



Public Services Committee

Oral evidence: The role of public services in addressing child vulnerability

Wednesday 14 July 2021

3 pm

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (The Chair); Lord Bichard; Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth; Lord Davies of Gower; Lord Filkin; Lord Hogan-Howe; Lord Hunt of Kings Heath; Baroness Pinnock; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Tyler of Enfield; Baroness Wyld; Lord Young of Cookham.

Evidence Session No. 25

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 194 - 205

Witness

I: Sir Kevan Collins, former Education Recovery Commissioner.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is an uncorrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.
2. Any public use of, or reference to, the contents should make clear that neither Members nor witnesses have had the opportunity to correct the record. If in doubt as to the propriety of using the transcript, please contact the Clerk of the Committee.
3. Members and witnesses are asked to send corrections to the Clerk of the Committee within 14 days of receipt.

Examination of witness

Sir Kevan Collins.

Q194 **The Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this session of the House of Lords Public Services Committee. We are looking at the role of public services in addressing child vulnerability. We have two interesting panels this afternoon and witnesses who have been involved in working with public services and children in recent years. We are grateful to them for giving up their time.

Our first session is with Sir Kevan Collins, who was until recently the person the Prime Minister brought in to look at how we made sure that children were able to catch up through and after the pandemic. We are grateful to you, Sir Kevan, for coming along. Several of us know you really well, so we get people telling us all sorts of things that we should be asking you, but we have a clear agenda this afternoon. Members may well want to come in with additional questions, and I always try to facilitate that. There is never enough time for all that we want to ask or that you want to say, but we are grateful to you for spending this period with us and for agreeing to be a witness on what we see as a challenging but interesting area for the country to think about at the moment.

Vulnerable children demand attention from more than just education. We know that you concentrate on education, but if at any stage you want to link that to other things that you think government needs to get better at, whether it needs to work more effectively in local places on or with organisations other than educational organisations, we are always pleased to hear that sort of evidence, too.

As is traditional—you know enough about these sorts of occasions—in Select Committees it is the Chair who always asks the first question. We have been discussing the needs of vulnerable children with a range of people and we have heard different things from different parts of government as well as from other organisations. The Department for Education was a bit sceptical about a cross-cutting bid for money for vulnerable children, whereas the Treasury, having seen that, said that it would welcome such a bid.

Given your recent experience in government trying to secure a rescue package for schools, what gets into government that means that they are not investing significant amounts in children's long-term life chances, which we all thought was going to happen coming out of the pandemic?

Sir Kevan Collins: Thank you very much for the invitation to join this session. I am grateful.

The question goes essentially to the heart of the problem. There seems to me to be four key reasons why we find it difficult to resolve the obligation we have to invest in childhood in the way that we might after this shock. To put that in perspective, on average children have missed 115 days of school. Children have had a very variable experience. That does not count, by the way, the large number of children now who are isolating and who have missed an increasing number of days as we almost peter

out towards the summer holidays. It is rather worrying. That 115 days since we last opened properly is a large chunk of 190 days of school life. It is a massive shock to educational experience that we have not seen in peacetime in this country.

The four challenges are, first, reconciling the Government and the Treasury to understanding the economic case. We will come to this later on. There is a huge economic case as to why you would invest now to recover as quickly as possible and as much as possible. We know that there are lots of estimates and lots of good data to show the impact on productivity and personal learnings.

The obvious challenge, which I do not fully understand but which must be real, is the competing demands for resources. We now must face a difficult set of circumstances. Where do we invest? Of course, I believe strongly that there is nothing more important than education for the long-term future of the country.

I think there is a reticence in parts of government, particularly the Treasury, to appreciate that additional money in education or in childhood is spent well and that you can guarantee that it goes to where it is needed—that confidence in the system to use the resources they have to the best effect.

Finally, there is still a failure to appreciate, although appreciation is growing, the impact on the wider outcomes of life, not just the academic. We seem to have quite good models now to demonstrate that if you invest in this way you get an increased return on GCSE results. But we now know about childhood and education increasingly that it is not just about the academic, it is the non-academic outcomes. It is the well-being, self-efficacy, delayed gratification and self-control. All these things live in a virtuous relationship. We still do not have a framework to value and to invest in those outcomes in the way we have in academic outcomes.

The Chair: That is very interesting. As you know, lots of people are estimating what could be put in. You were asking for what the IFS described as £5 billion a year, so it was not £15 billion in the first year; it was £15 billion over three years. What did your inquiry think would be the outcome and the cost of not putting that level of investment into recovery?

Sir Kevan Collins: Again, to put that into perspective, £5 billion is about 10% of the annual budget that we spend on education. The exam question the Prime Minister set me was quite straightforward: how do you recover the loss through Covid for every child over three years in both academic and non-academic outcomes? As I examined the evidence—the academic evidence, the international examples, anything I could find that was related to this kind of experience, although it is unique—I came to a view that you needed to focus first on the quality of the teaching for all children, vulnerable children and all children. You

needed to make sure that was the best it could be. The best recovery is being back in a class with a great teacher.

Secondly, for the children who needed it—that would be for schools to determine—I wanted to invest in a second wave of support: some additional education, tutoring, targeted work and catch-up work.

Finally, I wanted to increase the amount of time that children spend in school. You could increase the opportunities for sport, drama, art—for a wider range of experiences to build the social skills, physical skills and non-academic skills that have been lost. When we calculated that together, we came to a view that you could do that for about £5 billion a year. That was not being generous. That was quite a skinny model compared to the model of the Netherlands, which is almost twice that per child, or the United States', which, as always, is even more. We thought we could do it in a very cost-effective way.

The estimates for not doing it are interesting. One just calculates the lost personal earnings, and that takes you to a £100 billion cost. Eric Hanushek at Stanford did one for the OECD that looked at the lost productivity to the country if we do not recover. That takes you up above £1 trillion. Then, people like the Institute for Fiscal Studies and others come in at about £300 billion. I went to the conservative end and said that the cost of not recovering the loss is at least £100 billion. I was building quite a lot of the arguments for the recovery being not just for that reason but being primarily for the personal value of having a great education and being on track with your learning for the individuals who have missed out.

Critically, we know that the greatest loss has been suffered by the children who face the most disadvantage. We know there is huge variation. One of my greatest concerns is that the legacy of Covid in educational terms will be growing inequality. The cost is not just economic. It is a whole other layer of fracturing and inequality in our system. We will have wider gaps for children than ever before because of the different experiences they had through the lockdown and through Covid.

Q195 The Chair: Yes. In many senses, this committee is concentrating on that area most because it is happening to those who do not have the resources to have good home schooling and to get the outdoor activities that some families will make sure their children get, whatever is happening elsewhere.

One of the problems that we have been thinking about is that the Government have said that they will come back to this in the spending review, but the spending review relates to next year's spending, not this year's spending, so there really will be a year's delay. What is the effect of this, particularly on the sort of children you were illustrating in your last remarks?

Sir Kevan Collins: Unfortunately, delay in education comes with a heavy price. It is not just a matter of, "Okay, we will do it later". There is the phenomenon of compounding deficits. From the Nobel Prize-winning economist Jim Heckman, we know that skills beget skills. Learning has a cumulative effect. Equally, if you do not have skills, there is a spiral of deficit.

A good example is a child who is behind in their reading at five years old. That child is seven times more likely to be behind in their maths when they are seven and 11 times more likely to be behind in their maths when they are 11. If you take a child who gets to secondary school not reading at the level you want at secondary school—we think there will be more of those this year—only one in 10 of those children go on to achieve a good clutch of five GCSEs. It is not something you can pick up later. You get this compounding deficit, and you get compensatory learning.

I was deeply disappointed that we could not act quickly. Children's lives do not work in the cycle of a spending review. They work in the natural lives of maturation and development. We need to be with them and not ask them to dance to the tune of our timetables, if you like.

The Chair: Thank you, Kevan. I would love to go on questioning you myself, but I am just the Chair and there are lots of other colleagues here.

Q196 **Lord Young of Cookham:** Sir Kevan, you make a powerful case that resonates with members of the committee who share all your concerns about children being further disadvantaged.

I used to be a Treasury Minister, I am afraid, a long time ago. The Treasury spreadsheet does not have the cost of not doing things. It just has the cost of doing things. The sum of money you are looking for is substantial. What assurance could you give the Treasury about measuring the value for money and the outcomes? What strings would it be legitimate for it to attach in return for voting this very large sum of money? Frankly, the record of this country has not been fantastic in getting value for money from education, judging by the large number of children who go through the system and emerge with low standards in numeracy and literacy. Can you understand the Treasury's caution? What assurances are you able to give them that this is a priority against the background of a large number of other competing priorities?

Sir Kevan Collins: I do understand that. I am deeply disappointed that I failed to cross the line and win that argument, as you have set out. Three bits of evidence were crucial to me. There are some interesting international examples of similar levels of disruption happening in children's lives and those nations not acting in an intentional way. One is the long teacher disputes in Belgium where, almost like a natural experiment, the French teachers went on strike and the Flemish did not. When you look at the end of the education of those children, those who had missed a lot of education were six months behind in their learning. In Argentina in the 1980s, there was lots of disruption. Interesting studies

following people through their whole life and into work have shown that they earned less than cohorts who had not missed time in education.

We already have some hard data, because we have been assessing children's reading and maths through the pandemic—only their reading and maths; there are lots of other things that matter—and we had base data from before the pandemic. We know that children are months behind where they ought to be right now. They are two to three months behind in their reading and three to four months behind in their maths. If they are disadvantaged, you can add another month on. We know we have this gap to close, and if we do not close it we know that there is a long-term implication for the child and for the economy.

You are right: in the end, the question is whether we can have the confidence that if we make the investment we will get the return. It is good that the Government, and the Treasury, have acknowledged that for tutoring and are spending a considerable sum of money on tutoring and on some teacher training, but the time is the big-ticket number that people are not prepared to invest in.

In my view, the three—the time, the tutoring and the teaching—have to go together. I will give you a couple of quick reasons. First, tutoring must happen after great teaching and not instead of it. It is foolish to tutor instead of teaching as a class. Let us teach first and then tutor, because children may learn efficiently as a whole class. You need time to do the tutoring. When will it be done? I wanted to do it after school. I did not want children pulled out of lessons in maths, English, music or drama to tutor. I wanted to have more time to do some tutoring.

Secondly, you need time to do non-academic activities like drama and sport. As the package stands now with just tutoring and teaching, it has nothing in it at all for the non-academic outcomes. I believe very strongly that the evidence is with us that non-academic learning—in sport, drama, music or whatever it might be—lives in a strong reciprocal relationship with academic learning and academic outcomes. Our children have missed out not just in their maths and English; they have missed out in playing together and being together. That is every bit as important. We need time to do that. I wanted to increase the school day for half an hour every day for the next three years to help find time to do some of these additional sports, some of these activities and some tutoring. Unfortunately, I could not win the argument on that bit.

Q197 Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Sir Kevan, it is good to have you with us. I would like to put the focus on early years. Last week, we had a good session with Dame Andrea Leadsom. She told us how important early years was to a child's future life chances. I very much share that view from all the work I have done on social mobility, which is why I was so pleased to see that the package you put forward had a strong emphasis on early years.

Could you say specifically what proportion of your funding package you recommend should be invested in the early years and the sorts of

outcomes you were hoping would be achieved from that? As a corollary, could you say how the Department for Health and Social Care was involved as you put your package together to ensure a joined-up approach?

Sir Kevan Collins: I was grateful to work and engage with colleagues across the Government as we developed our ideas.

To answer your question, in the initial thinking about early years, the reports of numbers were never resolved. They were ideas and proposals that had to be worked through, of course, so I am reluctant to nail down these numbers. I wanted 10% of all the money to go to two to four year-olds—that beginning into reception—which, compared with the total number of children, is a relatively small group.

At first, we almost had to win the argument with some people that early years mattered. There was the view that, "They have a long time. Won't they catch up anyway?" You have to recall, for example, the idea that if you are three, a third of your life has been in lockdown. The experience of playing with and engaging with your friends in the nursery, the children's centre or wherever it might be is crucial to your long-term learning and success. We need now to invest in that group of young people.

I wanted to do four things. There is more we could do with the two year-old offer. As colleagues will know, we offer places to children who are two years old and support to families. We have a group of children now who we need to increase that offer to and we need to have more two year-olds in high-quality provision, which is critical. The evidence is strong that that can be very powerful.

Secondly, I wanted to create a pupil premium. Colleagues might not be aware that every primary school receives £1,300 a year for every child who is on free school meals to create additional opportunities. In the early years, you do not get that money. You get a fraction of it. I wanted to increase that fund for early years to make it the same, so that at local setting levels people could make discretionary decisions about what is best to do for their children to increase the opportunities and the experiences that they might have missed out on.

Thirdly, and critically, I wanted to invest in the quality of teaching in the early years. It is a shame that we still see early years practitioners resign from early years education to get paid more to work in supermarkets. I am not decrying supermarkets; that is a super-vital job, and we know that now. But it says something about the way we reward and recognise early years practitioners. We, frankly, do not invest in high enough skills and reward people in the way we should. I wanted to invest in the quality and the pay of practitioners in that sector to lift the quality, particularly for more disadvantaged children. A critical thing that we know through the evidence on early years is that access is not enough. It has to be high quality. In my view, we are not investing enough in the professional

learning and development of that group of people. I wanted to invest there.

Finally, there are captures from Covid and there are a few that we should definitely hold on to. One is the way that parents, in an inspirational way, leant into their children's learning and education. I wanted to invest more in home learning support for very young children from birth to three and their home learning environment.

They are some of the ideas we had that came through conversations across agencies, with early years practitioners themselves and with parents. I was fortunate that I had the opportunity to speak to thousands of teachers and hundreds of parents in my work as we designed the ideas, as well as the academics who provided the evidence.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: What you were saying about an early years pupil premium is music to my ears. That is a personal view.

You talked about the childcare offer for two year-olds, and of course there is the one for three and four years-olds. I know there has been some concern that the way they are currently work is a bit more weighted to parents who have a reasonable joint income rather than parents on the lowest income. Would you like to comment on that at all?

Sir Kevan Collins: This is slightly outwith the recovery, but I have spoken about it before publicly. It is extremely odd that parents who are not working are unable to access the full offer. Again, it goes back to the view of early years being not just a workforce issue but a learning issue. We need to make sure that the opportunities are available to the children who have the greatest need. We know from longitudinal studies we now have in different parts of the world that creating high-quality provision in the early years is one of the best drivers to narrow the gap and to help deliver more social mobility through education.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Finally and very briefly, going back again to our session with Andrea Leadsom last week, how do you see your catch-up plan interacting with the Government's family hub strategy?

Sir Kevan Collins: To be honest, I was not completely engaged in the family hubs. I was trying to work it out. It is still a slightly nascent bit of work. I understand children's centres and family centres, so I would not like to comment because I had not got to full grips with the family hubs model.

Q198 **Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth:** Welcome, Sir Kevan. Thank you for coming to see us. The committee has taken a great deal of interest, and it keeps recurring for understandable reasons, in the issue of mental health and particularly the mental health of youngsters. The Government recently announced the role of mental health support teams in schools. Did the office of the Education Recovery Commissioner produce any estimate of the post-pandemic needs of school children in this regard? What you think of the Government's plans on mental health support?

Sir Kevan Collins: We did not produce definitive estimates on the impact on mental health. We were very aware of the reports, particularly two that I will reference. One is the *BMJ* report of the increase of almost 200,000 in the number of children referred to mental health, up from 331,000 in 2018 to 530,000 young people referred. We were also aware of the general feedback we were getting from families, parents, teachers and those who led schools that they were concerned with this issue of the well-being.

My own personal reticence about putting a number on it was trying to be clear about the distinction between the crucial and important clinical mental health diagnosis and the well-being of children in a more general sense and how you work through the tiers and make sure that you do not cross the lines too quickly.

I am sure there has been a huge impact on children. We have seen reports only recently of heads reporting the number of children who are anxious and the disconnect between children and their peers. We were very conscious of the issue. This is why we wanted to increase the amount of time for schools to have a chance to engage their children in a wide range of social activities. A key thing for me is that the recovery has to be school led. In the first term after Easter, I was anxious that schools spent as much time with their children as possible, observing them, diagnosing them, doing diagnostic assessments of all kinds, including mental health and well-being with them, before they acted. We have to be sensitive about some of this stuff.

Unfortunately, we do not collect great data in this regard. We assess children endlessly in the academic world, but we do not have strong ways of assessing their well-being. We investigated the idea of a national well-being assessment but we realised that potentially we would go down the path of unintended consequences. We would rather have schools create their own instruments, use resources and reference them, as there are many around, so that we could get that from the school and build up.

But I want to distinguish between the clinical diagnosis of mental health issues with reference to CAMHS and general well-being, which has a relationship that all schools should be engaged in.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: Thanks. I understand that. Not only is this still very much the Cinderella service, but, as you say, it covers a wide range of activity under the general rubric of mental health. Statistics suggest that only about a fifth to a quarter of schools will have access to mental health support teams by 2023. That surely should concern us. Do you have any thoughts on what the response to that should be? Given the seriousness of the situation, surely we should be upping our game on that.

Sir Kevan Collins: We should. Ever since I have been involved in education, but principally as a director of children's services in east London, which is something I did for many years in Tower Hamlets, I have been concerned about the relationship between education and

CAMHS. It does not work as well as it should. We have not clarified who holds responsibility and when you begin to work together and move it along. It will be interesting to see the development of mental health teams in schools, and we have to build the evidence on its impact. But I am with you: we have to up our game on this quite significantly.

By the way, the story of Covid in children's lives has not been told yet in this country. We have limited data. We have a bit on reading, a bit on maths, but we do not know anything about the other subjects. We do not know much about some of the deeper social and emotional issues that children from different communities have faced. There is a long-term issue here that we should be mindful of, and there are no quick fixes to it. I think it has a profound impact on childhood, actually.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: Yes, that is wise about the broader social impact. I do not think that will be obvious for some time yet. The educational impact will come to the fore much more quickly. In the longer term, that is something we will have to grapple with, and the mental health area is certainly one area. Thanks very much.

Q199 **The Chair:** Can I follow that up? You would like schools to take responsibility for how they look at well-being and how they measure it. Does Ofsted have a role here? Does the local authority have a role? What do you do with schools where, quite honestly, it is just not happening?

Sir Kevan Collins: Ofsted absolutely has a role. As you will know, the framework for inspection has a section on well-being and behaviour. The well-being bit of that does not get the attention it warrants, and in my view it should become a bigger part of the evaluation of a school and how well the children are. That is not just because, in and of itself, that is the right thing to do. The evidence of the correlation between building self-regulation, self-efficacy, social and communication skills and attainment is well made. Unfortunately, we have had a period when people have seen these things as being in opposition or one fighting against the other.

I hope that through Covid we have all begun to realise that schools are places where children not only learn skills but learn so much about being the human beings and the citizens we want them to be. This function of schools is vital. It should be recognised and it should be part of the evaluation of the school's contribution and effectiveness. So, absolutely, for me, Ofsted should be addressing and asking that question in a broad way.

Equally, we should encourage schools to take responsibility for that and to work out for themselves what dimension of that you build for your children. What is the important thing for your children in their contexts? Schools should be bottom-up. I am very worried about another top-down definition of well-being. This should be grown up from the ground based on context, community and the competing demands that schools have on their time locally.

Q200 **Lord Bichard:** Thank you, Sir Kevan. Not surprisingly, I wholeheartedly

agree with everything you said. I am interested in the point you made about Ofsted. Could you expand beyond well-being? Ofsted has a huge impact on the way in which we educate children and the way in which schools behave. If you were running Ofsted in the next three or four years, what changes would you need to make post pandemic?

Sir Kevan Collins: I do not think I will be running anything in the next three or four years, Lord Bichard. That bridge is burned.

It is a bit trite to say this, but there is something about responsibility and accountability. I am keen that schools take greater responsibility for their children rather than looking up to the accountability framework as somehow ticking that box all the time. There is something about what you might call the lived education experience, which is what matters every day. Unfortunately, Ofsted sees a rather unique moment when people behave because Ofsted is in the room rather than the lived education experience. In this work, for example, I was keen that we moved into a world where we started scraping a lot more authentic data from the system regularly rather than the once-every-six-years event of Ofsted.

I am keen to see Ofsted engage in what you might call thematic reviews, such as going into a large number of schools—300 or 400—next term and looking quickly at tutoring, because it is the new big event. It would not be inspecting the school but inspecting this new provision across the system and quickly reporting back to us all on how we can get it right, the features that make it successful and how we can improve the system, rather than the focus being all the time a magnifying glass on the institution.

There is something about better use of data, because we now have very rapid day-by-day data on lots of the domains of children's lives. We can scrape that and get good analytics to inform our decision-making. We need more reviews that are low stakes for schools but high stakes for the system on things that we are trying to do as a national system, and to try to use the inspection framework in a way that shifts schools to be more responsible for their children, rather than looking up to the inspection framework or the inspection process all the time.

Personally, I think there is a place for Ofsted in the system. We need some kind of accountability framework that includes inspection, and it is great that more heads are now involved in it. I have done it myself; I have inspected schools. But we need to move it on to become a more trusted and authentic process.

Q201 **Lord Hogan-Howe:** Sir Kevan, good afternoon. This is a question for somebody who is clearly an expert in education. Our response to the pandemic has worried me a bit. You made the point that investing in giving young people more time in education is really important. The suggestion of adding half an hour a day gives you another two and a half hours a week. It surprised me that the summer break has been left untouched. Did you not recommend that because it was a cost issue—you

made the point that you were trying to be reasonable in your expectations rather than unreasonable—or because in your expert view it would not have had the effect that I might naively think it would?

Sir Kevan Collins: It did come under question. When I arrived in February, there was an announcement of an additional £700 million into the system. I was very pleased, because we had that money directed through the pupil premium, so most of it was weighted to areas of greatest need. In that £700 million were resources for schools to create summer schools for children who were at the end of primary and going into secondary. I am very anxious about the literacy levels of children entering secondary schools. It matters. My view is that there will be a large number of kids, more kids than usual, arriving with low literacy into secondary schools. There is enough resource there for 40% of all year 7 children to attend a two-week summer school. That money is in the system currently.

When it comes to making the holiday shorter for all children and all schools, we studied this, and it was interesting that, compared with countries across Europe and other countries, our summer holidays are already some of the shortest. We are in the bottom four, which surprised me.

We know that teachers have been working all the way through the pandemic. I know that parents know this, and I know you will know this, but the way teachers turned on a sixpence to start developing online learning was a remarkable achievement in our system for many children but not for all. Of course, many teachers were going into schools to teach children of key workers or vulnerable children.

We have to recognise that our teachers have worked really hard in the last year. Of course, we need them back. In September, basically, they will all need to teach like they have never taught before. They will have to adjust the curriculum and work out the priorities. Take year 8 science: they will have to ask, "What was in year 7 science that was vital that they missed, and how do I now build it into the year 8 curriculum and still get to the same point at the end of year 8? How do I teach a wider range of young people?" Teaching will be challenging next year and we need to make sure that our teachers' well-being is protected as well, which is another reason.

So we did consider it, but it did not feel like the better way. A better way felt like increasing time every day over the whole year for a richer experience, particularly as I wanted to get this tutoring in. When are we going to do it?

The other thing about time is that when you look at the pieces of evidence from around the world of big reform in education and of making something happen at a large scale, particularly the good randomised scientific studies, they have all included time in the equation and changing the school day. Changing the school day is a great enabler.

Everybody has to be involved. You cannot tuck it in the corner where someone does a bit of tutoring.

My great concern is that people do not quite appreciate the level of national endeavour that is needed at the school level to do what we need to do in the next three years to recover this loss. By changing everybody's day, it would be compulsory for every child. Every teacher's day could be different. It would be the signal that we are all doing something different for the next three years as we resolve and face this issue.

I am worried that there is complacency in the system. The signals are, unfortunately, that we can do a bit of tutoring on the side or do something in the holidays, or somebody else can do it and it is not our responsibility. That does not face the issue. That is not the nature of this challenge. We have never recovered a year of learning in a year or in three years ever before. People have not yet clocked the scale of this.

Lord Hogan-Howe: May I briefly comment on what you said about literacy that I support? We did work in London on young gangs, and 70% of a cohort of 14 to 17 year-olds had a reading age under seven, which is replicated in the prison system, sadly. This profound issue remains throughout our education system, I am afraid.

Sir Kevan Collins: Another role I have is chair of the Youth Endowment Fund, an organisation that is trying to build the evidence that prevents youth violence and crime. Previously I was the chief executive of the Education Endowment Foundation, bringing evidence to bear to the question.

To your point, low literacy levels are highly correlated to exclusion, exclusion is highly correlated to crime and, as you know, crime is highly correlated to more future crime. It is about breaking these cycles. If we do not tackle the literacy levels of the 200,000 kids potentially going into year 7 with lower levels than we expect, it can only be a problem building and building in all sorts of ways for our communities as well as our economy.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Bernard. The time thing is interesting. I taught in Kenya in east Africa for a while and we had a different timetable. We used to start teaching at 7.30 in the morning, but we would finish early and then there was lots of time for activities in the afternoon. It was very useful but it was a long day, for teachers anyway.

This is a really interesting theme. This week, we now know that there are 800,000 children out of school because of isolation and being pinged and so on. That means that their school holidays will be seven to eight weeks rather than even six weeks and we know how much that drops off as well post school. Anyway, I am musing.

Q202 **Lord Davies of Gower:** Good afternoon to you, Sir Kevan, and thank you very much for your fascinating and valued contribution this

afternoon. I need to ask you about schools. You touched upon it in answer to a question from Lord Bourne. Do you think that schools should be responsible for supporting vulnerable children with problems at home? I have an example here. Surrey Square Primary School in south-east London identified 250 of its pupils as vulnerable due to domestic violence, addiction or mental issues at home, but only eight of them had a social worker and the school was left to provide for the others. What is your view on that?

Sir Kevan Collins: Thank you for the question. I know Surrey Square. When you work in schools like Surrey Square or the schools that I have worked in as a teaching head in east London or Bradford, you have to deal with what the children bring to you. There is no escape. You cannot suddenly pretend that these are not your problems or issues. They just come at you in schools. It could be housing, domestic violence—a whole range of things. The critical thing, though, is that you are part of a network of agencies that can support you and can support each other in resolving those issues to create the very best lives for children.

As you probably know, we used to have a regime under Every Child Matters where we appreciated that childhood had these different dimensions to it and that a great childhood was what we were all trying to build. I wish I had been the commissioner for childhood recovery rather than education recovery, because that is what we should be thinking about.

Yes, the relationships between social workers, the police, local authorities, health and myriad partners matter to create great lives for children. I am interested in the solution of social workers based in schools. I have seen work in places like Hackney, a borough neighbouring mine in Tower Hamlets, where that has huge potential. I am excited to see how that plays out in the social care review work that is under way. There is good evidence that there is value in bringing it closer to the school.

Critically, the point for me in all that, though, is the need for local multiagency networks. One of the good things that has happened through Covid is that those networks have got stronger. Many of the colleagues I met with and talked to in the multi-academy trusts are reporting to me that they now have better relationships with their local authorities than ever before, because they are tackling issues together that they could tackle only together.

There was a slight myth that a school could be in splendid isolation and did not need necessarily to be deeply connected to its local place. I do not hold that as being self-evident. The work I did for the Government on opportunity areas, which are the areas with the lowest educational results around the country, kept proving to me again and again that the gap was in the networks and support for the schools and the children in the local place. Education happens in a place, childhood happens in a place, and the place really matters.

I know that you will see colleagues from local authorities later. They should not be running schools, absolutely not, but these partnerships to deal with the issues you have talked about are critical. Schools should not be left alone to do it. They should work in a strong set of networks and partnerships with other agencies, and they need to be facilitated and encouraged.

Lord Davies of Gower: Everything seems to come down to money these days, of course, but other than funding, is there more that the Government could do?

Sir Kevan Collins: Yes. The signals we send and the way we create the structures matter. The local authority, in my view—I am slightly biased, having been a local chief executive and director of children’s services—has an important role in supporting schools to thrive. I am thinking, in the early years, about the role of public health or speech therapists, for example, or post-16 the role of apprenticeships or planning decisions for the future. Between these bookends of education, there is enough to demonstrate that we need to do more to create the relationships and signals that we should work out as schools and not just up through one channel, the academic results and the Ofsted judgment. There is more to it than that, and we should facilitate and encourage those relationships. The signals the Government send are important in all that.

Q203 **Lord Young of Cookham:** Can we go back to Surrey Square and the question that Lord Davies asked? He pointed out that of the 250 pupils who were vulnerable, only eight had a social worker. Do we have the right definition of vulnerability? Do we risk becoming like the Ministry of Defence and overstressing ourselves? Given that we will never be able to provide social workers for all those 250, do we need some gradation of vulnerability to identify those who are really at risk rather than the broad definition that we seem to have at the moment, without in any way underplaying the challenges that face those children?

Sir Kevan Collins: To be honest, the evidence does not tell me that it would be beneficial for all 250 to have a social worker. Managing social care is, as ever with adults and children, about coping with insatiable demand sometimes. This question of thresholds is a day-by-day process led by highly qualified professionals who examine the evidence in front of them and see whether a child crosses a threshold to require a social worker or a deeper assessment. We have a relatively small group, thankfully, who are highly vulnerable, and we decide as a state that we will take care of them. We then have a broader group of children in need for whom we try to create additional support. Then we have the wider universal group and others in all that.

As ever, we have this tension locally—it is everywhere I have ever been—where the social care division of any local authority is usually saying, “No, that child does not meet the threshold” and the head teacher is saying, “Hang on a minute. How can that child not meet the threshold? You are all failing the child”. The only way out of that sort of tension is to have

great open discussions and relationships and to be clear that you are all in the business of trying to meet the needs of the child.

Critically, at the tier below social care—this is where there has been a lot of pressure in the system—you need to create a range of services that are helping to prevent the child moving across the threshold and getting into further levels of need. Too many of those services have withered and have been lost to the system. Take teenagers and youth clubs: we know that great youth provision can help to divert people away from other behaviours or divert them away from issues like crime, potentially, if it is done well, but they are not statutory. If you close youth centres, what happens? People move through the system and you get escalation.

It is about communication and the range of support from local communities, voluntary groups, faith groups and the sorts of activities that help to give children broader lives and give them resilience and support for whatever they are facing. That really matters in resilient communities. The evidence is there for that.

It is not just social services and Surrey Square. There is a bigger picture, and we need to see all the pieces of the jigsaw in that part of London and see what is missing, what we need to build and how we can make sure that there is a broad range of people involved in meeting these children's needs. Rather than handing it straight to social care, there are other solutions for some children.

Q204 Baroness Pinnock: That has been a fascinating hour. Could you touch on the variation that I guess will occur in learning for children with special needs of various sorts, either on the autistic spectrum or with moderate learning difficulties, but who are in mainstream education? My gut instinct is that they will be even further behind than their peers, but it would be interesting to know what you think and how their needs could be met.

Sir Kevan Collins: That is my gut instinct as well. Today I was saddened to read a report by the National Foundation for Educational Research, which had been working with those with special skills and those who support children with special needs in mainstream schools, and which confirmed that point. On average, they were at least six months behind.

We know that some children, if they have been shielding as individuals, may literally not have been out of their homes, as some of the families told me when I talked to them. Goodness only knows what that means and how we deal with that. Schools are reporting that as those children come back, they are working on social skills first because they have almost forgotten how to play with each other. Habits form quickly in early years and in childhood. A habit formed over a year becomes quite entrenched. Our colleagues who work in that sector and who work with children with those needs are definitely facing the greatest challenges. Those children have felt the biggest impact. My gut instinct is absolutely with yours on that. We now need the hard data, but as it emerges it is not looking pretty.

Q205 **Lord Bichard:** I have more of an observation than a question but I would be interested in whether Sir Kevan agrees with me. You will not have had a chance to read our first report, Sir Kevan, but that identified some of the principles that we felt government should be based upon. It seemed to me that everything you said today illustrates how important three of those are.

The first was early intervention and prevention. We have not seen enough of it. All your proposals were about intervening early to prevent later problems, using education as a tool. The second was devolution. We felt that more discretion should be given to local institutions. You have talked about starting with the schools, and I entirely agree with you about that. The third was not enough evidence of strong partnership, collaboration and co-ordination. You have talked in the context of the place about how important that is.

I will put it as a question. Have you run into a roadblock, which is the general attitude towards public services in government: that we do not give enough emphasis and priority to early intervention, devolution and collaboration?

Sir Kevan Collins: Yes, of course I agree with all that, Lord Bichard. I would add to that a focus on implementation. The key thing for me in England is variability. I have not talked about it and I will mention it quickly. We have to try to understand the variability of experience for children. Why is it so varied when we look across the system? Some children have fantastic support. For others, it is quite paltry. I am deeply concerned about the implementation of a consistent high-quality system.

I am completely with you, and yes, unfortunately I have failed with that roadblock. I have not overcome it, which is a profound disappointment, because I saw this work on recovery as the biggest challenge of my professional life. We still underplay and underestimate the impact this has had on our children. There is—I will use the word again—a complacency about it that I find deeply worrying.

Lord Bichard: You are not alone. Thank you very much.

The Chair: As colleagues have said, this has been a fascinating and helpful session. Thank you very much indeed, Sir Kevan. Inevitably, there are lots of other things that we could have talked about. If there are things that we have missed or other things that you would like us to think about, please do not hesitate to send us some written notes so that we can consider that when we come to do our final report after the summer. Thank you enormously. We are grateful to you.