The importance of resilience and life skills was highlighted.

Other comments

The whole group had concerns about cyberbullying and the support for children from schools. Some in the group said that there is a need to highlight to parents their

responsibility to watch their children's use of social media. While several parents thought that mobile phones can cause issues in schools, the participants didn't think banning phones from school would work.

Focus group with public and third-sector organisations, including community-based groups, and volunteers¹.

Ross Greer MSP facilitated the discussion.

General comments about the proposed reforms

- Governance issues would be better tackled in the longer term – the immediate challenges are to tackle the high teacher vacancy rate and to improve staff retention.
- The consultation focuses on how the reforms are to be achieved, but says little on why they are needed.
- The proposals lack balance – they provide detail on the role of head teachers and regional improvement collaboratives, but lack information on parental and community engagement and pupil participation.
- It is unclear what the Government wants to achieve from pupil participation.
- There will be no quick fix to the issues, and a parliamentary term is an insufficient period in which to measure attainment.
- Head teachers are being set up as fall guys, as they and not Government would be blamed if there is a failure to narrow the attainment gap.
- The Government is consulting on its proposals for a bill while some of its other policies are at an earlier stage in their development, and its ability to ensure that all the different strands of work integrate coherently was questioned.
- The reforms, if enacted, would simply result in another set of guidelines that would sit in a box, unused.

Role of head teachers

One person considered the proposals to be a political gimmick – a public relations exercise that tinkered around the edges - and questioned how increased autonomy would change anything, or whether the reforms overall would lead to material change; others suggested that headteachers are already carrying out much of the work that is being labelled as reform. Several people commented on the focus being on headteachers when parity of esteem is needed across all the professions.

Some argued that the main challenge is how to allocate resources, fearing that the proposals would simply see a continuation of the same approach to learning, unless headteachers were familiar with the roles that other organisations could play to support schools. Further to that, another person commented that many of the proposals are school-centric and did not take account of the wider support and learning opportunities that are available outwith schools and to adults.

On whether headteachers have the capacity or the appetite for the reforms, one person noted that the consultation document was silent on the resource, the training and the capacity available to headteachers to deliver what would be required of

¹ The groups included Action for Children, Age Scotland, Calderglen high school befriending project (represented by its creator), CELCIS (Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland), Enable Scotland, Generations Working Together South Lanarkshire Community and Learning Development Partnership and the WAVE Trust (Worldwide Alternatives to Violence)

them; another expressed concern that more responsibility would be placed on people who are already overworked and overstretched.

One person said that success would depend on the personality of the headteacher and the school culture, another said that success would be reliant on their commitment and drive, and another said that the main factors leading to success to date were good luck and good relationships. Consequently, results would vary.

One person said that they would have great reservations about headteachers' ability to control large budgets without appropriate training; another was concerned about headteachers' powers over staffing and how staff would be redeployed should they be considered surplus to requirements and whether that might lead to redundancies.

The need for broader consideration of additional support needs (ASN) was emphasised. There is no reference to, or discussion about, for example, the large community that does not go to or is excluded from school. There is a lack of understanding about how people learn and that a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate. There are question marks over how spending on ASN would be protected, particularly given the high cost in schooling those with learning disabilities; it is also unclear where responsibilities lie in ensuring ASN provision.

Parental and community involvement

One person argued that the learner journey has to begin earlier, with resource made available to cover the period from pregnancy to three-year-olds; another argued that the focus should not only be on three to 18-year-olds, but the spectrum of ages.

It was commented that the voice of the teacher appears to be absent from the consultation document. It was suggested that some teachers are anxious about engaging with parents outside the standard approaches, such as face-to-face classroom-based meetings. Those anxieties need to be addressed, with teachers given the confidence to engage in different formats and settings. One person spoke of the need to break down the barrier between parents and teachers and to develop a culture where different groups work together.

It was also highlighted that the voice of carers is absent from the consultation document, and there is no reference to non-parents or the role that they might play.

One person emphasised the need to hear the diversity of parental voices; another suggested that the third sector should be used as intermediaries to engage with parents.

A general theme was that a wide range of children are not being catered for, with no one speaking up for, for example, children in care and those with parents in prison. The wider issue of the impact of trauma was raised. It was suggested that additional money is not necessarily the answer; rather, the essential requirement is to address people's poor experience of school, such as those who have been maligned there. That would require tackling and finding solutions to damaging intergenerational family cycles.

It was suggested that different models of participation are required to fit the spectrum of needs. Some argued that it is essential that engagement takes place beyond school and in the wider community – places where some people already go, or have positive experiences of, such as community centres and GP surgeries.

One person mentioned the issue of parents wanting to help their children with, for example, their homework, but not having the skills, the knowledge or literacy abilities to do so. It was noted that improving the literacy of adults and children together leads to greater development for both parties. More generally, children's development is amplified when working with older people. Furthermore, the benefits of adult education and the knock-on positive impact on young people's education should not be overlooked or underestimated.

Concern was expressed that community learning and development is simply an afterthought and an underdeveloped aspect of the proposals. Schools could be insular and might seek to redeploy staff in CLD, with the risk that the vast experience in the third sector would be neglected.

One person argued that a change of culture is required; another suggested that people have to move away from accepting that how people behave is just who they are and move towards addressing the problems that families and children experience.

Nature of good empowerment

There was general agreement that engagement must not be seen as an add-on, but as an integral part of the system. It was highlighted that confident youngsters are better able to specify what they want and most likely to be represented on pupil councils, whereas those with the most needs are more likely to require assistance to get across what those needs are.

One person highlighted that children learn in different ways, such as through art or music. It is therefore essential not to meet the needs of the schools, but the needs of the individual. Further to that, another person spoke about the need to investigate why some schools do not work for young people, which would mean speaking to those outwith parent councils, pupil councils and parent-teacher organisations.

Financial literacy was highlighted as a priority area because educating people in this area would help to break cycles of poverty. One person suggested that the topic is not covered in nine out of 10 schools because no one is competent to teach it. Despite there being people with relevant knowledge available through the third sector, that resource is not used.

One person proposed that community and learning development be extended beyond schools. It was argued that education is not just provided by teachers. Furthermore, it should happen 52 weeks a year, and other professionals are available to provide support. On a related theme, it was suggested that another key issue is the protection of teacher numbers while support staff numbers are being reduced. Although those fields are being decimated, that support is essential to close the attainment gap.

Level of financial support required

Funding is seen to be too low, and the one-year budget negates any ability to plan properly, or for the medium to longer term. Some people supported the suggestion to increase taxation and to ring fence the extra money for education; others expressed concern that secondary school headteachers would simply use additional financial resource to recruit more classroom teachers, and examples were cited of primary school teachers being more innovative in the use of resources, such as through the provision of bilingual support for pupils. Again, it was emphasised that how resources are targeted is considered to be key.

One person highlighted the need for appropriate funding for sensory impairment from birth onwards. Another person suggested that a slice of pupil equity funding should be ring fenced to allow pupils to continue to learn and develop over holiday periods, because some schools used the funding only during term time.

Regional Improvement Collaboratives

It was highlighted that the consultation fails to ask what stakeholders want from RICs, which are seen to be school centric, and it was suggested that it is difficult for CLD organisations to get involved in them. However, the northern alliance, with its focus on CLD, is seen to be an exemplar, and its approach should be replicated. Where RICs sit within the overall education system is unclear - the west partnership is about to agree its RIC plan, but stakeholders are unclear about its structure – and the messages from Education Scotland and local authorities' about the roles and responsibilities of RICs are different. Reference was made to the lack of regional involvement in the Norwegian education system².

Closing the attainment gap

A number of people were concerned that, although the aim of the reforms is to tackle the attainment gap, those who should be the priority of this work – that is, the most deprived – are not being engaged. Some people were unclear about the meaning of the attainment gap; some thought that the definition is too wide; others thought that it is too narrow – for example, although poverty is an important measure, other factors play a part, such as disability. One person raised the importance of wellbeing and bringing happiness into children's lives in order to tackle the lack of hope or the belief that there is nothing for them.

Concerns were expressed about whether - and if so, how - the poverty-related poverty gap would be monitored and how headteachers would be held accountable. One person suggested that the getting it right for every child agenda is missing from the proposed reforms. Achieving that ambition would be possible only if a teacher can identify a child's needs, teach them on that basis and bring in other

² In Norway, municipalities are responsible for operating and administering primary and lower secondary schools; county authorities are responsible for upper secondary education and training.

professionals where necessary. However, the range of needs would make that challenging to overcome.

One person asked where the evidence base is on what works best; another emphasised the need to identify why there is an attainment gap in the first place.

One person commented that insight, the benchmarking tool, is flawed, because it is too narrowly focused and fails to include a range of possible achievements.

General Teaching Council for Scotland

One person highlighted that there are about 2,000 registered CLD workers compared with about 70,000 registered teachers. CLD workers fear being marginalised in the proposed education workforce council, and lumped together with those had no understanding of their role. Although they welcome the new council, they have concerns that their distinct professional identities might be lost. The challenge would be to ensure that a spectrum of professionals with wide-ranging views are represented fairly and effectively. Another view was that the CLD profession might be negatively affected by being seen to be part of the Government system.

Case studies cited at meeting

The Calderglen high school befriending initiative was cited as an excellent example of what can be achieved through intergenerational activities in the community, with benefits to both pupils and older people. The high school also runs a dementia group. It was stated that the group costs nothing, but was simply an add-on run by the school³.

A representative of Generations Working Together described the intergenerational practice that they are involved in and the initiatives that they run in Perth and Kinross and Glasgow. Two schools are involved, and there is a paid-for co-ordinator. In Perth, for example, an older volunteer has been working with younger pupils to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy. The person highlighted the positive impact of the activities and the wider benefits to expanding the practice. The organisation's website has [further case studies](#) that may be of interest.)

[WAVE's 70/30 campaign](#) aims to reduce childhood abuse, neglect and those living with domestic violence by 70 per cent by 2030.

³ Motions were lodged by Margaret Mitchell on the befriending initiative in 2014 and Linda Fabiani on the dementia group in 2015.)