

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Funding priorities in the 2018-19 budget: Education, HC 1497

Wednesday 9 January 2019

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Members present: Dr Andrew Murrison (Chair); Mr Gregory Campbell; Maria Caulfield; John Grogan; Lady Hermon; Mr Robert Goodwill; Ian Paisley; Jim Shannon.

Questions 207 - 249

Witnesses

I: Geri Cameron, President, National Association of Head Teachers (Northern Ireland); Justin McCamphill, Senior Northern Ireland Official, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers; Gerry Murphy, Northern Secretary, Irish National Teachers' Organisation.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [National Association of Head Teachers \(Northern Ireland\)](#)
- [NASUWT](#)
- [Irish National Teachers Organisation, National Education Union and Ulster Teachers Union](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Geri Cameron, Justin McCamphill and Gerry Murphy.

Q207 Chair: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee. It is great to see you here. I am just going to start very briefly with a little bit of background. This Committee has been interpreting its remit widely, given the impasse at Stormont, so we are going to places that perhaps we would not have gone to in the event of devolved matters being determined locally. We hope, two years on, that those institutions will be set up again before very long. Let us be optimistic and hope that 2019 brings better news.

In the absence of those institutions, we feel it is important that light is shed on important areas of public policy in Northern Ireland. We have felt that this Committee has a role to play in that. One of those public services, clearly, is education, and the point of this session and the inquiry we are doing at the moment is to investigate and probe a little bit into how education is being funded in Northern Ireland. With that in mind, we are very grateful for the written evidence we have received on this matter and for your attendance here today to tell us how it is and answer any questions that Committee members may have on this important matter.

Perhaps by way of opening, I can very briefly invite you to say who you are, where you come from and what your take is on this particular matter. We will then go into some questions. Perhaps we can start with Justin.

Justin McCamphill: Thank you very much, Chair. My name is Justin McCamphill. I am the national official for the NASUWT, which is the largest teachers' union in Northern Ireland. We represent classroom teachers and school leaders from nursery right through to further education. I am delighted to have this opportunity, and I thank the Committee for taking the time to consider the issues around education funding in Northern Ireland. As you said, it is very important that, where there is a lack of Government, the Committee is extending its remit to look at these areas.

One of the big issues during this process so far is that the classroom teachers' voice has been absent. It is my intention, along with our sister unions today, to make sure that voice is heard around the issues in terms of funding of education.

Geri Cameron: Good morning. Thank you very much for this opportunity to come along today. My name is Geri Cameron. I am the Northern Ireland President of the NAHT. The National Association of Head Teachers is an independent trade union representing head teachers across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is a great privilege to be able to come today to represent the views of those members. In Northern



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Ireland we have 900 members who have participated in the initial submission to this inquiry. I look forward to enlightening you with some further information today that might be of interest.

Gerry Murphy: Good morning, Chair. Can I add my thanks to the Committee and yourself for inviting us here today? My name is Gerry Murphy. I am the northern secretary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, a teachers' union organised across both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. What I hope to bring to the party, if you like, is something similar to what Justin is articulating there: the teachers' voice and teachers' experience in respect to the dire circumstances in which we find ourselves with respect to our education system. I hope that the Committee's work will assist in finding a pathway for us all out of the mess that we currently find ourselves in.

Q208 **Chair:** Turning to the situation to which you have referred, a great deal of the unhappiness in education in Northern Ireland at the moment revolves around the current pay dispute and the difficulties there appear to be in determining a proper level of remuneration for the people that you represent. The Education Authority is insisting on the statistical fact that teachers in Northern Ireland, on average, are paid more than in the rest of the United Kingdom. I am sure you will tell me that that is because of the demographic of teachers, which, of course, those of us who represent rural constituencies in the rest of the UK also experience, since our teachers, too, tend to be more senior, a little older and therefore further up the pay scale. I wonder what your thoughts are on the likely impact of the relaxation of the 1% stricture on pay awards for public servants, and whether you think this might be a way of dealing with the stalemate that appears to have existed really for far too long. Do you want to have a go at that, Gerry?

Gerry Murphy: Okay, Chair, I will do my best. I, for my sins, am secretary of the Northern Ireland teachers' council, which is the representative body for all the unions. I, de facto, lead the teachers' side in those negotiations. You will appreciate that, similar to the EA representative at a previous hearing, I am not in a position to go into a pile of detail in respect of those negotiations, except to say that, from a trade union perspective, we have approached resolving what are a series of disputes—not simply one dispute, but a series of disputes—in a very positive fashion. Once the opportunity presented itself—after some equivocation, shall we say, or prevarication possibly, on the part of the employing authorities, EA and the Department—we eventually came to talks on 17 February last year, having effectively been in dispute in one form or another since 2010-11.

The disputes are in three areas. There is a professional and philosophical disagreement around the assessment mechanisms, which were effectively foisted upon the system in 2010-11. The dispute then accelerated somewhat in 2014-15 with respect to the cuts beginning to manifest themselves across the system, and then the dispute further accelerated



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again in 2015-16, when the 1% pay rise was withheld in its entirety from the teaching workforce. That is the background in respect to public sector pay policy, which your question was mostly about.

Effectively, we have had the same public sector pay policy from 2012. The leeway that you are referring to refers only to the potential within policy to go beyond 1%, provided you can fund that addition above 1% from savings achieved inside of the budget. Effectively, from a trade union perspective, I would imagine you could characterise it by saying that you are invited to cut your own throat to fund the pay rise. Do you know what I mean? You would have to support cuts in another area to bring about funding a pay rise beyond the 1%. What I am saying about public sector pay policy is, effectively, it has remained static since 2012 in terms of Northern Ireland. Executive pay policy, as of 2012, even though the Treasury revises it every year, is largely the same. I do not see any significant difference there.

In terms of comparison salary-wise across the islands, a beginning teacher in Northern Ireland at the moment is paid 6.6% per annum less than a beginning teacher in England and Wales. That same beginning teacher in Northern Ireland is paid 23% less than a beginning teacher in Scotland. Shockingly, that same beginning teacher in Northern Ireland is paid 47% less than their colleague in the Republic of Ireland. The figures do not hold up.

Q209 Chair: If I can interject on that point, the Education Authority will probably say that they have no difficulty recruiting teachers and that there is an oversupply of teachers in Northern Ireland, because the teacher training statistics would probably underpin that. If you were being a hard-nosed bean-counter, you would probably say that supply exceeds demand so we have no need to increase salaries and close the gap that you have just rightly highlighted. How would you respond to that?

Gerry Murphy: I would respond to that by saying the number of teachers in employment has declined. Our colleagues in the NAHT have pointed out that the total number of teachers is down 692 in the last three years. My colleague from the NASUWT, Justin, will no doubt go into this further. Proportionately, if we had maintained the teacher numbers in line with the growth in pupil numbers, which we have failed to do—correct me if I am wrong—

Justin McCamphill: Nine hundred and fourteen. In 2010, we had 329,500 children. We now have 340,000. In 2010, there were 20,136 teachers, but now there are only 19,867. If we had kept the ratios the same since 2010, there would be 20,781 teachers now. The problem is not that we are training too many teachers. The problem is that we have been making teachers redundant in schools, so there have not been jobs for those that have been trained, because the workforce is being downsized at the same time as the number of children has increased. It is increasing at quite a dramatic rate at some points in Northern Ireland.



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There are other places where population is falling; I know we may look at area planning later. Those areas that are having to expand are running into problems in getting capital funding for schools, but they are also running into problems in terms of recruiting teachers and keeping proper pupil-teacher ratios within those schools.

Q210 Mr Goodwill: You mentioned a 60% difference between the Republic of Ireland and Ulster. Presumably that depends a lot on the exchange rate between the euro and the pound. Presumably, about two years ago that would have meant the pay rates were more in Northern Ireland than the south.

Justin McCamphill: No, that would not have been the case. Possibly the difference was 25%. The difference in salaries in the Republic is quite significant. I know Gerry has the figure in front of him, but at the top of the scale, a teacher in the Republic on the main scale goes to about €67,000.¹

Gerry Murphy: It does, yes. It is £61,391. The top of the scale in the Republic of Ireland is 62% higher than the top of the main professional scale in Northern Ireland. Of course, you are not comparing like with like exactly.

Justin McCamphill: We accept there are going to be differences around taxation and those things, but we now, on a regular basis, get calls into our office from teachers asking, "How do I get a job in the Republic?" There are barriers in terms of language requirements for primary teachers. That probably slows the flow. In terms of secondary level, we do get one or two calls a week from people wanting to know how to register in the Republic. We do get teachers in border areas who will decide, "The conditions are not great here. I will go to the Republic and start again on a lower salary," knowing they will rise up quicker again.

Gerry Murphy: On the salary comparison figures, the more direct comparison is probably with England and Wales, or the simplest comparison is with England and Wales. That beginning teacher is still 6.6% less well off teaching in Northern Ireland than their counterpart is in England and Wales. That is partly or largely due to the fact of the withholding of the pay increase in 2015-16. The other thing is, at the top of the main scale, that difference is 7.6%, but once you go beyond that it reduces somewhat to 4%, so the average is somewhere around 5% of a difference.

Justin McCamphill: In terms of the point you made about bean-counters, it is actually very instructive to look at what happened in the Republic of Ireland five or six years ago, when they were still coming out of recession. The teacher unions there were going to the Government,

¹ Written clarification from the NASUWT: "The current top of the scale salary for a teacher appointed post-2011 in the Republic of Ireland is €68,213." Source <https://circulards.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2018/51.pdf>



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saying, "We need to do things to get young people into work". They now have a recruitment crisis even with the salaries they have. The employers in Northern Ireland should be conscious that we are heading into the same situation. Particularly with the salary levels in Scotland, a large percentage of our young people in Northern Ireland go to university in Scotland. In the past, many of those have trained to be teachers through the Scottish system and then returned. With a starting salary difference of £3,000 or £4,000 and a guarantee of work for at least a year in Scotland, we are going to find more and more that those young people who traditionally would have returned to Northern Ireland will not. With the climate that is out there, with people knowing how bad things are for teachers, we will have a recruitment crisis a lot sooner than you might think.

Geri Cameron: It is worth adding that, along with the recruitment crisis that may be looming, we have a retention crisis. Young teachers who might initially be highly delighted to get a job close to home are then beginning to take stock, look around and think, "The workload here is phenomenal. For the same amount of work, I will get paid more in another jurisdiction," and they are upping and moving. That has very serious concerns for the future of the profession, with young professionals coming through and gaining the experience and capacity to take on leadership roles later on in their careers. We are seeing that translated into a lack of application for leadership positions in Northern Ireland, which is something we will maybe come on to later.

Justin McCamphill: It is also the case that in some subjects, such as maths and science—STEM subjects—that we are trying to promote in terms of reviving the Northern Ireland economy, schools are not finding it easy to recruit.

Chair: STEM is an issue right across the UK, and, I rather suspect, further afield.

Q211 **Jim Shannon:** It is nice to see you. In particular, if you do not mind me saying, we had a chance, Gerry, to meet before Christmas to go over some of the issues, so I appreciate you coming along.

I want to ask specific questions to do with special educational needs, as it is something that is very important for me, as you know from the discussion we had before Christmas. I would also say that every week in my office I am referring some family's child to the Education Authority for special needs, whether it be for an assessment, first, or whether it be to get a classroom assessment. Justin, you mentioned the issue of classroom assistants. It very much features in my workload in my office every week, genuinely. I say that with all honesty to you.

I also should declare an interest, as I am supposed to do, as a member of the board of governors of Glashury College in my constituency, where I have been on the board of governors for some 31 years. If there is a long-service medal coming, I am going to get it shortly. There you are.



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The issue for me, Mr Chairman, in relation to mental health in children is really, really important. It is because I meet it every week, and my staff do as well. Can you give us some idea of the enormity of mental health issues in children? The figures that I have seen, I think in the *Belfast Telegraph* just before Christmas, before I met you, actually, were to do with the numbers of children in schools in Northern Ireland who have mental health issues.

I will do a couple of questions together if that is okay, Mr Chairman, so it keeps the thing going. The other thing that comes to my attention every week—again through myself and through my staff—is the issue of autism and children with ADHD and with obsessive disorders who are educationally challenged. That comes to the issue of mental health—being very careful that they are not necessarily mental health issues, because the terminology of mental health maybe sends a certain message in your mind.

The reason why I ask this question is because I had a chance, again just before Christmas, to visit one of the schools. I am not going to mention which school it was, but this school would take in some very educationally challenged children—extremely challenging children, who can be disruptive and violent. Those children deserve an education as well, so it is important, but it puts tremendous pressures, first, on the schools and on their budgets—this is what the principal told me—and, secondly, on the welfare of the staff. Because the children sometimes are violent, they do strike out, though not in a malicious way; it is to do with what they are like. I wanted to ask those questions in relation to mental health, first, and those children who are educationally challenged.

Geri Cameron: My background is as the principal of a school for children with severe and challenging special needs. For very many of them, mental wellbeing and mental health is part and parcel of their difficulty. As a corollary of that, their parents, families and extended families often suffer as a result.

The question on special educational needs is a good one because it crosses all sectors and all phases. There is not a school in Northern Ireland at the moment that is not feeling the effects of dealing with SEN children and young people who have mental ill health. The simple fact is there is not a sufficient service for these children and young people. Schools are finding it extremely difficult to access the services that they require. It brings it back to something that we are going to hopefully focus on a little bit later: the fact that there may not be sufficient funding in the system in Northern Ireland to adequately meet the needs of all the children and young people that we are having to deal with on a daily basis. That is a wider issue than mental health, but when you get to the sharp end of the wedge in dealing with children on a daily basis who have severe challenges, that is the service you need to have most adequately funded. As I say, it is one that crosses all sectors and is a common need in all schools.



In regards to children with specific needs—autism, ADHD and oppositional disorders—again, the service facility simply is not adequate to meet need. We would contend in the NAHT that there is funding at the centre: 41% of the block grant that comes into Northern Ireland for education goes directly to centralised services, and it is difficult sometimes to get transparency on how that money is deployed. Our client satisfaction survey that we completed just before Christmas would suggest that head teachers and teachers in schools are not seeing the impact of those centralised services in their schools. The Education Authority would contend that they are in a transformative process at the moment, and that would be a mitigating factor for that. I would contend there is a generation of children who are suffering at the moment and whose needs are not being adequately met.

It is a very good question and one that we grapple with every single day. You are quite right that teachers, head teachers and people involved in all sectors of education are suffering at the hands of children and young people who are not being adequately managed because of the dearth of services.

Justin McCamphill: Mr Shannon, I know you raised it specifically in terms of mental health, and we do not have figures in terms of those, but we do know that, over the past year, there has been an increase of 2,800 in the number of pupils on the special needs register, while there are now 800 more pupils with statements for special needs. That is happening at the same time as special school provision is being reviewed. The number of those pupils with statements who are in special schools has fallen from 9.8% to 7.5%. We therefore are finding that pupils may be inappropriately placed in mainstream, not because it is necessarily the best place but because the employing authorities, due to financial considerations, are having to put the responsibility for that provision on schools. Our concern is that when that provision is put in schools—and in most cases it can be delivered in schools—the support is not put there.

We have had to deal with situations with young people with severe mental health problems, with behavioural problems, who have had an individual classroom assistant. That individual classroom assistant has been withdrawn. Because that pupil does not have that support and the one-to-one of the person to talk to when they are not feeling well in themselves, that obviously leads to behaviour—unfortunately sometimes quite violent behaviour. We believe that if you look back at statistics, between 2015 and 2016 there was an almost doubling in the number of attacks on school staff by pupils. We would say that correlates directly with the withdrawal of classroom assistants from classrooms. When cuts are happening in schools, schools have constraints around pupil hours, around teacher hours and around class sizes, so the first people, unfortunately, to lose their jobs are support staff.²

² Written clarification from the NASUWT: "2014-15 There were 213 suspensions for physical assaults on staff: <https://www.education->



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That increase in assaults that happens leads to both support staff and teachers taking time off sick. Again, if you look at the figures in terms of the increase in sickness absence, they match almost exactly the increase in assaults. If a teacher is assaulted, the mental health problems that causes that teacher lead to them taking time off and the problem then starts to spiral out of control. There have been cases where we as a union have been contacted by members saying, "This school has gone out of control with behaviour." When you actually dig down into it, it can be one or two pupils, the reason being that they have their individual support withdrawn. The impact one or two people with real problems can have on the others can be quite severe.

Q212 Jim Shannon: I concur with that, Mr Chairman. Again, I have not mentioned the school, but I was there on the day that a very challenging young boy had assaulted the teacher. He was very young. It was, unfortunately, his emotional make-up. He had overturned a desk and really wrecked the room, so they had to put that child in a room on his own with a classroom assistant. To be truthful with you, it should really have taken two classroom assistants. I know he might have been young, but he was challenging and strong. The teacher was still at work the next day. But for the first time ever in my life, I saw exactly what this meant; I just happened to be at the school when it was taking place. This is a mainstream school, by the way, which goes back to your point.

Mr Chairman, I want to ask a question as a follow-on. Geri, on your issue about the money coming in, I think if there is going to be a recommendation at the end of this—Mr Chairman, there will be recommendations—one of those recommendations has to be that the money that is sent for education is ring-fenced for education; it does not go into a central fund where it is disbursed out towards you. Another thing from personal experience, but now backed up with an evidential base, is that I think we also need to have the money for special needs education and educational needs set aside as well.

Another issue that has come to my attention is identifying and assessing those with special educational needs. Truthfully, it is so frustrating. I get terribly frustrated with the system sometimes. It is probably because of the costs, and others have spoken here about not having a functioning Assembly. I have to say that I am as frustrated as anybody with what is happening and the inability to address the issues directly with the Minister and with a Department that can then respond. In relation to the assessment process, which can take from three to six months, I am wondering whether, if you have a child at a particular moment in time who is particularly difficult, that is the time you need the assessment and you then need a classroom assistant to follow through from that. I need

[ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/pupil-suspensions-2014-15.pdf](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/pupil-suspensions-2014-15.pdf). 2015-16
2015-18 There were 646 suspensions for physical assaults on staff
<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Pupil%20suspensions%202015%2016%20%28revised%20October%202017%29.pdf>"



to be careful what I say. It is almost as if they are playing for time.

Geri Cameron: The Northern Ireland Audit Office report on special educational needs did challenge many of those elements you have just discussed. We would contend that there needs to be urgent action in regard to the assessment and identification of children and young people with SEN. The difficulty is that, for a child to proceed through the stages of the code of practice in Northern Ireland, all the assistance and support is school-based up until stage 3 of that code of practice. The child has to progress, and effectively fail, through a number of individual education plans before they become eligible for assessment. Three to six months would frankly be very optimistic. It could be as much as four or five years for that to be the case. We talk in Northern Ireland and in other jurisdictions about the impact of early identification and putting services in exactly when they are required. That is not happening effectively in Northern Ireland, and that audit report identified those issues. I do not think they are being effectively addressed at the moment.

The centralised services are responsible for identifying and putting in the assessment needs for children and young people. They are not adequate. They are not meeting the needs of the population at the moment. That is universal. That is across all phases and sectors. It is something that I would like this inquiry to really take a close look at. I am not suggesting for a second that schools want to be responsible for all elements that are currently centralised, but we need to find out if that money is being deployed in the most efficient way to meet the needs of those children and young people. In schools is where the money can make an impact directly.

Gerry Murphy: Fundamentally, what we are seeing here is what John Collings of EA referred to in a previous evidence session as the cake being too small. We have special needs children with particular and special learning needs manifesting in the system at a rate of 5% more per annum year on year, at a time when the budget is reducing by 10% in the same years. It does not work. There simply is not the provision there. In terms of how it manifests itself, in terms of classroom assistant support, up until 2010-11—and I was the principal of a primary school as well—you could expect a child progressing to stage 5 and being awarded a statement of special educational needs to normally receive 25 hours per week of classroom assistant support. Since 2010/11, we are seeing that, gradually, that figure has reduced to 10 to 15 hours.

You have that running alongside a policy of integration, which we fully support as trade unions, but it has to mean more than simply putting these children in the same uniforms and pushing them through the front door with everybody else. Integration has to be accompanied by the appropriate and particular levels of support required. It is simply not. We as representatives of teachers are hearing every day from our members that they are not able to provide the level of support that these children need, and the assistance that was provided to the children and to the



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teachers by the classroom assistants is also being withdrawn. It is a double-whammy, and something really needs to be done. I would echo Geri's call here to the Committee, when it is looking at this: when it comes to making recommendations, we need strong recommendations in the area of special educational needs.

Justin McCamphill: I want to pick up on your point, Mr Shannon, in terms of the recommendations you might make. I would caution about allocating all the money to the aggregated schools budget, given that the second biggest cost is actually for the special schools themselves. While the figure of 40% might look as if that is a lot of money not being spent in schools, when you take the special schools themselves out of it and take the school transport cost out of it, there actually is not that much money left that is being spent at EA level. When you look at what they are spending, I certainly do not believe there would be a case for allocating the management of free school meals to schools. If you were going to do that, you would have to look at exactly what budgets you would give to schools and whether schools are in the position where they take that responsibility on, particularly small schools. If you have a small school with a teaching principal, the idea that you suddenly could be in a position where they could be managing everything becomes almost impossible.

Geri Cameron: I do not think that is what I was saying. I should qualify that. What I am saying is this 41% is held centrally and is managed centrally. The 59% that goes directly to schools is heavily audited and scrutinised on a regular basis, and we are publicly accountable, as we should be. Every pound coming from Westminster and making its way to the frontline in schools is clearly seen and easily audited. We cannot say the same for the other 41%. Notwithstanding the 38 special schools in Northern Ireland, which are almost all deemed outstanding—there is no question they are providing an outstanding service—there are issues in regard to the rest of that money in terms of clarity and transparency. Is it being efficiently deployed? If it is, then let it be seen to be. If it is value for money, then let it be seen to be.

At the moment, I cannot say that. My members cannot say that. We are hearing on a daily basis from principals and teachers that they are not getting the services that are at the centre. They are not seeing them effectively deployed in the school. Ultimately, it is the children and young people of this generation, this particular generation, who will suffer from that. Everybody in this room will have benefitted from an education system that they probably have very fond memories of, but fond or not so fond, it was probably adequate to meet your needs. There is a generation at the moment who probably will not be able to say that in the future.

Q213 **Jim Shannon:** For the *Hansard* record as much as anything, there are special needs schools and special educational schools like Killard House, which the honourable lady for North Down has in her constituency, but



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which my constituents and her constituents both attend. I was there before Christmas, and they are finding their budgets extremely challenging, as does Tor Bank in East Antrim and Longstone in Lagan Valley. Again, because there are people in areas from all our constituencies that go towards it, I want to get an answer very quickly—because the Chairman is intimating to me about time—on the importance of those schools. Colin Millar, the principal of Killard House School in Donaghadee—who is my constituent, by the way—tells me that his budget is under pressure. His pressure will be staff. If he lays staff off, then he cannot look after children. It is ridiculous.

Geri Cameron: They are the most vulnerable children. If I give you a concrete example of how that has impacted, not necessarily in Colin's school but in a school not very far from that, there are cases where there are children who are placed in those schools as a direct result of their very complex needs after the allocation of the budget and after the allocation of staffing. The agreement with the Education Authority is that the principal then asks for additionality to meet the needs of those very complex children. That can take 18 months. You have children who are extremely challenging giving the school an incredible management issue. They are not saying they cannot; they are not saying they will not. They are more than willing. These schools are all excellent, and their staff go the extra mile every single day, but they simply cannot manage without the additional staff. That is an element that was highlighted in the audit report that really does need to be looked at. What are the delays, what are the obstacles and what are the barriers to that money reaching the end user, which is what it is intended for?

Q214 **Lady Hermon:** Thank you very much indeed for coming to give us evidence this morning. Where to start? Let me come back to some of the evidence you have already given about the figures of teachers and to references made, quite rightly, to a number of young people from Northern Ireland who go to Scotland, as identified in your evidence. Could you give us the figures on teachers who have trained, left Northern Ireland and stayed in Scotland?

Justin McCamphill: I cannot do that now, but I can supply that to the Committee after. I was aware of a BBC story, I think in October or November, in terms of university graduates who go. I know the majority do not come back. I certainly do not believe it will be any different for teaching graduates. I will try to get those figures for you after.

Q215 **Lady Hermon:** The point was made earlier on that, because of the pay levels and conditions in Northern Ireland, teachers were leaving and retention was a difficulty. Could we have the figures for those who are moving on the border area, to the Republic of Ireland?

Gerry Murphy: I attempted to investigate those figures in the run-up to the Committee, and it proved very difficult to get any. I looked to the GTC north and south. They could not supply me with an accurate figure, and neither could the Departments. What I was able to ascertain was



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there were 600 teachers who are registered on the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register who live in post codes along the border—the 357 miles of border—on the northern side who are within easy travelling distance. What I can tell you anecdotally is that my office is receiving between five and 10 calls per week from teachers looking to know how they go about registering in the Republic of Ireland to teach, so much so that we produced material for them before Christmas and sent it out to our members. We ran a special event around December time.

Q216 Lady Hermon: Do you follow up on that, having sent out the material, to find out, after the phone calls have been made to the office, how many of them actually do register in the Republic of Ireland?

Gerry Murphy: We invite them to contact us and let us know how they got on.

Q217 Lady Hermon: Do they do that?

Gerry Murphy: Very few of them do. They do tend to contact us if there is a difficulty, but the process is relatively straightforward.

Justin McCamphill: We would know when we get the resignation, because, unlike Gerry, we do not organise in the Republic. When somebody resigns, they would give as their reason that they have taken a job up in the Republic; therefore they would have to join one of the unions that organises there.

Q218 Lady Hermon: Do you have figures?

Justin McCamphill: We do not have figures on that, no. Again, not everyone who inquires about it necessarily follows through.

Q219 Lady Hermon: I wanted to clarify that because I had written it down. I was very struck by the evidence at the beginning, and I just wanted to know what the figures were. You might be able to, when you go back home, help the Committee with the figures. Thank you.

One of the other things that came across very clearly, without saying so much about it, is the Education Authority—the unidentified elephant in the room—which we have heard criticism of as you have given evidence this morning. Could I ask you to describe the relationship with the Education Authority? Is it good, bad or indifferent?

Justin McCamphill: At senior level it is very good.

Lady Hermon: The senior level is very good.

Justin McCamphill: Yes, at chief executive and director level—with some of the directors it is good. The problem is sometimes when you actually want to get things to happen lower down the chain. We are finding you cannot find the right person to talk to anymore.

Gerry Murphy: I would describe it as generally good at senior levels. Where you do run into difficulty is that, even after it has been established



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for however many years now—is it three?—it still appears to be pretty much in transformation mode. The work does not appear to have completed yet—of drawing five education and library boards together into one body. There is confusion, we find, as to who is in charge of what and who is looking after what. There simply still is not the level of access that previously was there for head teachers or teachers seeking advice and support, which was traditionally available to them via the old education and library boards. That is not there anymore.

Q220 Lady Hermon: Has there been any review of the Education Authority, which is into its third year? Is there any organisation that actually checks on the Education Authority? Is there no review of the working and how well it is doing? Is there any inspection provision?

Geri Cameron: No.

Justin McCamphill: The Department of Education is responsible for monitoring how the Education Authority delivers on the Department's objectives. I have not heard of a review in terms of the effectiveness of the organisation. However, both the Education Authority and CCMS are being looked at within the transformation of education, which I know Gerry has looked a bit more at than me.

Geri Cameron: When organisations come together—for example when two schools amalgamate, which has happened in Northern Ireland, and there are many more proposals for that—ETI, our equivalent of Ofsted, would undertake a baseline inspection, which would be the same and standard practice for any organisations that you are bringing together. If you want to establish whether there is cost saving, an improvement in service or an improvement in outcomes, that would be a good starting point.

Maybe 12 to 18 months later, you would get a second review or a second inspection, to establish whether or not those proposed cost savings and improvements in service delivery had actually emerged and come about. Maybe five years or 10 years down the line you would be able to say that it was a really good thing to do.

When the five education and library boards came together, the tenet for that was that there was too much bureaucracy and there was too much inconsistency in provision across the Province. The hope was that there would be a single identity for education in Northern Ireland—the Education Authority. There was not any baseline assessment of what that should look like or did look like at that particular moment in time.

There were difficulties emerging from 11 years ago when ESA was proposed. That became EA three years ago, and still there is no assessment of whether we have improved service delivery and whether we have saved any money. We would strongly contend that the transparency that we need to see, in terms of whether those elements of improvement and cost saving are there, are impossible to get at the



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moment. It is another element of a recommendation we would like to come from this inquiry. If it is value for money, if it is a cost saving and an improvement, then let it be seen to be that.

I understand that, with any huge organisation, not least the health service that we saw, that it will take time. I would contend that there is a generation of children who are currently within the Education Authority's provision, and they need to have the best quality service possible. We have no way of telling if they are getting that at the moment. We would like an inspection or some sort of scrutiny to begin, looking at whether or not the new structures are effective.

Q221 Lady Hermon: Can we be clear as to whose responsibility it is to make sure that those efficiencies have been made?

Gerry Murphy: The Department of Education.

Q222 Lady Hermon: In the absence—and continued absence, unfortunately—of the Northern Ireland Assembly functioning properly, that will have to be the permanent secretary.

Justin McCamphill: No. It is still the Department's responsibility because it is really a functional issue in terms of how the Education Authority is delivering in relation to the Department's aims. It would not have taken a Minister, in any case. The Department has lots of staff whose job it is to monitor how schools and employing authorities are carrying out their functions.

Lady Hermon: Yes. The point I was making is that, in the absence of the Assembly, the person we should be writing to is the permanent secretary for the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to seek clarification on this particular issue that you have raised.

Justin McCamphill: Yes, sorry.

Q223 Lady Hermon: A point that you made earlier, Geri, which I have taken down, is that it is difficult to get transparency on how the EA spends its budget. Have you tried?

Geri Cameron: Yes, we have. We have tried with two freedom of information requests. We did get an answer that is within the legal requirement, but it still does not contain the detail that we need to be able to get off our soapbox and say that it is delivering effectively. Unfortunately, on client satisfaction, our members who responded in large numbers to our request for information prior to this inquiry would state that they are not receiving the service that is the central services' responsibility. We want to be able to demonstrate that it is value for money—or it is not, and it is reviewed and changed—but we are not able to get that transparency, and we really need that at the moment. There are all sorts of figures.

You could contend that every penny that goes into central services, bar maybe administrative costs at the very centre, is directed towards



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schools. You can say that with relative impunity because that is probably true. Everything is intended to be directed towards servicing children and young people. Unfortunately, it does not always get right to the end user. There are too many layers of bureaucracy—something that bringing together the five education and library boards into one Education Authority was supposed to diminish. In actual fact, I would contend that it has increased. I am not saying the Education Authority is to be thrown out and started again. I am not saying that at all. What I am saying is we need to be able to scrutinise and publically audit every single pound that comes out of Westminster that makes its way to a child at the frontline who needs it. We are not able to do that at the moment.

Q224 Lady Hermon: That is certainly the remit that this Committee has: to look at the allocation to the Education Department and how that money has been spent. You have made two freedom of information requests to the EA, the Education Authority, about how it is spending money. Maybe I have misunderstood your reply. Are you suggesting that, while it has replied technically to the freedom of information requests, its answers have not been particularly enlightening?

Geri Cameron: That is exactly what I mean. The budgets have not been published since 2016.

Lady Hermon: Sorry?

Geri Cameron: We cannot get access to the budgets. I know that was asked of the Education Authority directly by this Committee, and there was an answer given in late November that there was a reason why their budget for 2017-18 had not yet been published. There are issues with clarity.

Gerry Murphy: I just wanted to make a point about the budgetary timeframes. For the last number of years, the education budget has been allocated on a year-to-year basis. That is making planning difficult for schools, the Education Authority and the plethora of educational administrative bodies—employing authorities and people who have some either administrative or employing function across the system. The fact they are only getting a budget on an annual basis means that their capacity or their ability to plan forward is curtailed.

Lady Hermon: That confirms evidence we have had earlier.

Justin McCamphill: What we are really dealing with is crisis planning. The system as a whole has £233 million less than it had in 2010-11. All these things that are happening at the Education Authority, at school level and among the other bodies in terms of planning are the symptoms of not being able to balance budgets, having to, every year, make ends meet, and not being prepared to engage in long-term planning. As Gerry said earlier, it is not about dividing up the cake. We also have to look at how we can make that cake bigger while not losing sight of what efficiency savings can be made and need to be made. Certainly, it is not



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possible to make up that £233 million gap just by making the EA more efficient.

Q225 Lady Hermon: Yes, but we as a Committee would like to know how the Education Authority spends every penny that has been allocated to the Department in Northern Ireland. That was the point we were making.

I was particularly struck and very much concerned by the evidence you gave earlier about the increase, it seems, in the level of assaults and harassment that teachers, your members, are experiencing. That is deeply concerning and very upsetting to hear. In those circumstances, can we ask again what support services are provided by the Education Authority in the event of a report by a teacher of an assault to the Education Authority? Presumably, the support service has to come from the Education Authority. Am I right?

Witnesses: Yes.

Q226 Lady Hermon: You are confirming that is right. You have given us evidence that, in fact, there is an increase in the level of very unpleasant behaviour that staff have to deal with in schools. Mr Shannon confirmed that he had witnessed some of that himself, which is very concerning indeed. In those circumstances, how does the EA respond to support that member of staff?

Justin McCamphill: Where an assault happens, if it is a young person who clearly needs support, the school will make a request, but we are finding, unfortunately, that unless we as a trade union put pressure on, that support will not come, whereas in the past we believe it would have come a lot more readily. That is to do with resourcing issues within the EA. In some schools, we have reached the position where teachers have refused to teach some of those pupils, not because we want the pupil expelled but because we want the pupil to get the support. Of the assaults that happen, my estimate is that probably two-thirds of them are being perpetrated by young people with problems, where, if those problems had been identified and dealt with, the assaults would not have happened.

The three of us work in the Irish Congress of Trade Unions with the non-teaching unions. We have completed a large workforce survey. We have yet to publish the statistics but, without giving too much away, we can clearly see that the people who actually bear the brunt are the classroom assistants, and it is far more likely to happen in primary than in secondary, whereas most members of the public would imagine it is secondary school teachers that get assaulted. By and large, that is not the case; it is in special schools and in primary. Our view is if you cannot provide that one-to-one support or that flexibility for that young person who is having that problem, the problems are going to multiply.

Q227 Lady Hermon: Could I ask again: what support comes from the Education Authority to the members of staff?



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Justin McCamphill: If it is at post-primary level, for example, young people will be moved to an EOTAS centre.

Chair: Gerry, you are busting to contribute.

Gerry Murphy: In terms of support for the teacher as opposed to the child, there is a telephone helpline service that the Department pays for that the teacher may call and review or discuss the incident with a counsellor, effectively. I am reluctant to use the term "assault". Some of these incidents are clearly assaults, but I do not think they should all be characterised as assaults. In England and Wales, for example, if the teacher has to take time off as a consequence of an assault, that teacher would have additional leave. It would not be sick leave, per se. It is described as something else other than sick leave. That provision is not available in Northern Ireland. If you are assaulted and you are not in school, you are sick. That maybe needs to be looked at.

The short answer to your question, Lady Hermon, is that there is little or no support available to the staff member, be that the hard-working classroom assistant or the hard-working teacher, in the event that they are assaulted.

Lady Hermon: That is enormously disappointing.

Geri Cameron: I should say that the Education Authority do have behaviour support teams who are designated to go into schools and provide support. Again, unfortunately the experience of schools would be that that is too thin on the ground. It comes as crisis management. It is very reactive. We are very good in Northern Ireland at reacting to critical incidents, but we are not terribly good at learning from them and putting mechanisms in place for making sure that the chances of them happening again are mitigated. Justin was about to allude to education other than at school and alternative education provisions. Unfortunately, in Northern Ireland this is a huge area of growth, although I have to say it is a huge area of growth in England as well.

There is no doubt that as a society we are experiencing challenge in terms of the behaviour of some children and young people in our system. I do not think we can underestimate the fact that there is a fiscal challenge across society in general, and a lot of voluntary organisations that would have participated with youth work and diversionary work are no longer in existence. This is particularly true in Northern Ireland, and unfortunately in flash points across Northern Ireland, where you will have drug and alcohol issues, those services have largely disappeared. There is a huge, greater emphasis on the statutory provisions for supporting these children and young people. Unfortunately, they are stretched to the limit.

I would like to go back to my previous point, which is that, of the money that is available, we simply do not know if it is being deployed effectively in the best way that it can. There is not enough money, but that that there is, we are not seeing it translated. I am first and foremost a



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teacher. I have been a principal for 24 years, but I was a teacher—I still am a teacher—and I have been assaulted many, many times and have never looked anywhere for support other than to my colleagues within the teaching profession, because I simply know that what is beyond my own colleagues is not fit for purpose. It is something that really does need to be looked at.

Q228 Lady Hermon: The support beyond what your colleagues give you is not fit for purpose.

Geri Cameron: It is not fit for purpose. There is a huge network of colleague support among teachers, classroom assistants and school leaders in Northern Ireland. We are very good at self-help. We get together. I was instrumental in starting the strategic leadership forum for special school principals because, as Justin correctly alluded to, there is a huge number of assaults on staff in special schools—staff frequently with bite marks, punched, kicked and all sorts of assaults. The NAHT undertook a survey of the assaults in special schools a number of years ago. The results were frightening—so frightening that we would not publish because these children and young people have behaviours that are beyond their control. It is a totally different scenario, but it is still a fact of life for the staff that are in those schools. It is something that we would contend needs to be a much stronger element of the Education Authority and the employing bodies' responsibility in general.

Justin McCamphill: One of the issues we would have is that schools are obliged to report assaults to the Education Authority. We are talking about the governance and whether the EA is being monitored, but there is also a duty on the EA: are they monitoring what the schools are doing? Are schools reporting all these assaults that happen? It is only when you acknowledge the problem is there, and it comes to people like yourselves, that people can actually focus on how to deal with it. Unfortunately, in some schools there would be a culture where you do not want to tell anyone, because otherwise they will think you are the problem. It is important that the EA do fulfil their role of making sure that schools are reporting these incidents when they happen.

Gerry Murphy: We have been trying for the guts of a decade—seven years. I myself have been directly involved in trying to develop with the employing authorities and DE a teacher health and wellbeing strategy. We get to virtually the same point on every cycle of trying to get a teacher health and wellbeing strategy in place. We get to the point where we have to survey to determine the extent of the problem and it ceases.

Q229 Lady Hermon: We still do not have a strategy after all these years. After aiming for one, we do not have one.

Gerry Murphy: No.

Q230 Lady Hermon: Would that be a good place for the Education Authority to



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start?

Geri Cameron: It would certainly be a very good place to start, in that it would target the entirety of the sector. There are no leafy suburbs anymore. There are children with challenging mental health and challenging difficulties across every school. It is something that would be of universal benefit. I cannot imagine any other situation where a school principal could be hounded, stalked, vilified on social media and held up for public ridicule with no consequence. As a trade union, we are inundated with principals who are suffering at the hands of all sorts of individuals with very strange motives. Nevertheless, they are there. They are in existence. No other profession would sustain it or tolerate it. We do need to have a serious look at that.

Q231 **Lady Hermon:** An urgent look—could I prompt you to say that?

Geri Cameron: Urgent, yes.

Q232 **Lady Hermon:** The evidence you have given is very compelling, I have to say.

Gerry Murphy: There are 4,000 teachers employed on a temporary basis in every month. Those are 4,000 substitute teachers coming in for teachers who are off as a consequence of illness.

Lady Hermon: Four thousand?

Gerry Murphy: Four thousand in every month, so about 20% of the teaching population.

Lady Hermon: That is an enormous number.

Gerry Murphy: You would think that the Department of Education and the employing authorities that have been motivated to save some money would want to look in detail at what is causing that level of turnover. We are talking about £76 million per annum in temporary and substitute teacher costs, if we take the Department's figures as correct—and we have no reason not to. There is a case for a teacher health and wellbeing strategy which goes beyond the issue of the assaults, because our teachers are working in an extremely low-trust, high-pressure environment. All that stress, which has been generated by an accountability system that is effectively out of control, is playing into these sickness figures. All of that needs to be addressed. We are of the view that a broader health and wellbeing strategy for teachers—and indeed for classroom assistants and all of those colleagues who assist and work in schools—needs to be put in place.

Lady Hermon: Thank you very much. Let us hope that the Education Authority are listening. That was a very, very clear message, a very strong message and a very powerful message.

Q233 **Chair:** That is very clear. The sickness absence figures that the Education Authority has generated would certainly support all of that. Loss of



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productivity is obviously a cause for concern, as is the toll it is taking on your members. Would you say that a proper occupational health service, for example, might be of assistance to your members? Is that something you would welcome?

Gerry Murphy: Yes, we would welcome a proper occupational health service sitting within a broader health and wellbeing strategy for the profession as a whole. We have an occupational health strategy at the moment, which appears to be more about pushing people back into work as quickly as they can, as opposed to ensuring that they are fully recovered and ready to return to work.

Geri Cameron: Something that might be of use there is to consider the relationship between employers and their employees. At the moment, it can often be considered—real or imagined—quite adversarial. It would be nice for any occupational or welfare strategy to be a collaborative strategy that recognises the stresses and strains of the profession at the moment. It is the times we live in, and it is a shared responsibility, particularly where there is such shared funding. We all have a responsibility to ensure we have the capacity to meet the needs of the children and young people. Four thousand substitute teachers a month is not good for children and young people. It is not good for those teachers who end up on temporary contracts for very long periods of time. There is a greater dividend to be had by addressing this at a fairly deep level.

Q234 **Mr Campbell:** I want to go back to the issue that you opened with in terms of the whole teaching staff issue, with terms and conditions, pay and those sorts of issues. I am trying to put myself in the place of an individual who is not a teacher, who is perhaps a parent or a grandparent, who has an interest in education, as we all do, and who would have listened to your evidence and would also have had a passing interest in education over the past few years. I wonder if what I am going to say now is accurate or inaccurate. In terms of those people looking today and saying that teacher morale appears to be low, because of the reasons you have outlined—there has been a dispute going on for eight years, as yet unresolved; school inspections have not been co-operated with for about two years; the school population is going up; the number of teachers is going down; attractive options are available elsewhere, in the Republic—would that be reasonably accurate summary of where you are?

Gerry Murphy: Yes.

Q235 **Mr Campbell:** If that is reasonably accurate, what is the Department, in your opinion, doing about that analysis?

Gerry Murphy: The Department here and at other places are telling you and other bodies that they are engaged in a transformation process. We are not in a position to comment on that transformation process, in that they have not engaged with us on that as yet. Hopefully they will do in the near future. Clearly, the Department recognises it has a problem. EA



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clearly recognises that it has a problem. We are stating clearly that there is a huge problem, and you are having this inquiry; we are all accepting that there is a problem here.

Mr Campbell: I am trying to find out what people are going to do.

Gerry Murphy: The Department is talking about transforming the situation. We do not understand what they mean by transforming. From the little that we heard here and were able to ascertain at home, it appears that it is talking about reducing the size of the school estate. I do not see how that is going to free up a huge amount of money—the amount of money that is needed to fix or to change the very bleak outlook that is in front of us.

On that point, Gavin Boyd, in November or December of last year, quantified the amount of money. The shortfall is £300 million going forward. The shortfall would be £300 million in the education budget. He was basing that on 2015-16 figures. In 2015-16, we had already been experiencing cuts to the budget approaching 10% from the 2010-11 year, so I would suggest that is a gross underestimation of the extent of the problem. The maintenance backlog alone is £327 million.

What do we do about it? We need to invest very substantially initially to address the shortfalls. We have a special needs population, as already mentioned here, growing at 5% per annum. We simply do not have the resources to deal with that. The cuts—and I am not choosing to use the euphemism here of efficiency savings; they are cuts—across the system are manifesting themselves in increased level of sickness across the whole piece. The immediate short-term solution is to invest now and then let us sit down, all of us together, and plan a way forward. They did it in health through Bengoa. I do not see why we could not, as an educational community, sit down together and sort a way forward for ourselves.

Geri Cameron: One of the things I would say, Mr Campbell, as a direct answer to you is that rationalising the school estate is something that has come up at many of these sessions. It is almost bandied about in the public arena that there are many, many empty school desks. There may well be some empty school desks, but there are not as many as there were in the past. The geographical distribution is very uneven. There are parts of Northern Ireland where it is impossible to get a child into a parent's first or second-choice school.

What we would suggest in the NAHT is that there has not really been any realistic assessment of the financial impact at the very lowest common denominator of closing and amalgamating schools. What is the financial saving there? Is there a saving to be had, or is it just a response to the idea that there are too many school places, which there may well in fact not be in the next couple of years if the demographic continues as it is? The children who are going to be going to school in the next three years are already born. We already know where they are.



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We would contend that the Department is not looking at whether or not it is viable to close small rural schools, for example. Is that a cost-saving exercise? Has amalgamating two schools that fall below the sustainability level in terms of the set criteria been costed? Is it viable? Is it something that is going to do what it sets out to do? We are not aware that the Department is doing that, as Gerry said. We are not consulted on that at the moment. Perhaps that is something that will emerge going forward. I for one am very tired of hearing the excuse of a transformative process being used as the reason why we are not making progress and why we have a situation where parents, grandparents and onlookers can look at the system and go, "There is something seriously wrong here. What is being done about it?" There are things that we feel could emerge as useful strategies going forward that might improve the situation, but we do not feel they are being done yet

Justin McCamphill: Mr Campbell, in terms of the point about what the Department is doing in resolving union action, even if we reached a settlement, we are still going to be left with the same issue of more pupils and fewer teachers. There are physical limits in terms of the number of pupils you can put in classrooms; there are limits in terms of hours teachers can teach. If those numbers do not match up, you are going to have a problem. Unfortunately what will happen, although the majority of principals will not do this, is that in some schools it will be the teachers who are pushed to the breaking point; they are pushed to the point of breaching their contract and working beyond the hours they are meant to work. We will be back to square one again very quickly.

If you cannot make those things match up, we are going to be faced with more and more issues. My view is the union action is more the symptom of the problem. The real problem is having more pupils with fewer teachers, and pay that has fallen in real terms by 20% since 2010.

Gerry Murphy: Can I try to lift this gloom somewhat? Over this entire period, if you look at the GCSE and A-level results, if you look at the PIMS and the PIRLS results—those being the primary school literacy and numeracy international testing scores—you will see the trajectory has been continually upwards, and quite steeply upwards. In fact, our primary schools rank in the top 10 in the world, and the top five in literacy. The teachers, the principals, the classroom assistants, the lollypop men, the dinner ladies and the bus drivers have been delivering here. The problem lies elsewhere. That is what needs to be addressed.

Justin McCamphill: We are going to reach the point—and it is actually happening now incrementally—where schools are starting to shave five minutes off the school day every year. Parents maybe do not notice it, but if you have a large school with 40 teachers, shaving that five minutes off per day may allow you to make one person redundant. Going forward, we are going to find more and more schools will be making the school day shorter so that they can deliver the curriculum with a reduced number of staff.



Q236 Mr Campbell: To conclude my question, do I read you right—not to use a pun in the education sector—that if there were a Bengoa-style overarching educational review in which your members, as well as a whole series of stakeholders, were involved in a consultation process, you would welcome that? Is that right?

Justin McCampbell: In many ways, we thought the ESA proposal in 2010-11 would have been part of that. If you were to have a Bengoa-style review, it would have to take account of the totality—all the different bodies that exist and the model of selection that is used. It would have to be in its totality.

Chair: Thank you. That is an important point to make. I am going to appeal for brevity in the questions and answers.

Q237 Maria Caulfield: I wanted to go back to special educational needs, because I understand from the evidence that we have seen, and from what we have heard this morning, that there is a significant delay in statements being made. Can I get a feel of some of the reasons for why that is? Is it because of the lack of staff available, the lack of resources or the increasing number of children that are making applications for statements? What is the reason why that deadline is not being met?

Geri Cameron: It is a combination of all of the things that you have just mentioned, but in totality the system of assessment for children with special educational needs is very unwieldy. It requires an awful lot of duplication. It requires a very high threshold of assessment for any meaningful action to come from without the school. Up until that point, the provision needs to be within the school. That is why we are finding significant difficulties, because while the school is able to hold the line and manage, they will be allowed to do so, despite alerting the authorities to the fact that a child is struggling and would require full assessment.

There are other practical issues. If a child gets to stage 4 for formal assessment prior to having a statement, there are a range of professionals who have to submit evidence and advice for that child, and the audit report suggested that there were significant delays in providing that advice so that the statement could be completed. In many cases, it is well beyond the statutory 26 weeks, which is unsatisfactory. At the sharp end of the wedge, which I mentioned earlier, the school is still managing that child throughout the entire process.

One of the things that is most laudable—I am trying to lift the gloom as well—is that principals, teachers and classroom assistants in Northern Ireland do an outstanding job in the face of this adversity. We do make excellent progress with children who have adversity and very specific learning needs, as well as learning challenge, but there is a strong sense among the school leaders that I can speak for that they are being taken for granted—that they will continue to do that and that no leader of a school with children with special needs will ever want to disadvantage a



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child, so their staff and the leaders themselves will always keep going the extra mile. That is simply not good enough for either the child or the staff involved.

The parent lobby in Northern Ireland needs to get an awful lot louder. There has been quite a significant parent lobby in England, which has been very effective. In Northern Ireland there is a great respect for the teaching profession in terms of dealing with and managing children with additional and special needs. Whenever there is any suggestion that that service is less than it should be, they could come out and make their presence felt an awful lot more. That would be in support of the profession.

Justin McCamphill: One of the issues we are picking up now is that many schools in more affluent areas are encouraging parents to go privately to educational psychologists. Those schools are able to get pupils pushed up the queue quicker. We do have a situation where the schools that are dealing with the most problems are now the ones that are being left to wait. In fact it appears that the EA are almost operating a quota system where you can have a certain amount. Is it two per year?

Geri Cameron: It is supposed to be needs-driven, but unfortunately the capacity to meet the need has not kept pace. There are 140 educational psychologists employed for the entirety of Northern Ireland, and there will not be any increase in that number. That is simply not meeting the need. It would not be unrealistic for a school principal to have to make a very difficult arbitrary decision between two children or young people who urgently need to be assessed. They then have the serious backlash from the community, from the parents and from their public representatives, who phone us with regularity to press their case.

Justin McCamphill: I know one parent who was more or less told—or it was hinted at very strongly—“Well, you can afford it.” That is what is going on now.

Q238 **Maria Caulfield:** You hinted at the fact that the situation in England is very different. Since 2014, we have moved to a system of EHC plans rather than statements. It is not an ideal system—I get lots of parents who come and see me, and there are backlogs in assessments as well—but it is a much more needs-driven system, and it is about much more than just education. It is about the holistic needs of the child. Is that something Northern Ireland should be moving towards?

Geri Cameron: We have been attempted to reform SEN in Northern Ireland for the last 15 years, and we have not managed it yet. I have been involved in it from the very beginning. I get extremely frustrated with it. I am very familiar with the EHC plans going forward. I know there are problems with those as well. It is a contentious and emotive area of education that will always be problematic, but that is a much more child-centred methodology, where there is less duplication and there is



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less chance of a child falling through the so-called net, which unfortunately does happen frequently in Northern Ireland.

Q239 **Maria Caulfield:** What is the blockage in terms of making that change?

Geri Cameron: At the moment, we have no Assembly. We have no mechanism for pushing that through. We are currently training teachers, SENCOs and principals in what the legislation will bring forward, but it is in a bit of a vacuum because they cannot actually act on it.

Justin McCamphill: The legislation was passed in the Assembly, but because the Assembly currently is not sitting, they cannot bring in the regulations that are needed to enact things on the ground.

Gerry Murphy: Meanwhile, the Education Authority's Children and Young People's Services section continues to bring about change in the way special needs is organised and provided for across the system, even though the legislation has not been enacted.

Justin McCamphill: The training has been rolled out. SENCOs have been on the training. The training is now a part of school development days. However, if you move to a new way of assessing and recording special needs through personal learning plans, if you put all of that in place, and then it does not happen for another two years, the worry is that people will need to be refreshed. That is one concrete example of not having an Assembly and the impact it is having in the area of special needs.

Gerry Murphy: It is also part of the negotiation around the dispute with the trade unions. It is part of the solution. It generates a significant additional amount of workload for teachers, so that is one of the areas that is part of what we are looking at as well.

Justin McCamphill: It is important to let you know what role a SENCO plays in a school. Every mainstream school will have somebody who is responsible for co-ordinating special needs. You could well have people in schools that have 400 or 500 pupils, and who receive an extra £2,000 a year on top of their salary for carrying out this very important role. In some of those schools, they may have two days a week off or one day a week off, but we are finding that, more and more, they get half a day to carry out this important role. Given that 23% of young people are on the special needs register on average across our schools, these are the people who are actually coming under the most pressure within schools.

If you were to look at it from the outside, you might think this is an important person who is on the senior management team. It is in some schools, but in many cases, unfortunately, it is left to somebody with an extra £2,000 a year, with a declining number of classroom assistants to support them and with very little time to do the job. When the EA delegates things to schools, you have to remember that this can be the reality of how it is being managed at school level.

Q240 **Maria Caulfield:** I have one final question, because I know time is



pressing. In terms of training for teachers and SENCOs in that field, where is the most pressing need? Is it supporting training for teachers to identify children with special educational needs? Is the need greater, once children are identified, in terms of being able to help them through the education system with teaching and learning? Or is it both?

Geri Cameron: There are two elements to that answer. Initial teacher training in Northern Ireland does not address the whole area of SEN to any adequate standard level. It is usually a very small option for a PGCE student or a BEd student to opt into. It is not mandatory. Certainly, I would purport that a level of SEN knowledge and behaviour management knowledge would be a very important element to initial teacher training. That is one thing we have lobbied for.

Maria Caulfield: That is not happening at all.

Geri Cameron: It is optional. You can opt into it, but you do not have to. You can also opt to have a period of your teaching experience in a special school or in a support unit within a mainstream school. But, again, this is a growth area. The fact we are talking about it—and we talk about it extensively—means that it is everyone's business. Everyone should be interested in this issue and this area.

Secondly, training and ongoing CPD is a generic problem for all teachers and principals in Northern Ireland. It is just not sufficient. I was being nostalgic the other day and talking about having time to do a Master's degree when you graduated and you were working in a school. You might have taken an area of particular interest, and you might have actually had that paid for. That was in the good old days. I am old enough to remember them. There is very little capacity for CPD now for staff. Unfortunately, one of the outcomes of any CPD that staff are able to engage in is that they then become responsible for that element of the management within that school. That is not satisfactory, particularly, as Justin says, when there is no time allocation for it. It is a really good question, and it is one we grapple with all the time.

Gerry Murphy: What my trade union and my sister unions are trying to do here with respect to training is to fill this void with training courses. The problem I am finding is this: I can make the courses available, pay for whoever is delivering it, provide the venue and support transport costs, but I cannot get the teachers out of school to go to the course, because the school cannot afford the substitute teacher cover to release the teacher to the training. It is round, and it bites.

Q241 **Maria Caulfield:** It is not just providing the training; it is allowing the staff the time off to access it.

Geri Cameron: It is very interrelated.

Justin McCamphill: The Regional Training Unit of the Education Authority was providing training for schools a few years ago. With the



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cutbacks, it has now closed. For example, the professional qualification in headship no longer runs in Northern Ireland.

Geri Cameron: We are seeing the impact of that in terms of getting applicants for headship. It is a very frequent occurrence now that you will see re-advertisement of posts not once but up to three times.

Chair: This is for senior teaching and management posts.

Geri Cameron: For senior teaching and principal positions, yes.

Q242 **Mr Goodwill:** It seems that almost every issue we have discussed this morning comes down to money, whether it is special educational needs funding, stemming the exodus of teachers from Northern Ireland, or indeed funding the teachers' pay rise. The figure that jumped out of the page to me was this 41% of the budget being spent at the centre. That is £700 million. To put it another way, for every one percentage point of that you can claw back and deploy to schools, that is £17 million more for schools. Could I ask how that figure compares, say, with England in terms of money retained at the centre? Is it comparable or is it way out of line?

Justin McCamphill: It is very hard to make a direct comparison. In the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People's submission, they have tried to break down the figures into how this appears in practice at school level. Of the four jurisdictions in the UK, it is pretty clear that in Northern Ireland the average amount spent per head is less. Regardless of how it is divided up within the EA, the actual quantum is still less, particularly when you compare it to Wales and Scotland. We should remember that in England special schools are funded out of the main budget. In Northern Ireland, if special schools are being funded out of the 40%, that could be half of that 40%. There are not 40% savings. There are a lot of things that need to be looked at. Things like the visual and hearing impairment service and the autism service are all coming out of that 40%. Those are things you could not necessarily put at school level.

Q243 **Mr Goodwill:** It is difficult to make comparisons. It is even more difficult because of the fact they will not give a lot of information.

Geri Cameron: That is the issue. Justin referred to the NICCY report. Spending on pre-school primary education is 46% higher in Scotland, 18% higher in England and 31% higher in Wales. Now, statistics are wonderful; you can carve them up whatever way you like. What we are saying is that we do not know if the way we are doing it in Northern Ireland is value for money. What we do know is that the percentage going to the centre is much higher than it is in any other jurisdiction, where it is between 2% and 10%. We do not know, and that is what we need to get to grips with. As I said before, I will get off this soapbox if it is proven to me that it is the most efficient way of doing it and that it is providing and will, following transformation, provide a more effective service than we had, but I have no way of telling that at the moment.



Lady Hermon: It is an issue of transparency, yes.

Q244 **Mr Goodwill:** One of the services the EA provides is procurement. We heard in earlier evidence sessions some rather surprising stories of teachers being able to get cheaper laptops online. Do you have any examples of that? Would schools themselves be better able to procure some of the services they need locally? The internet is not even local, but there are deals to be had there, which maybe officials are not getting for them.

Justin McCamphill: I would caution here, particularly in terms of ICT. Northern Ireland's schools have a very good system through the C2K system. Every school in Northern Ireland is on the same managed network, which has large efficiencies in terms of purchasing power for the EA and for the transfer of information between schools. For example, if a teacher goes from one school to another, they keep the same email address. I can see the efficiencies that are there. You might say, "Well, schools might be able to buy their own system," but once you are down to a school with four or five teachers, putting in a server, putting in a network and paying for maintenance and upkeep, you are not necessarily going to get those savings. You suddenly then have a very fragmented system.

Schools in Northern Ireland all use the same school information management system. When the Department of Education wants to lift data in the annual census, it knows it is getting consistent data from every school. To me, the information the Department of Education then has on its website is second to none in terms of what I have seen across the other jurisdictions. It also means if a pupil transfers from one school to another, you hit a button in one school and you hit a button in the other school and the files go across like that. You have all their special educational needs records; it complies fully with GDPR. Everything can come across for that child. If you suddenly break it all down into 1,200 different silos, you will not find that the savings are there, and extra workload will come out of it.

Mr Goodwill: There are also areas like school catering or janitorial services.

Geri Cameron: I concur with what Justin says about ICT. The management system in Northern Ireland is very effective. Having said that, it is not a good example of centralised procurement being an issue. You have heard from other school principals and other contributors to this inquiry that school leaders are making choices now in terms of purchases. They are deciding whether or not to have a particular activity in the school or whether they have to withdraw that activity to do something else. There are difficult decisions to be made every day.

You asked for concrete examples. In my setting I have children who have vocational education. They go out of the school for experiential vocational education. They have to have equipment for that. They have overalls and



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steel toe-cap boots to go to building sites and so on. I can buy those very cheaply from a local supplier for maybe £15 a pair, but through procurement they are £65 a pair. If you multiply that up over the entire school population who are undertaking experiential vocational education, it is a lot of money.

It is one example, but when you multiply it up, I would like to think that the economy of scale should provide savings. I fail to understand why it does not. We then have all the other issues of maintenance and how much it costs to get small pieces of minor works completed in schools, which are extremely vital at the moment because a lot of the school estate is in such a state of disrepair and is not really fit for purpose. While there are elements of the centralised procurement process that are very effective—and I totally see the benefit of having a single system for ICT; that is essential—there are other elements that need to be looked at urgently.

Gerry Murphy: Like my friend from the NASUWT, I would add a note of caution in this area. There are elements of how the school budgets are managed that do bear examination and probably need modification and change, but I would be very reluctant to impose upon already overworked and underpaid head teachers additional responsibilities around ordering school meals, for example, or managing school transport. That is not their primary function. They do not themselves see it as being their primary function. Their primary function should and has to be about leading teaching and learning. The procurement issue is a mess. Procurement is a mess. If you want an example of procurement being a very big mess, look at Strule in Omagh. That campus encapsulates virtually all of your procurement issues on one site.

I am disagreeing slightly with my NAHT colleague here, in that while the common funding scheme and the LMS all could be looked at, I would be reluctant to see more responsibilities in terms of financial management and administrative burden imposed on hardworking principals and teachers.

Geri Cameron: For clarity, I want to say that is not what I am purporting. I am suggesting that the system as it exists may well remain with the central services, but it needs looking at in terms of efficiencies. As a principal, I do not want to increase my workload and I do not want to increase my colleagues' workload, but I do listen to them every day asking me why, for example, out of the 59% of the money that I do get, I have to pay this extortionate amount of money for an item that I know I can get somewhere else. It is not a matter of wanting more responsibility. It is a matter of wanting to make sure I can trust that the central service that is provided to me is efficient and cost-effective.

Q245 **Mr Goodwill:** Finally, one way that this logjam has been broken in England is with academisation. Particularly those schools with local authorities that were keeping a big slug of money at the centre were first



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in the queue to become academised and get a bigger proportion of their budget and have more flexibility on staff pay and all of those other things. I am not sure whether this question could have a yes or no answer, but has that been discussed?

Justin McCamphill: It is a yes or no answer. It is a terrible idea, so no.

Gerry Murphy: No.

Q246 **Lady Hermon:** Is that a unanimous no?

Geri Cameron: It is something that is contentious here. Northern Ireland has a strange habit of following some of the contentious ideas that precede them in other jurisdictions, so it is no doubt something that will feature but it would need a lot of questions answered.

Mr Goodwill: We will not go there.

Chair: Yes, I suspect that would take us well into tomorrow.

Q247 **John Grogan:** Very briefly, I want to follow up on a couple of things that have been raised and perhaps tease a little bit more out following my good colleague Robert's questions. There was a slight difference in emphasis and so on. Is there a consensus amongst you that this split of roughly 60/40 does at least need to be looked at by someone? There was the Salisbury review a few years ago that touched on these things. If the Assembly gets up and running, is there agreement here? I know we have been talking about the size of the cake, but, however big the cake is, we do need more transparency on this so we can make sensible comparisons and so on. Should it be something that is looked at?

Gerry Murphy: Yes, I believe so. Everybody benefits from increased levels of transparency.

Justin McCamphill: The Department has given you the headline figures. I am firmly of the view that once you break it down, you are actually going to find that you might be talking about 5% that you could argue might be better spent. Geri's own school comes out of the 40%, not out of the 60%. That 40% is paying for a lot of schools.

John Grogan: Five per cent. is a lot of money.

Justin McCamphill: I do not know what the figure would be.

Geri Cameron: Yes, the money that is going directly into special schools—as I said earlier, there are only 38 of them in Northern Ireland—is not half of the 41%. As I said before, we need clarity and transparency so that we can be assured.

Justin McCamphill: I want to pick up on the point that Mr Goodwill made. Mr Goodwill, you made the point about how you might be able to vary salaries if you had more local autonomy. Certainly, you could get into a position where you have increased autonomy and you are using it to drive down the salaries of teachers and support staff. We are going to



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end up with an even bigger mess if we go down that road, in terms of industrial action in Northern Ireland, than we have at present.

Q248 **Mr Goodwill:** That would help if you need a physics teacher desperately and you pay above the odds to get one into the school? That is how it has worked in England.

Justin McCamphill: Is that how it is really working? If we pick up on the point the Chair made at the start about the bean-counters in the EA who made the comparison with teachers' salaries in England, it would appear to me, then, that local autonomy in England has driven salaries down.

Q249 **John Grogan:** Can I just ask one final question about Northern Ireland? I have been listening carefully. One feature of the system is that there are several different employing authorities and so on. Something struck me. Do teachers move from one type of school to the other easily? Does it cause a problem that there are multiple authorities all with different ways of doing things? Does that make no difference?

Justin McCamphill: There is not necessarily a big problem in terms of your right to move. However, there are practical issues in terms of the Catholic primary schools having a requirement for the Catholic certificate in religious education. That certainly stems the flow. The other issue is that the exemption in the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order for teachers does mean that schools are allowed to discriminate on the basis of community background. Whether they are doing it or not, it creates a perception that it is there.

Gerry Murphy: What I would suggest is we are seeing more movement. We are seeing increased levels of movement across and between the various sectors.

Justin McCamphill: One of the issues that can arise with moving can be if a temporary teacher, for example, was in one sector and moves to another. In terms of the accrual of rights for maternity leave, that can sometimes cause issues.

Geri Cameron: I would say that we are seeing more and more of it. It is becoming easier.

Chair: Thank you ever so much. I have to say thank you to you for some really compelling evidence. We will reflect very heavily on that as we come to finalise our report on this matter. Thank you so much for being with us today.