Northern Ireland Assembly

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COMMITTEE
FOR EDUCATION

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

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Successful Post-Primary Schools Serving Disadvantaged Communities

23 February 2011

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Successful Post-Primary Schools Serving Disadvantaged Communities

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:
Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Mary Bradley
Mr Jonathan Craig
Mr Trevor Lunn
Mr Basil McCrea
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mrs Michelle O'Neill

Witnesses:
Mr David Cargo)
Mr Shane McCurdy)
Mr Barry Mulholland)   Association of Education and Library Boards Chief Executives
Mr Tony Murphy)
Mr Stanton Sloan)

The Chairperson (Mr Storey):

We will move on to our inquiry on successful post-primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. This session is being recorded for Hansard, so I welcome a member of Hansard staff. I also welcome to the Committee the five chief executives of the education and library

boards.

Our inquiry evidence session today is with the association of chief executives. Members' tabled papers contain the submissions and responses to the inquiry that the Committee has received to date. When I open the Floor later for members' questions, they may wish to bear those submissions in mind, as well as the draft listing of emerging themes.

I welcome David Cargo, Barry Mulholland, Tony Murphy, Stanton Sloan and Shane McCurdy. I am glad that you are here and that you are in agreement with each other. We are delighted that you have taken the time to make it up the steep hill. David, are you the chairperson of the group? Will you introduce your colleagues?

Mr David Cargo (Association of Education and Library Boards Chief Executives): As I always say, I am the chairperson by default; I think that that has something to do with age. I thank the Committee for inviting us to give evidence. We understand the vagaries and intricacies of the Assembly voting system, so we will be prepared if members leave us at various stages or if they have to go to make speeches in the Chamber on the Justice Bill.

The Committee's inquiry is into successful post-primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. Members will hopefully have received a fairly detailed response from each of the education and library boards. Rather than appear as five separate organisations and wax lyrical about each of our areas, we are happy to talk about any of the details of each of our responses. We have put together a paper for members in which we have tried to draw out the common themes that have been included in all our responses.

I should say at the outset that there is nothing surprising in our paper. The comments that we articulated in our individual submissions and in this response reinforce much of the research that the Committee has undertaken and, hopefully, many of the issues that members have heard on their travels, far and wide, when talking to a number of post-primary schools. We also included in the paper a number of conclusions and recommendations that have been drawn from our research and from our individual papers.

Like every good presentation, ours should contain a number of high-level themes to leave with the Committee, but, at the outset, it should try to give a proper context for the discussion. The first theme is that, successful schools, as articulated in a school improvement policy, are not necessarily the same as a scenario where there are high-achieving pupils from disadvantaged areas.

I could, perhaps, expand that a little by saying that, if the starting policy base is trying to ensure that there are successful schools, a slightly different system may be developed than if the starting point is trying to ensure that all children from disadvantaged areas have the optimum opportunities to achieve their maximum potential. Those are not necessarily one and the same. That is an important issue to remember, especially when we consider some of the exemplars that the Committee has looked at. Some schools are doing outstanding work in quite difficult situations. Perhaps the measures that are used to deem schools as successful or otherwise do not necessarily take into account fully the issues that relate to the pupils as individuals. That is an important issue. There is a danger that we could end up with a monochrome version of education and successful schooling, and we hope that the Committee will bear that in mind in its deliberations.

The second issue is the impact of school improvement on underachievement. Most research highlights that somewhere around 14% of the incidence of low educational achievement can be attributed to poor school quality. Although it is a demand and aspiration of us all to ensure that schools are of the highest quality, that point has to be remembered in the context of tackling low achievement. That is only one of a number of factors that must be taken into account if the issue is to be dealt with. Percentages may not necessarily be the major factor to consider.

The third issue is the question of what constitutes a successful school. Although the way that we currently measure success through five GCSE A to C grades may fit many children and be a suitable indicator for the sector, it may not necessarily be the most appropriate, especially for some children who come from the most disadvantaged and deprived areas.

Finally, I hope that, on its travels, the Committee is coming to the conclusion that one size does not fit all. What may work in east Belfast may not necessarily work in Derry or Fermanagh.

Therefore, there is a rich variety of approaches to the resolution of problems. Although there are common themes, the way in which those are played out in the context in which the children exist is, obviously, an important aspect of any inquiry or any attempt to draw conclusions from that inquiry.

Therefore, having made those introductory comments, I will ask my colleagues to take each area that is in the papers and make a few comments about them. After that I will, perhaps, say a few words about conclusions and recommendations before we attempt to answer members' questions.

Mr Barry Mulholland (Association of Education and Library Boards Chief Executives): School leadership is one of the key factors in bringing about better outcomes for pupils in schools is, so I will focus on that. It is present in all the research, and it is in all the responses that were forwarded to the Committee. It is also in the Northern Ireland Assembly's Research and Library Service's research paper, number 601. It has been identified that that factor is second only to classroom teaching in its impact on pupil outcomes.

Looking at all the research and the analysis that the boards have carried out, the following characteristics have been identified as significant for schools that serve disadvantaged communities. Those characteristics are set out in the short paper that members have been provided with. They include leadership in the school at senior level and how it should have the ability to create a vision for the future direction of the school and be able to inspire those who work in the school, whether they are teaching or non-teaching staff. School leaders should also have the ability to create structures that are flexible to pupils who present with challenging behaviour. There is a raft of leadership issues for staff, such as making them feel supported, being able to develop trust among staff, demonstrating empathy with pupils and families, and demonstrating that the school has high expectations for the delivery of education and outcomes for children. School leadership is also about demonstrating a belief and determination that schools can really make a difference to pupil outcomes.

If we look at leadership, we can see that it has tended to focus on those at the top. As the research indicates, there needs to be a willingness to distribute leadership down through the

organisation and to have high expectations at different levels. The leadership, and leadership characteristics, of the staff is extremely significant to how a school operates. Therefore, the ability to distribute leadership in the organisation is important. There should also be a commitment to the provision of continuous professional development for staff in the school, with a focus on leadership.

I will make one final point about leadership. It is fine getting all those characteristics in people in a school, but the crucial point is to recruit people with those characteristics into the school to ensure that the right person at the right time is brought in. Whenever we talk about leadership, we are not just talking about staff. Boards of governors must also have the necessary vision, expectations and aspirations, and they must work very closely with the senior management team in the school. Therefore, I am highlighting the importance of leadership in bringing about positive outcomes for pupils in disadvantaged communities. It has a more significant impact on schools that operate in disadvantaged areas.

Mr Tony Murphy (Association of Education and Library Boards Chief Executives): Good afternoon, Chairperson and members. I will address the issue of school engagement with parents and the wider community. It is a fact, and we all know that no school can work in isolation from its local community. Assembly and other research shows how vital real engagement with the community is in disadvantaged areas. We can see that in our schools, and we see the success that has come out of schools' working with the community and having close links with its.

The key point is that those links need to be tailor-made to a community. I make that point to stress that issues are not necessarily transferable. There will not be a silver bullet that cures all ills. Links need to be custom-made. Schools have developed their own links and methodologies for working with their local communities.

The extended schools programme has been a wonderful example of integration with the community. The opportunities and success that have come out of that for disadvantaged schools are immeasurable, so that should be put down as a marker for the future.

All the statutory voluntary and community-based organised organisations have a contribution to make. The positive aspects of synergy of engagement with all those agencies are immense. It is the same for the involvement of parents and boards of governors, particularly in schools where there is disadvantage. It is vital to make links with parents and to embrace the extended schools programme.

Learning communities are also important. The Southern Education and Library Board gave the example of a specialist school for science that is a member of the area-learning community and that works with all the post-primary schools in the area and with the local further education college. Those are, of course, given contexts for all schools now. However, for disadvantaged schools, the positive aspects of collaboration with the wider community are immense.

Another important element is the extent to which parents value education. If parents are involved in adult education, the message is sent to youngsters that it is valued and that people can see and demonstrate that it is a lifelong experience. Teachers will find that it is infectious to learn and engage with youngsters. Some years ago, I used to read in a library with youngsters, and I know that if someone reads, it becomes infectious. Therefore, engagement in education in the family is of huge value.

Communication with the home and creating links between parents and schools are vital. It is important to make connections and create a synergy where the one on one makes more than the two. It is vital that staff are accessible to parents and the community. Some schools really work at and develop that to a high degree so that it has an impact and is part of the school's success.

There should be a strong link between the formal curriculum and the extended schools provision. Those two things are not different, and, as I said, they are all part of the one thing and can form a lifelong experience.

To round that off, strong community engagement is an essential element at the core of the success in supporting schools in that context, and it is therefore vital that it is part of the process.

Mr Stanton Sloan (Association of Education and Library Boards Chief Executives): Thank you for your invitation. Good afternoon, everybody. I will look specifically at addressing underachievement in disadvantaged communities. I do not intend to go through the key points of our submission, but I will highlight one or two things and pick out a couple of other relevant issues.

Addressing underachievement in disadvantaged communities is not a matter for just the Department of Education. I believe that the Department for Employment and Learning, for example, can play a significant role. There are high levels of unemployment in disadvantaged communities, so the currency of education, which a person can cash in to get a job, is lost. That means that there is no impetus and no clear path to link education and employment. Therefore, the issue is about much more than just education.

This matter is about not just the home learning environments but the whole community. The school, the home, the community and statutory and voluntary agencies have a role to play to get together and recognise that education does not start when pupils walk through the school gates and finish when they walk out of them; it is 24 hours a day. We all have roles and responsibilities. That becomes particularly relevant in the areas of special educational needs and looked-after children. Those areas are particularly important to us.

When we talk about raising aspirations, we are talking about doing so on a number of levels. We want to raise the aspirations of the young people themselves so that they have high expectations of themselves. That relates back to the appropriateness of the curriculum and to leadership, which Barry talked about. Raising aspirations is also about encouraging parents to have high aspirations for their children, which goes back to employment and life chances and showing how that is all linked. It is also about making sure that the teaching and non-teaching workforce in the school is totally engaged and expects high performances from pupils.

It is also about education and library boards, other support bodies and departments having high but realistic expectations. In that context, David touched on another issue in our schools, which is adding value to schools. He said that one size does not fit all. Judging all schools by the number of children who get five A* to C at GCSE level means that they are all equal. However, I

can quote a school in my board that would not have attained that level. However, if we were look at where the young people started in year 8 and where they finished in year 15, we could see that that school added value that was more than just academic value. It was concerned with social and personal, as well as interpersonal, skills development.

There is a significant issue with boys, and I put part of that down to the lack of male role models in the primary sector in particular. In that sector, a male in the school is either the caretaker or the principal. Without wanting to demean caretakers, it is a case of being at one end or the other, and those in between tend to be female. My wife is in a school where the only male is the caretaker. She relates that there is no male role model for learning in the school.

With young people, and young boys in particular, early intervention is important, especially in key skills such as literacy and numeracy. I include interpersonal and ICT skills in that. If people do ICT without including interpersonal skills, they can lose an awful lot of the social interaction that, I believe, is part of the process of becoming mature. I will pose a question to the Committee, which goes back to what David said about the appropriateness of the curriculum and the one-size-fits-all approach. For a boy or girl who is going into secondary school and has a reading age of eight or nine, should we be saying to them that they should be doing French, history, geography and a range of subjects? Alternatively, should we say that their main focus should be on getting their language and mathematical skills, but primarily their language skills, up to a level that makes them a fully functioning member of our society before doing other subjects? If we are serious about raising literacy levels, we should look at that.

The issue, above all else, is to engage the children. It is about showing them and their parents the value of literacy and numeracy while recognising the pastoral dimension. It is also about everyone accepting that they have a major role to play in this area. I include in that not just the Department of Education, the Education Committee, the education and library boards, but the whole of society.

My final point aims to lay to rest the misapprehension that disadvantage is to be found in only one particular group. I noticed the quotation that mentioned those from higher and lower income groups. I am saying that some schools in my board are noticing that problems are beginning in

children both of whose parents have to work. They are being disadvantaged in a different way, but they are still disadvantaged. Therefore, it does not happen in just one group.

Mr Shane McCurdy (Association of Education and Library Boards Chief Executives): Thank you for the invitation.

I will be looking at the broad policy context and will focus on Every School a Good School (ESAGS) in the Department of Education improvement policies. In all this, I am very cognisant that policies take a very broad approach to and have a broad impact on the education community. When we think of that in the context of Every School a Good School, the point is to try to use factors that are of a common standard in judging the success, or otherwise, of individual schools. As we heard, schools are individual places with individual pupils, and what may or may not be attainable relates to the individuals in those schools.

Although the policy context sets a means for an evaluation, we need to be very conscious of what we are trying to measure through that policy and how we are trying to assess it. Stanton made the case about looking at the abilities of individual children and what we are trying to achieve for them through the curriculum. That also applies when we are assessing the success or otherwise of a school.

Data have to be reliable, valid and robust. Conclusions need to be drawn about what is actually happening in those schools. The ESAGS policy has certainly drawn attention to issues where there has been deemed to have been a failing on the part of a school. For example, there may have been a need to intervene in the teaching and processing practices that operate in a school. Perhaps, and possibly more so, it is a case of learning to identify at an early stage, and before we have reached the intervention stage, the factors in a school that are not as they should be. We should also learn to identify the support mechanisms that can be put in place to assist the school to address those issues before it gets into significant difficulties.

In all that, the point is to promulgate good practice. Schools that exist in their own circumstances do not necessarily have the opportunity to see good practice in other schools. There is a clear focus on trying to facilitate a mechanism whereby schools can see what is

happening in other schools of like characteristics so that they can see what is successful and how they can then learn from that and take it back for their own school development planning process. That creates an opportunity for capacity building for the personnel in the school, including the principal, other senior teachers and teachers generally.

Through that process, there is an element of self-evaluation. Schools and teachers know specifically what outcomes they are trying to bring about for their children, and they can develop and tailor strategies for those children to bring that about. Key in all this is trying to assess, as Stanton said, what added value we are trying to achieve and how we define a successful school if "success" relates specifically to the successes of an individual child. In a policy context, although not decrying the policy's intent, the point is about how we tailor that to the individual child in the school and to the particular circumstances that exist.

Mr Cargo:
In conclusion, we have given the Committee a flavour of what it knows are some of the key elements of the issue. Perhaps I can throw in another comment. As we reach the end of an Assembly mandate, and as members reflect on the success or otherwise of the past four years, in the context —

The Chairperson:
Do you have a stamp?

Mr Cargo:
Yes, we are going to mark you. Obviously, the current mandate has a Programme for Government, which, quite properly, sets the economy as an important priority for us as a society moving forward. Everyone is clear about education's role in that policy, which is that a successful education system is important in helping us in the twenty-first century. In that context, a number of policies have been debated.

I think that there is an issue to consider as we go forward into the next mandate. The Department of Education has a clear and properly held view of the important roles that schools play. There is a danger that the Department could become the Department for schools, because

that is quite a safe place to be. If the success of an education system is measured through the success of its schools, the vast majority of children will fit into that approach. We are suggesting that the Department must always strive to be the Department for children, especially in the context of children in disadvantaged communities. That is a slightly different issue.

In going forward in our day-to-day work, one of the challenges for the Assembly, and certainly for us, is how to give policy resource and operational effectiveness to a Department that looks after children, as opposed to one that manages schools.

The Chairperson:
Thank you very much David. That ties in with the conclusion in your submission, which states that:

"The funding formula for schools should be reassessed to reflect more accurately the specific needs of children."

Mr Cargo:
Yes.

The Chairperson:
I suppose you would argue that it is possible that the local management of schools (LMS) funding formula is tailored more towards schools than to children. The worry and fear when starting to look at a new or an amended formula is always that it may become so detailed and complicated that only accountants can understand and work it out. I mean no disrespect to any accountants who may be present; Shane knows that I hold them in the highest regard.
There is no doubt that that is an issue.

One issue has come up repeatedly both during this inquiry and since the Committee came into existence. We often hear about a list of characteristics that define a good school. One such characteristic, which everybody talks about, is effective leadership. Two schools, which I will not name, come to mind. They both sit in socially challenging areas, but they are in different parts of Northern Ireland. In one, things have gone immensely well; however, in the other, and according to the comments of one teacher to whom I spoke, if behaviour continues at its current

level, the staff will soon have to bring in the police. Both schools face the same challenges and have similar characteristics, including social background, opposition to authority and so on. It seems that something dramatic must have happened to make that one school successful. However, the success of that school cannot be transposed on to the other school. I know staff in the other school, and they have leadership qualities and have endeavoured to do what they can, but they just cannot get over the bar. What, specifically, will it take to deal with that school? In addressing a point about Every School a Good School, Shane McCurdy talked about establishing a standard added-value measure. If you were given the challenge of going into the underachieving school, how would you deal with it?

Mr Cargo:
The point that we are trying to make is that, given the complexity of the issues with which we are dealing, coming at the problem purely from a school perspective is the wrong place to start. My experience from working in Belfast is that four key factors interplay in many disadvantaged areas. Those are health inequalities, educational underachievement, community capacity, or, in other words, asking who the role models and leaders in the community are, and the last factor is economic regeneration. Our experience in Belfast is that some of the issues that we mentioned can start to be addressed. However, much less will be achieved by simply focusing on the school unless, and at the same time, partners are addressing health inequalities, others are creating greater capacity for society to help itself and there are jobs at the end of the process.

As I said, the incidence of low achievement in poor school quality contributes about 14% of the total solution. That means that the wider problems have to be tackled. Over the years, the education and library boards have learned that things can be done in a school to bring about change, but unless those changes are allied to wider changes in the community, the problem will not be sorted out and no meaningful impact will be made. To build a successful secondary school, as our paper says, intervention has to start at pre-school level. The issue is to start growing people early, because trying to sort out a child's problems at the age of 11 or 12 is almost impossible. Although that might be the age at which to break in, things will not be sorted out from there.

Therefore, a much more holistic approach has to be taken. That is why I said that we need a

Department for children. For example, in our most deprived areas, the Department of Education works closely with the Health Department to tackle family issues. That integrated approach tries to build services around families, because, as we have found, many elements of disadvantage are linked to other factors. It is not just about educational underachievement; a whole raft of other things have to be tackled at the same time. Unless the structures are in place to tackle them holistically, the necessary impact on the child will not be made, and the child will have increased barriers to learning that will shape their ability to be an effective learner.

Miss McIlveen:

I apologise, because I am going to have to leave soon. Mr Cargo, my question is on a point that you made about the Health Department and on an issue that Stanton mentioned about looked-after children. A couple of weeks ago, when the Minister of Education made a statement on a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council, she mentioned that the Department was going to start a review that would look into the non-attendance at school of looked-after children. Do you have any statistics that back up where the problem with those children lies?

Mr Sloan:

We have those statistics, which are quite far-reaching. As David said, the issues concerned are not just about the child's education. David talked about a Department for children. When the Assembly was being set up and we were working out the number of Departments, I remember saying to a politician that instead of having a Department of Education, there should be a Department of children's affairs. There is not enough integration between the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Education and a whole range of other Departments, including the Department of Justice, which comes into it massively. It is about having that sort of view going forward.

You probably heard on the radio this morning about the new facility at Forestside for looked-after children who are in need of intensive care. However, I think that we are still putting as many as 200 children who have mental health problems in adult wards. There is a phenomenal need to address those issues, because that number is increasing. We can certainly provide some information on that. If you come to the board, we will put that together for you.

Miss McIlveen:

Do you have statistics on their level of attainment?

Mr Sloan:

Again, we could provide those, but we do not want to end up defining attainment in a very narrow sense.

Miss McIlveen:

I understand that you cannot take that in isolation either, because of the number of —

Mr Sloan:

For some children, even just improving their attendance rate is a major feat. I am actually involved in a situation at the moment where we have managed to get a particular young person in, which is an absolutely phenomenal success in itself, and now they are now starting to learn. However, we are not teaching that individual any academic subjects. Believe it or not, their real interest is in woodwork, and they are coming to school because we have built that in for them. If the Committee wants, we could look at range of methods for measuring achievement that could, in fact, help the Department.

Miss McIlveen:

I think that that would be very useful.

The Chairperson:

I agree. We have heard this question asked repeatedly, but how is added value packaged, measured, defined and described? There is so much added value out there, but, because a school may not fall within the definition of success, which is five GCSEs A* to C grades, it is not put on a sheet of paper as being successful. This is a societal issue about how we accept certain things and about how we deem certain individuals to be successful. The example you gave was a good way to show the clear benefits of added value for a young person. However, we must ensure that that translates well in society, so that when that person goes for a job, the employer recognises that, although they might not have the accepted criteria of success, they might still be a star worker.

Miss McIlveen:

There is clearly a crossover with other Departments, particularly where looked-after children are concerned. What are those relationships like?

Mr Cargo:

All relationships depend on people, and these relationships depend on whether on-the-ground synergies can be achieved. When the former North and West Belfast Trust existed, we put in a huge amount of work at local level and on the ground between social workers, psychologists, education welfare officers and teachers to try to promote sharing mechanisms. I think that the key is to build bottom-up and on-the-ground arrangements that are based around children, as opposed to those that are top-down. Schools are important in the sense that they have a captive audience. As members saw with schools such as the Girls' Model, if we can get the services for schools, which is where the captive audience is, we can start to address those wider issues. We have to say that that works incredibly well in some areas, but it is patchy in others. If the relationship with the people from the various agencies is right, and if they can see a shared interest in an outcome for families and children, the process begins to work quite well. That is the key issue. We sometimes fall down in translating it up to policy and resourcing level, which still comes down the silos.

Mr Sloan:

I have written to the permanent secretary about the issue, and I understand that an interdepartmental working group, which brought together education and health issues, worked on it. I want to build on what David said. We need co-operation at a strategic level, because, although boards are being encouraged to come together to co-ordinate and converge services and to have a common approach across the whole of Northern Ireland, I do not see the same thing happening with health issues. If work is done across two health boards, which is what the South Eastern Education and Library Board does, there will be some disparity. As David said, we work well with the health sector on the ground, but I think that more could be done at the policy level.

Mr Cargo:

The Joseph Rowntree Trust did a very good piece of work in England and Wales on added value

indicators, because the same issue came up under the Blair Government. The five-GCSE standard was focused on, but then there was a sudden plateau. How do we get the schools that are always going to be deemed to be unsuccessful in that scenario? What are the added value measures? Rowntree did some good work in the English system, which, I think, we could benefit from if we going to continue to look at school improvement.

Miss McIlveen:

Do you have formal links with the voluntary and community sectors?

Mr Cargo:

We have an integrated services approach in Belfast. We got additional resources through the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), and we have community, statutory and voluntary integrated services. The community sector leads it. It has people who identify families who are at risk and in need, and the statutory, voluntary and community services work together with a lead worker to try to put a raft of packages around the individuals. Through those packages, they move the individuals from the situation they are in to where they need to go. That has a positive impact in education and in many of the other issues that the health sector is dealing with. That is the practical way that we have been doing it in Belfast. It is an important pilot, and a lot is to be learned. The approach could be replicated in other places. It works well, because the voluntary sector is an integral player in that scenario.

Mr Sloan:

We all have similar examples, but I want to draw the Committee's attention to the pre-school education expansion programme, in which every board has a committee. It is not a board committee, but the board established it to look at the programme of expanding pre-school education. It involves community, statutory and voluntary nurseries, and strategic direction has been given. I think that that has been one of the most successful initiatives to come out of the Department in recent years. It is a key factor in addressing the area of underachievement. Therefore, there are examples of strategies that work, but there are things to build on.

Miss McIlveen:

That goes through to your recommendation about having a clear strategy for early years

provision.

Mr Sloan:

Yes.

Miss McIlveen:

Thank you. I apologise for having to run off.

Mr Mulholland:

I want to add an important caveat to the points that I made about leadership. Without doubt, leadership is crucial. Next to classroom teaching, it is the most important aspect of the process. However, I would be concerned if the quality of leadership in a school were measured or assessed on the basis of pupils' getting five GCSEs. I have schools where the quality of leadership is excellent. However, they may not be hitting what would be regarded as high returns in the form of five GCSEs. A raft of factors impacts on that.

For instance, in one area, over 60% of the young people who come out of the feeder primary schools go to a grammar school, meaning that only 40% go to the local high school. The capacity of that school to hit high levels of returns with five GCSEs is somewhat limited, but the quality of leadership in that school is such that individual pupils are achieving, and those achievements can be tracked. That is at a fairly high level. It is a more complex issue than equating good leadership to excellent results in schools and thinking that schools that have difficulty with attainment levels must have poor leadership. It is not as simple as that.

The Chairperson:

In this case, it is right to name a school on your patch Barry. That school is Drumragh College, and we saw it last week. We saw an example of the way that that school approaches the problem. It has a dedicated member of staff, not a teacher, who is tasked with going out into the community and who is the link between the family, the statutory agencies and the school. In that school's experience, that approach has been useful and worthwhile.

Last week, we heard from a school that has a whole-day assessment process for selection of a

teacher. That involves a number of interviews, observing the candidate teaching the class and looking at how they interact informally with pupils. Given the important role of the principal in creating and maintaining a successful school, is the current process for selecting our teachers the correct one? One of the chief executives will know of a school, which I will not name, at which issues have been ongoing for six or seven years because of a dispute about a principal. The numbers at that school went from around 160 to 70. There are all sorts of reasons why that happened, but the school suffered.

I think that those two elements of the system need a radical change. What needs to be changed so that we can effectively and efficiently deal with the problem, with the result that it does not impact on the school or hinder the rights of the individual? It is not that we are trying to take rights away from individual teachers, but it is a scandal that the dispute has been ongoing, and the public perception is such that parents do not want to send their children to that school. During the time that that process was going on, numbers kept falling.

Not every candidate at an interview is the right teacher for the school in question, so is the selection process right? Secondly, are the processes and systems adequate to deal effectively and efficiently with a problem that may arise? Those two elements have adverse effects on the good governance and good running of a school.

Mr Cargo:
There are two differing processes. If we take leadership in the distributed sense that Barry talked about, we all agree from a professional point of view that no one would choose to buy a player for Manchester United without having seen him play.

Mrs M Bradley:
They are all good players. You could buy them anyway.

The Chairperson:
Crewe United gave them a bit of a run for their money on Saturday.

Mr Cargo:

Teachers should not be appointed until their teaching has been seen. There are elements in our system where we have encouraged —

The Chairperson:

It is not normal practice.

Mr Cargo:

No, I agree, and there is a volume issue.

The Chairperson:

There is a whole dispute about the matter.

Mr Cargo:

From a professional development point of view, we see it as a good practice that needs to be explored and developed. If I return to leadership, we all have the experience that there is no such thing as an infallible system, but, if the system gets the appointment wrong, the legacy of that decision can be with a community and a school for a long time.

There are a number of ways to select a principal. Compared with some countries, we have an unusual system. In the main, we allow boards of governors in the controlled sector to choose first. They then give the education board a list of people, from which it should choose one. The board's view, at officer level, is that it could be done the other way round. People could be interviewed, we would then give a board of governors a pool of people that we think would be competent leaders, and we would tell them to choose who they wish from that pool. That is another way of doing it.

I know that in some American states, all leaders are appointed to the authority, which then moves them around. There is a range of ways of doing it, and no one way guarantees success. However, we would all totally agree that, whatever the system, the implications of getting it wrong could be damaging for the school over a long period. In many cases, other than getting a new school, appointing a principal is the largest single investment that a school will ever make.

The consequences of getting that wrong can have major impacts on children, the community and the school.

Mr Sloan:

I was out in America, and what appealed to me greatly about the system there is the divergence in pathways. People train to be principals, but they are principal teachers. They are able to focus on what their job is about, which is teaching. All too frequently, I meet so many of our principals who say that they spend 98% of their time on HR and finance.

There is also a third level to consider. It is not just about principals and teachers. It is also about the selection of young people who will train to become teachers. Three A grades are needed to get in to train as teachers. To use David's analogy, Manchester United would not sign a player on the basis of three pictures. Those players would need to be seen, because other qualities will also be sought. Therefore, there needs to be a reappraisal of what an individual needs to become a good teacher. At school, I was taught by a number of gentlemen who had PhDs. I have to tell you that I do not recall any one of them making an impression on me. The people who connected with me as a young person and as an individual, and who could inspire, encourage and develop me, had a level of intelligence and intellect. However, there are so many other skills that have perhaps been forgotten about.

Mr McCurdy:

In our current teaching cohort, we have newly qualified teachers who are young, enthusiastic and recently out of college, where they were imbibed with all the current teaching processes. At the other extreme, we have teachers who are coming to the end of their teaching career. There is a key challenge for successful schools. Schools and teachers need to have a belief that they could have an influence that could bring about change. Teachers who have been in a school for 10 or 20 years but have not seen any impact or change for the better, although they may have seen a change for the worse, sometimes feel defeated by what lies ahead. They may no longer have a belief in being able to bring about change or have an impact. There is a hearts and minds issue in how that belief is instilled in teachers, whether it is through leadership, new teachers coming into the school or whatever.

You mentioned two schools, one of which you would say, I am quite sure, has been successful in what it has achieved. The other is still where it was x number of years ago and has not moved forward. Therefore, the issue is about trying to package what has worked and then to translate that into another circumstance. We do not have a mechanism to promote successful strands as case studies for other schools, because that could take away the successful dimension. No school should be wholly dependent on one individual, but, at the same time, capacity has to be created to allow that to be fed in to the system.

Mr Craig:
Thanks, Mervyn. That is the second time that you have stolen my question.

There is an even more critical issue. Let us be honest about this, because all of you will have experienced this. When it goes wrong, and it does go wrong — Stanton is sick talking to me about that — why is there no mechanism available to deal with ineffective leadership?

Mr Cargo:
I do not necessarily agree. There are mechanisms, but they have to be subtle. Under the legislation, the board of governors is the employer. We are the employing authority and, under the legislation, may go into a school only by invitation. Neither I nor any of my colleagues have ever been refused entry, but the legislation permits schools to do that. Therefore, we have to work in a way that moves the situation on while respecting the individual's rights.

Our current system's strengths include local communities taking responsibility for their schools. The deficiency is that you have to work through a board of governors to effect change. Since many of those individuals live in the local community, they are not necessarily the best or the most detached people to become involved in processes that can sometimes be challenging and may require governors to take difficult decisions. I can think of a significant number of cases over the years where we have effected change in the leadership of a school, but we have done so in a way that was not always explicit.

Mr Craig:
In other words, you have to go around and about and through the back door to get rid of an

ineffective leader. I have experience of that, which is why I say that there is no genuine mechanism for the removal of ineffective leadership in schools. There is no effective way of doing it. Why is the leadership of schools the only position in the world that is all carrot, carrot, carrot and no stick?

Mr Lunn:
The Civil Service.

Mr Cargo:
There is an effective way of doing it, but it may not be explicit.

The Chairperson:
I declare an interest as a governor of two schools. In this day and age, we must qualify almost everything we say to be politically correct, but without casting any aspersions on individuals, if a board of governors has the principal as the secretary and the chairperson, and if that relationship is strong, most things will be done and dusted. If it is weak, the whole thing will disintegrate.

There may be a case for looking at how we constitute boards of governors. If the Department has any input, maybe it should focus on that in an effort to get some sense of independence. David is right. Local communities accuse public representatives of never making a decision to close anything. Equally, a local board of school governors sitting around a table will in most cases find it challenging to deal with a particular issue of leadership in their school. We have all had conversations about the leadership in some schools. We believe that we have the issue resolved, only for something to happen and the whole thing goes pear-shaped. It is not a matter of the mechanism being subtle; it must be defined well enough for people to know how to use it and be capable of using it when a problem arises.

Mrs M Bradley:
It is good to see you all again. I am particularly glad to see the two boys from the Western Board.

The Chairperson:
Mary would not be parochial or anything. She used to have only one boy, now she has two.

Mrs M Bradley:

I agree with most of the things that you are saying, and I definitely agree that the health and education systems are not working together. By the way, I declare an interest as a governor of a school. Any of us could go into a school in our area, and we would all come out with the same complaints, because every area is similar. Boards of governors and principals have to have good working relationships. That is very important. Boards of governors should know where there should be space between them and the principals in order to run a good school.

The other thing that concerns me is that so many children are sitting in our schools at the minute — we talk about early years learning, early years this and early years that, but so many of them are sitting there and the one basic thing that a lot of them have not got is proper speech. They need speech therapy. I can give an example of one classroom in which there are 13 children, and they all need speech therapy, but it is very scarce. I do not know how we can improve that, because it is a health and education situation. That is where we should be working together more closely with the health system.

The other thing that some areas have is Sure Start programmes. I would like to know your opinion on those programmes. I think that they are very good. They could work more closely with schools. A lot of schools have empty classrooms, and Sure Start programmes should operate out of those schools. They would benefit the schools, because they have access to health things that schools do not, and that could be helpful. I would like your opinion on that.

Mr Cargo:

Would you like a response from the head of the Southern Board? *[Laughter.]*

Mrs M Bradley:

No, I am not biased at all.

Mr Sloan:

I agree with you about Sure Start. It is a very good, effective programme, and it is part of the continuum. There should be Sure Start, preschool, nursery school, primary school and all the

way through. We have a number of areas where Sure Start is based in schools. However, there are some difficulties about the whole issue of community use of schools and people going in and out with children.

I could not agree with you more about speech therapy. However, to some extent, it is like educational psychologists, who are also in short supply. There is work that speech therapists and educational psychologists do that could be done by other people. That would allow them to focus on the sharp end of provision. For instance, we have more or less completed an initiative in an area in our board which I will not name, where we focused on upskilling teachers and classroom assistants in schools to carry on the work of speech therapists. They carried on the routines that they needed to do when the speech therapist was there, and it was built upon. That has proved to be exceedingly successful. When there is a commitment to come together and work, the synergy is there, and the potential is unbelievable. I agree with you.

Mrs M Bradley:
The other thing that I want to mention is that Sure Start programmes now also have a programme for fathers. When working with single parents, sometimes the daddy is the single parent and sometimes it is the mammy. The fathers would always have stood off the schools more than the mammies would; it was easier to get them into the schools to work closely with the teachers than it was to get the daddies in, but the Sure Start programme helps to bring them into the schools. There is a way of working there, but the health trusts definitely need to work more closely with the schools. For other problems that are there — David mentioned some of them — they can come into schools with behaviour and different things, and you do need them at those stages.

Mr Sloan:
The initiative that I was telling you about is a programme called Incredible Years. We pilot it, and it is about skilling parents to deal with children who present with challenging behaviours. Interestingly, with one exception, it was always the mother who attended. One grandfather came along. The success rate of that in addressing the issues that children will have in later life is somewhere in the order of 60% to 70%. You can actually prevent them from going down there.

There are initiatives out there. It is about looking at underachievement in a community, and

there is a role for parents. As an aside, some of the ladies who went to the course said that it was brilliant for the likes of anger management, because they used it very effectively on their husbands. There are things that can be done, if we come together and work together.

Mr Lunn:

Can you help me with this standard value added measure? I do not really follow it. What kind of a measure do you have in mind? Was it you who mentioned it, Shane?

Mr McCurdy:

The academic focus that we have at the moment does not give recognition to the breadth of other skills that individual children can achieve. We can look at it from the point of view of discipline, which was referred to in Mervyn's illustration. The fact that the school could turn around the situation in those circumstances is added value for the school, and it creates a better learning environment for the children to be developed in. It is about trying to recognise that things like Every School a Good School do not give recognition to that. The vocational issue and the entitlement framework that we have now, as well as the broadening of the curriculum to ensure that children have a breadth of developmental opportunities, are about trying to give recognition not just to pure academia, but to the vocational skills. I suppose it is about what society wants to be produced from the education system. It is not just about five good GCSEs, grades A to C.

Mr Lunn:

A school that offers the Duke of Edinburgh award course or participation in the school orchestra would be a good example.

Mr McCurdy:

All of those are good examples. It is about the development of the whole child. It is about enabling children to function in society and to meet the requirements of employers. A child who goes into the workforce who cannot adequately read but has been exposed to a whole spectrum of academic development in terms of languages and such things, if they are not focused, as Stanton said, on English, all the other aspects of extending the curriculum to them are laudable in themselves, but actually if they have not got the fundamentals of their own language they are going to struggle in terms of taking on board the other aspects. It is about trying to see where the

educational parameters meet the employment requirements.

Mr Cargo:

With regard to the outcomes, there should be a broader focus than five GCSEs. The other issue is the inputs. At the moment, the only indicator that we all have is free school meals. That gives a fairly rough indicator of areas of social deprivation. Many of you who sit on local authorities will know that the super output areas give a more finely grained set of indicators and statistics, which can be applied to the education situation. At the moment, we draw false conclusions from some of the indicators that we have, because we use free school meals. We are saying that two schools with 30% free school meals, for instance, should have the same output. They should not, because you might not be talking about the same type of children. Take an extreme: a factory closes down and lots of people become unemployed. Their children are entitled to free school meals. There are other areas that have a deep-seated history of social deprivation, poverty and all of those indicators. Schools in both those areas may have 30% free school meals, but it is unfair to the children and to the schools to say that those two schools should be performing the same.

A substantial body of work has been done on other parts of these islands to look at some of the other indicators, such as health inequalities, long-term unemployment and the children who are on the child abuse register. From that, you start to weave a more fine-grained approach to the profile of that school. Therefore, you benchmark the starting point when the child appears in the school, and you start to measure performance, year on year, from that benchmark, rather than simply saying that everybody in Key Stage 2 should be at level 4 when they go into year 8 at secondary school. We know that a significant number of children go into post-primary schools who are not there, but, when they enrol at the post-primary school, no recognition is given to where they are starting from. Therefore, there is an outcome and an input, and, if we had that, we would be in a better position to put some meaningful programmes in to tackle some of the issues that present themselves.

Mr Lunn:

In simple terms, how would you do the standard added value measure that you advocate the Department should establish or invent? Maybe you have just told me. Are you talking about a measure that people can look at in preparation for deciding what school they go to?

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Mr Cargo:

Yes. The measure has two elements, Trevor. First, it has a much more clearly fine-grained approach to the profile of the input. The benchmark is when a child appears at P1, and the benchmark is much greater than simply reading age, because, in disadvantaged areas, there are lots of barriers to that learning, and you need to understand what those are. There is an input process where you try to articulate that, and you then put in place a process where you measure on an ongoing basis to show improvement and you tailor programmes to gain improvement. You have an outcome that is perhaps wider than five GCSEs.

For example, I am sure that a number of schools in Belfast said to you that many of their young people are not ready to achieve five GCSEs at 16, but that they could if they were allowed to stay at the school until 17 or 18. At the moment, those schools are measured by the achievement of five GCSEs by 16, but the elements of disadvantage among many of the young people have not been articulated and remediated explicitly so that everyone understands. Nothing is given to the school to say that it has done quite well to get that child to that point at 16 and that, if the young person were to stay on to 18, they would have a fair chance of achieving five GCSEs. It is about taking a much more fine-grained approach than saying simply saying 16, five GCSEs, that is it; you are a success or you are not.

Mr Sloan:

There is a lovely analogy that I use for that: the driving test. You would never think of sitting their driving test until you thought that you had a good chance of passing, yet we totally ignore that.

In terms of squaring the circle, we are talking about schools again, but we need to bring it back down to the child. A well tried and tested procedure is in place already that relates ordinarily to children on the special needs register in a school or who are on a statement. Every year, the school sits down with the parents and the pupil and establishes what the pupil can achieve this year and what the realistic goals are. That adds value, not necessarily to the school, because, unfortunately, that is what we get focused into.

Is the school adding value in a general sense? It is not whether we are adding value to the individual lives of the individual children in the school. Therefore, the annual review, which is part of the statement process and which sets out all of those goals, is perfect. The only thing is that it is resource-intensive, because the teachers need time to do that. We are finding that resources are scarce, and that will probably get worse because of the financial situation, but there are ways of doing it.

There are also predictive measures. You can bring a child in, assess where the child is academically — the Advanced Level Information System and the Year 11 Information System, and they have been used. They can show where the child might be in two or three years, and you can assess how the child did relative to where you thought they would be. It is quite a complicated process, but there are measures and ways of doing it.

Mr Mulholland:
I emphasise the importance to that process of having a good ICT platform in schools to track the progress of individual pupils. I have seen excellent examples of that in Rainey Endowed School and in Holy Family Primary School in Derry. They can track the progress of individual pupils across not just subject areas but the modules within them, showing trends and where support has to be focused to bring about improvement in that individual pupil.

Mr Lunn:
OK. I am glad that you explained it all to me. I think that if I come back here on 7 May, I will join the Agriculture Committee. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Cargo:
The key issue that we are trying to highlight is that, as a service, we are dysfunctional. We have a clear vision for those with special educational needs, and nobody would ever deem it appropriate to measure them through five GCSEs. We think that we have a very robust process that is incredibly positive for those young people.

At the other end of the system there are a lot of very capable young people who, to be honest, will succeed irrespective of what system is put in because all the natural and environmental

advantages are working for them. In the middle there is this grey group, some of whom need to be dealt with in the same way as special educational needs pupils. However, we tend to put them in the system as though they can catch most of the processes that the very able do.

Nobody has worked out how far into that grey group we have to take the approach. In theory, if you have a group of very able people you could sit with a class of 200, and, with little resource, they will succeed. There is an issue about enhancement. Boards and schools continually get caught around that group of children. They know that a little extra resource or doing things differently would impact on those young people, but, because of the constraints of the schooling system, they never get that resource, or they chase it through short-term funding. Therefore, we do a disservice to that group of young people. That is the core of the problem.

Mr Lunn:
Thank you kindly.

The Chairperson:
Are there a variety of methods? We have heard of various methods that schools use to assess children. The new e-schools data is referred to in the submission from the Belfast board. Where are we at in relation to having a system in place that is able to gather and use appropriate information for a variety of those things? I more and more see that two things are linked in that, one of which is the funding formula that we use to determine where money goes. Without the appropriate and accurate information, you will make an absolute hames of allocating the money. The free school meals measure is a blunt instrument; it is not the best. There are others. You mentioned super output areas, David.

Mr Cargo:
That relates to Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency data. We look at wards, and we fine-grain data around communities in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson:
In the Scottish system and in England they are talking about this pupil premium, which is to do with finance.   At times, we have also heard the phrase "pupil passport". If we were to link a

pupil premium and a pupil passport to track a child's qualities, weaknesses or whatever, we would have a better chance of being able to identify early what needed to be put in place to deal with challenges or corrections that needed to be put in place for that child. Are we not coming near to having all of that in place?

The Department is always fearful that the information will be used for other purposes, such as to do that awful thing called transfer and selection. That seems to get trailed into every conversation. Set that aside. It has nothing to do with this. It is not an attempt to justify selection, so it is best to put all that to the side. We need a structure in place that assesses the needs of the child, not the school.

Mr Mulholland:
There are two important things coming to a close in relation to data coming together for schools and the effective use of that data. The eSchools initiative is nearing conclusion — that is the data warehouse that you referred to. That involves all pupil information being put into a data warehouse that schools will then be able to use to address the sorts of issues that David talked about. We have the platform — the hardware and software that will allow schools to use that data effectively.

Again, there is an important process that is going on with the re-procurement of the Classroom 2000 system — the lot 7 contract — which is the electronic network in Northern Ireland. That will be completed within this financial year and will involve the re-procurement of all the hardware and software necessary for the infrastructure in schools.

If you go into schools such as Rainey Endowed, Holy Family and many others, you will see the very effective use of data. As David said, if you go into a classroom in one of those schools, you will be able to see the pupils who are at the weak end and those who are at the high end. However, the leaders of those two schools fear not being able to reach what they refer to as the invisible child in the middle, that grey area. The effective use of data allows them to track the progress of those children and to tailor responses to meet their needs. They can also use data to alert them when a child who should be performing, or who has historically performed, at the high end starts to slip back in a particular area. They then respond to that right away by stretching that

child in order to bring their performance up to what is expected of them. Those things are coming together at the minute. Many schools are effectively using data at this time.

The Chairperson:

I think that St Louise's in west Belfast uses that data extensively, and that has certainly proven very useful in its case.

Mr Mulholland:

The software and hardware is there. Many schools have the capacity to do that now.

The Chairperson:

Is the new eSchools warehouse being driven by one board?

Mr Mulholland:

The Western Education and Library Board has responsibility for leading that on behalf of all five boards.

The Chairperson:

Can you send us a paper on that, just to give us an update?

Mr Mulholland:

I can get an update on eSchools and C2k.

The Chairperson:

That would be very useful.

Mrs M Bradley:

We will help you out.

The Chairperson:

Thanks, Mary.

Mr Cargo:

We have a large number of examples where we have worked and continue to work together. For many years, the Western Board has taken the lead on ICT on behalf of the five boards. We have always worked together on that. That is just a given.

Mr Hilditch:

I have a brief question about school trips. The witnesses from Ashfield Boys' High School told us about their school trip to the World Cup, which was basically paid for through pupil fundraising and various things. I know that the school is continually doing things like that, because my star striker for Carrick Rangers, Nathan McConnell, is a teacher at that school, and I cannot get him on Tuesday nights. He is usually away with some pupils to Old Trafford or another place.

Unfortunately, it worked the other way with me. I will give an example: in around September or October, a 15-year-old boy, who is a young friend of the family, was told that a trip linked to his history course was planned. It was going to cost an enormous amount of money and, because the young fella comes from a single-parent family, he had to be told that it just was not affordable. I have never seen a young fella's head go down so quickly. He actually wanted to give up the subject and do something else. Although the parent was given plenty of notice — about eight or nine months — as they were told in September or October and the trip was not until the following June, there would not have been much change out of £1,000. For a single parent to put away £100 a month just is not on. The school that I am talking about serves three disadvantaged wards of social deprivation. How do we balance this out and not make a hames of it?

Mr Cargo:

That is the point that we are making. A particular esprit de corps has developed around Ashfield Boys' and the use of sport in a very positive and constructive way. It also has a number of very simple mechanisms. For example, every boy in the school reads for 20 minutes first thing in the morning. That may be simple, but it is a simple measure that affects and impacts on literacy. However, if you were to simply take it and transpose it across the river into Tiger's Bay, it would not work. Tiger's Bay is starting from a much lower social base than east Belfast.

There are issues with simply looking at what happens in a school such as Ashfield Boys' and saying that that should be replicated everywhere. That is why dealing with this issue is so complex, David. You may get a positive construct that you deem to be a good way of improving aspirations. However, a construct based on finance will not work in a particular situation where there is extreme poverty. It will actually do what you are saying. Therefore, you have to look at other ways of doing it.

People such as Andy McMorran have been very good at fundraising, getting contributions from local businesses and so on. It is easy for him to do that in his environment, but it would be incredibly difficult in other parts of the city. In some cases, there is basically no local economy in the surrounding area that could support schools in the same way that Andy is able to get support in east Belfast. The fact that it works in one school does not mean that you can say, "That is brilliant. We will do it everywhere." It is not that simple.

Mr Sloan:

There are also steps that we can take. We take consideration of outdoor education centres, for example. A number of schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area generate funds specifically to help people like that. However, the real difficulty lies in disadvantaged communities where the schools are not perceived as high achieving and are only half full. Schools often have to go out to raise money to supplement their delegated budgets just to survive. David spoke about Ashfield Boys'. Ashfield is full, so the issue there is perhaps not about needing so much of that to supplement its delegated budget. However, some schools in our board area are less than half full and will not survive unless they get that money and spend it. That is how they get interactive whiteboards and computers. You have identified a massive issue that needs to be tackled.

Mrs M Bradley:

Do schools that work with the community groups in their areas benefit by raising funds in that way? Some of our schools do. How do you assess schools to ensure that they all work with their communities?

Mr Sloan:

I go out and visit schools, as we all do. I was in one primary school recently that can bank on parents raising £20,000 every year, because it is in an affluent area. Again, it is the whole community-school relationship. In an area of high deprivation, the role that a school plays does not have the same level of esteem that it would elsewhere. Therefore, schools in those areas are not able to raise as much money. The parent-teacher association there may have six parents and will be doing well to raise £1,500 a year. Schools in socially disadvantaged areas endeavour to do it, but they usually have fewer teachers because they have fewer pupils. The teachers are doing more and more and more, and, therefore, their capacity to go out and do all those other things is significantly reduced. It is a vicious circle and a downward spiral that can be got into very readily.

Mr Cargo:

One thing that you may have seen at the Belfast Model School for Girls is its community element. We have actually set up a charitable trust through our private-sector partner to deliver benefit to the community. Income that is generated from the use of the school goes into a community chest, and the community can bid over a period, if it works, for resources to actually enhance its capacity to support the school and its young people much more effectively. There are a number of models that we all have. I am not aware of that one anywhere else. Will it work? Well, it has not been tried anywhere else, to the best of my knowledge. It is, perhaps, worth a try if it begins to say to the community that we value it and that it can use the resource, which will generate an income that, by the way, will find its way back into the community for the benefit of educational projects for children and young people.

Mrs M Bradley:

A school in my area, St Columba's Primary School at New Buildings, is in a big situation with Foyle Search and Rescue. It has a massive job coming up. It is bringing top chefs to the City Hotel for a night. They will get good money. It is good for schools to work with community groups in that way. With times being the way that they are, they need to do that.

Mr Sloan:

Clifton Special School in Bangor is linked with particular ships in the Royal Navy. It puts money

in because the fathers of some children who went to the school serve on those ships.

I think that Trevor would acknowledge that five or six years ago, a school in his constituency, Lisnagarvey High School, was probably facing a very bleak future, but it got the community involved. It is this whole package of things. We appointed a new principal, who got the community in. The school was opened up. It now has a new fitness suite. The school is now on the radar for children in primary schools. Five years ago, it was not. The school is a success story in recruiting children. In around four years, it has quadrupled its intake. It still has the issue of translating that into standards, which it is working on. It is about bringing together the four areas that we all talked about — leadership, Every School a Good School, the community, and all of those sorts of areas — in the right mix. As you have seen in Lisnagarvey High School, a phenomenal change can be made.

Mr Lunn:
Absolutely, Chairman. It has become a school that people want to go to. Five years ago, it was one that you crossed off the list. It has been remarkable.

The Chairperson:
The one thing that needs to be said is that in any proposed future changes with regard to new structures — and we have the five board chiefs with us — it must be ensured that the good practice that we have in different elements of service delivery in each of the board areas is not lost. If there is one note of caution that I would give to you it is that, while we all accept that new governance arrangements will, at some stage, come into play, we need to be very careful not to lose those things that you, as boards, have developed, which, in a sense, have their own particular nuances because of where you are and the way that you have approached it. The way that Tony may have dealt with an issue in his area is completely different to the way that Shane has dealt with it in the North Eastern Education and Library Board. That is not because of two different types of managerial skills, but because the service has been developed to meet the particular needs of the area that the board covers. That worries me immensely. It is all too easy to say that we can do away with this and put this in place. However, that is a caution because I am hearing today from all of you that wee pockets of practice that you engage in and have engaged in have been particularly beneficial to the area that you serve. Fundamentally, children benefit as a result.

Mr B McCrea:

I apologise, gentlemen, for coming in late. It is not for any lack of interest. I have being doing battle over the Justice Bill.

The Chairperson:

You will have 500 lines if it happens again.

Mr B McCrea:

There are a couple of things. You may have covered some of this already, but it seems to me that the debate is about three key issues. One is that leadership in the school is critical. Therefore, we have to find a way of recognising and promoting that. The second thing is the point that Trevor was going on about: how do you measure added value? I know that some principals swear by InCAS, and you can track development on a year-by-year and class-by-class basis. There is a danger of our testing towards InCAS, and that is always the education argument. It seems to me that there ought to be something like that where you could at least talk about resource allocation, or something in those bits. I think that there is a debate about the common funding formula because it does not recognise the challenges in our society. You might be better placed to come up with an effective funding strategy.

The third thing — and I apologise if you have already covered this, but the bit that has come to me of late is the importance of the school being part of the community. Being a good leader is not enough. You can have a good leader in a school, but schooling is only 30% of the educational process. It is about what your peers think, not just your classmates. It seems to me that that needs to be elevated more. It is not just something that should be added on after pupils get their qualifications. I am almost at the stage of saying that the most fundamental reworking that we need to do is how we get schools at the centre of communities.

Mr Sloan:

That is an interesting point about the common funding formula. A number of years ago, we looked at how children with special/additional needs were funded. If a school has a large number of children with special needs, it gets a lot of money, but we do not incentivise success. I do not

include certain categories of children with severe difficulties and physical difficulties in that, but if you can deal with getting children off a register, and incentivise that area, rather than giving money because they are on the register, you start to fund success. Therefore, I think that there are issues in the formula that need to be considered. There are a whole range of other issues.

Mr B McCrea:

I will not go on for too long, because I know that it is late in the day. When you mentioned that you set up a charitable trust, I have to say that I thought "So what?" It is good, and it is a better use of the buildings, but if you are saying to me that the reason why you do those sorts of things is because the capacity in the community is not there to go and do it, but if we do it for them they can get involved and this is a way of doing it, then I can understand it. I just think that there is a communication issue. That is only one example, and I know that you will all have your own examples, but I do not necessarily get why we are trying to do those things.

This is my last comment on this, because I am sure that you have had enough. I remember, a year or two ago, talking in the Committee about the issue of health and about whether we should extend the education remit. However, it was decided that we did not want to do that because there would be unfunded liabilities. However, when you are trying to increase your awareness or acceptability to the community, the mentoring role that some teachers or resources have — I do not know whether they were teachers in Drumragh. Was the lady in Drumragh a teacher?

The Chairperson:

No, she was not a teacher. She was a member of staff.

The Committee Clerk:

She was a social worker.

Mr B McCrea:

I feel that I let myself be talked out of it a couple of years ago, but I am now more into education being the lead authority because you have the buildings and the infrastructure, but you should take responsibility for health or social services because it builds acceptability and support for the school, which is an education objective.

Mr Cargo:

I will not say too much, but I will, perhaps, be slightly controversial. I think that we have wasted the past four years in the education sector on two debates which are largely sterile. One was around transfer, and the other was around the structure of administration. The real debate that we need to have is around children and how to ensure that young people are given an education service that is fit for purpose and enables them to be leaders in the society and global economy that we have in the twenty-first century. If we were having that debate, we would be able to do more positive things.

To be honest, it is irrelevant whether there are none, one, three or 10 boards. The people who are in the current structure will largely remain in the new structure. We would be better talking about the needs of the children in the new structure. If we talked about that, things like transfer, which is a twentieth century issue based on the Education Act 1944, would suddenly find its normal place in the twenty-first century. It is about child-centred education in the real sense, not about schooling.

The Chairperson:

It goes back to the point that Basil missed earlier. You said that we need a Department for children, not a Department of Education. That deals with many of the issues that Basil raised.

Mr Cargo:

We have a Department. I am not critical of it, but it is a fact that it is happy when it is the Department for schools. Sure Start came along, and the Department never really knew how to handle it, because it is not a school. If we had a Department for children, however, it might mean that we would have to tell the Health Department that children's social services are in the new Department, and the Department of Justice that elements of justice are in this new Department. Do we need a Children's Commissioner? The Department for children would be the champion for children. If you look at that, you have a construct that is dynamic and progressive and starts to tackle issues relating to children. That is what needs to be tackled.

We have been forced into some issues over the past four years which have been a waste of

everybody's time. We could get away from them and into the real issue. To survive in the twenty-first century, young people will have to be skilled and equipped with a lifelong learning process that is more than what we have at the moment.

The Chairperson:

As you know, I was never controversial during the four years of this mandate. We had 11 pieces of subordinate legislation and we were looking at the ESA Bill. I wonder how many pieces of subordinate legislation we would have if we were to move to create a Department for children on that model — probably about 444. That is part of our problem. We need legislation to govern how we operate our systems, but we get into a quagmire of the implications that it has in relation to all the elements. There were 11 pieces of legislation relating to changing the existing structures, which are represented by you, into one. That has been a huge issue. What would it be like if we were going to move to a Department for children?

Mrs M Bradley:

Do you feel that that Department should be a separate Department, or should the Education Department be changed to a children's Department?

Mr Cargo:

I would change the Education Department to the Department for children.

Mr Lunn:

You used the word "quagmire". If 444 pieces of subordinate legislation were required, the Assembly would disagree with 400 of them. I would say that 10 mandates would probably sort it out.

Basil mentioned a figure earlier. I do not disagree with it, in case you are wondering, Basil. He said that only 30% of a child's learning experience was provided by a school. Who worked that out? Do you subscribe to that?

Mr Cargo:

There are a number of pieces. There is an educationalist called Alan Dyson who has done a fair

bit of work on the impact of schooling on disadvantage. It is clear from his research and a number of other pieces that schooling plays a minority role in the overall impact on children's learning and development. However, if we get it right, education has the capacity to punch above its weight. I was giving school quality around 14%, so the other influences on children are huge.

Alan Dyson did a significant piece of work on the system in England, and he also came over and worked with the five boards here. However, he says things that do not necessarily accord with the perceived wisdom of the day, which is to go on the standards agenda of five GCSEs, and use that to judge success.

Mr Lunn:

Some of the schools that we have been to are in disadvantaged areas, but punch above their weight. Does that mean that they have a higher than 30% input from the school, or are they managing to get the parents to put more in?

Mr Cargo:

We could all talk about our own boards, but what I see in my area is that those who are most successful in disadvantaged communities look at the issue in a much more holistic and broad way, rather than simply looking at what goes on in the classroom. They have long since recognised that if they focus solely on that they will fail.

Mr Lunn:

Even if those schools manage to encourage the parents to make more of a contribution, that is still effectively a contribution from the school. Should that 30% be slightly higher?

Mr Cargo:

Absolutely.

Mr Sloan:

Although I am not an accountant, I want to deal with the financials. I know of one school where attendance was a major factor, and a parent governor turned round and said that if so-and-so did not attend, to tell him, as he knew his mum and dad. Other parents then began to exercise certain

functions and took on responsibilities. That is a whole new culture.

Returning to what Basil said, we had a situation in which health was based in a school: speech therapy. What we found was that children attended 95% of speech therapy sessions in the school, while another speech therapy session in the local health clinic only had a 17% uptake. The child benefits, but there is also an economy of scale from putting that therapist in there. It means that parents do not have far to travel, you have got the parents in the school and you start to build a relationship. The children benefit because they are there, and the speech therapist can see more children. Therefore, there a lot of advantages for all the key players.   It goes back to what I said earlier; a common, agreed strategic vision about what we want for children would be a major step forward.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much for your papers and the submissions that you made, some of which were very useful. I do not want to pick anyone out in particular, but the Western Board submission and the case studies that were included in it were very interesting. Barry, thank you for that. I wish you all well and thank you for taking the time to come and see us today.