



## Education Committee

### Oral evidence: [Special educational needs and disabilities](#), HC 968

Tuesday 15 January 2019

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 15 January 2019.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Lucy Allan; Ben Bradley; Marion Fellows; James Frith; Emma Hardy; Ian Mearns.

Questions 247-291

### Witnesses

**I:** Tania Beard, Headteacher, St Martin's C of E Primary and Nursery School; Jon Boyes, Principal, Herne Bay High School; Penny Earl, Resource Provision Manager, Stoke Park Infants School; Sabrina Hobbs, Principal, Severndale Specialist Academy; Nicola Jones-Ford, SENCO, Fulham College Boys' School; Dr Cath Lowther, Educational Psychologist; and Callum Wetherill, Pastoral Leader, Joseph Norton Academy, part of Wellspring Academy Trust.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Penny Earl](#)

[Fulham College Boys' School](#)

[Herne Bay High School](#)

[Dr Cath Lowther](#)

[St Martins C of E Primary and Nursery School](#)

[Wellspring Academy Trust](#)

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tania Beard, Jon Boyes, Penny Earl, Sabrina Hobbs, Nicola Jones-Ford, Dr Cath Lowther and Callum Wetherill.

Q247 **Chair:** Good morning, everybody. Thank you for coming today. Although the session is going to be watched on Parliament TV, we want it to be informal and more of a genuine roundtable. For the benefit of those watching, we will go around the room, starting with Marion, and introduce ourselves and say where we are from.

**Marion Fellows:** Hello. I am Marion Fellows and I am the MP for Motherwell and Wishaw, where we do things differently.

**Callum Wetherill:** I am Callum Wetherill and I am a member of the support staff at a special school in Yorkshire.

**Ben Bradley:** Ben Bradley. I am the Member of Parliament for Mansfield in Nottinghamshire.

**Penny Earl:** Penny Earl. I am resource manager for children with speech and language needs in an infants' school in Eastleigh, Hampshire, and I also work in the junior school.

**Dr Lowther:** I am Cath Lowther. I am a practising educational psychologist in a local authority. I am also a local representative for the Association of Educational Psychologists and I have just joined their national executive committee.

**James Frith:** I am James Frith, MP for Bury North.

**Nicola Jones-Ford:** I am Nicola Jones-Ford, SENCO at Fulham College Boys' School in London.

**Sabrina Hobbs:** Sabrina Hobbs. I am the principal at Severndale Specialist Academy.

**Ian Mearns:** Ian Mearns, MP for Gateshead and still, among other things, the chair of a primary school in Gateshead.

**Chair:** Robert Halfon, MP for Harlow and Chair of the Education Committee. Richard and Chloe are officers of the Committee.

**Lucy Allan:** I am Lucy Allan and I am the Member of Parliament for Telford.

**Tania Beard:** I am Tania Beard. I am the headteacher at St Martin's Primary in Devon.

**Emma Hardy:** Emma Hardy. I am the MP for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Jon Boyes:** I am Jon Boyes and I am the headteacher at Herne Bay High School in Kent.

Q248 **James Frith:** I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Welcome everybody. This format worked really well last time, so I hope we can kick off with a positive, constructive question about the implementation of the 2014 Act. Who would like to start on the theme of what has worked well and the positives that have come from the reforms?

**Penny Earl:** I didn't put it in my written evidence, but there has been a lot of emphasis in Hampshire on working towards more pupil-centred processes and really involving the children in processes, which looks at their views and gets to the bottom of what their wishes are. I also find this really helps with parents and parental engagement and getting across the sense that we are working in a team together. That has been led by the educational psychologists in Hampshire, which I think is really positive.

**Nicola Jones-Ford:** I echo Penny's ideas. The idea of the co-production and being part of the team helping that student is really good. In my borough, there has been a political nightmare and all sorts of shenanigans going on—

**James Frith:** We are familiar with shenanigans.

**Nicola Jones-Ford:** Absolutely. Hammersmith and Fulham pulled out of the agreement they were in but they are getting back to that idea—that whole-heartedness of co-production and the child being at the centre of that whole process, looking at the needs and taking the parents with them, rather than it being done to the family.

**Jon Boyes:** I agree, in that there is much more support now for parents and they are more involved in the process. That has definitely changed. It is sometimes a bit of a double-edged sword, because sometimes the information parents have access to these days makes them think—they are looking at the different interests for their child as opposed to the best education and best support interests for the child. Occasionally, there are reasons why they go down a certain route; if it went through a more educational side, it would probably be slightly different. Certainly, involving parents has changed a lot in the last couple of years.

Q249 **James Frith:** Is there a different experience among the parents you deal with? Do some feel satisfied with the work that has been going on? Do some feel aggrieved and find it challenging?

**Jon Boyes:** It's probably balanced. There are some parents who feel they have got more control and that they have more of a voice to be heard, particularly when they are dealing with the authority. There are other parents who feel like they are hitting their heads against a brick wall. That possibly comes down to—dare I say it—the nature of the parent, how much they know about the system and how they have got the support. We have parents who have got expensive legal advice to support them going through processes, whereas others will just go with what they think. Those

who really know what they are doing are very successful; those who don't, aren't.

Q250 **James Frith:** Do you see that as a sustainable model for the experience?

**Jon Boyes:** No. The local authority that I work with is Kent. I think that, over the last two years, 85% of all applications for EHCPs have come directly from parents. That is a fundamentally ridiculous change from where it was two or three years ago.

Q251 **James Frith:** Why do you think that is?

**Jon Boyes:** Possibly the access to information—the greater availability of knowledge. I think there are people out there who are more freely available to support parents. Whether or not that is a direct result of the Act—trying to steer more control to parents and them actually picking that up—

Q252 **James Frith:** When we had the Director of Children's Services for Surrey in here, he talked about the success rate of tribunals being as much as 85% to 90% and the sheer volume of cost attributed to that. If it goes to tribunal and at least 90% of parents are found to be bang on in their appeal for additional support, why is it that some schools, colleges and providers of education still conclude that there is an aspect of parenting that is pursuing an entitlement that they amplify without due cause?

**Jon Boyes:** I can't talk massively about that. Ironically, I have been called to a tribunal in the coming months for a student of ours—the parents have taken it to that level. I have looked through all the evidence that has been put forward to the tribunal, and any sane person would have said that it is a waste of time going to tribunals—even to the point when we doubt that it will finally get there. It will be decided prior to that. About six months ago, a previous case was planned to go to tribunal and had gone through the whole process, but it never got to tribunal either, because it was obvious that all the information was there. Is there a lot of money spent on it? Is it a waste of money? Possibly. If there was a more rigorous system prior to that and better decision making, and if there were more trained people—"educated" is the wrong word—making the right decisions earlier on, I think most things would never end up at tribunal and there would probably be a whole load of money saved through that.

**Tania Beard:** I think the other reason that more parents are taking things into their own hands is that schools have to make really difficult decisions about where to prioritise. They have a SENCO, a certain amount of SENCO time and a lot of children with a lot of need, and you have to think, "Which child am I most likely to get an EHCP for? On which child can I spend the hours and invest the money it is going to take to get educational psychologists' reports and speech and language reports to support my application for an EHCP?" If you are the parent of a child who isn't meeting those criteria, which are getting higher and higher, I can see why you might want to take things into your own hands and do that.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Sabrina Hobbs:** The NAHT says that 94% of 2,000 headteachers surveyed on holistic services and education state that that is happening in their own school. That could be another cause of why there is a shift into tribunals. It is not just at school that a young person's needs should be supported; they also need more holistic provision.

Q253 **James Frith:** It was suggested at an earlier evidence session that the Act's emphasis on and advocacy of co-production and being pupil-centred was hugely welcome, but that that was only half the tale because there was no follow-up in terms of resources or an emphasis on how that is actually delivered. Is that a fair comment?

**Penny Earl:** In my experience, it is very hard for parents to navigate the bureaucracy that follows after you have identified the need. Parents who are educated and articulate and shout loudest are the most influential, but I also know that some of the parents I work with sometimes do not feel that their children's needs are being met. They would be happy for the school to meet needs without escalating to the next stage, but they don't feel that their needs are being met without doing that. I have been in teaching a long time and there is an increasing amount of fear among headteachers who are trying to achieve outcomes with 85% of pupils in their schools. They don't deliberately want to ignore the other 15%, which is what most of my SEN children come under, but they do get sidelined. That makes parents more litigious and feel that they have to escalate from that point.

**Dr Lowther:** I think that the capacity of schools to support students at a lower level—in terms of the graduated approach, the 15%—and to have access to external agencies that can provide the support and advice to staff, just in terms of resource and numbers of people in schools, is decreasing. Schools are having to make quite difficult decisions. We were talking in the corridor about whether we should have five teaching assistants or employ an educational psychologist to give us some advice. I think those are impossible decisions. For me, that is what is driving that pushing up into a higher need bracket, because there is not enough resource to help children who have additional needs at an ordinary level. In order to access the resource, it goes to the education, health and care needs assessment level in order to get what is really needed for all children, not just children with SEN.

**Chair:** I want to move the discussion on to Ben, who will ask about the challenges.

Q254 **Ben Bradley:** We very quickly moved from positive things to challenges. Before we move on, I wonder if anybody has more positive things to say about it.

**Callum Wetherill:** Coming from an SEMH background, representing an SEMH school, the fact that that has become a primary area of need is a big positive. It has taken away the behaviour element. Every child can have issues with behaviour at different times, but actually we are focusing on mental health, the social and the emotional. I think there is an awful



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

long way to go—there are still an awful lot of issues around SEMH. I will come on to that later, but the fact that we are focusing on it as a primary area of need is a positive. The theory behind the EHCP, the fact that we are working together from birth to 25, is a positive thing. Again, we will look at the problems with that as we go on, but in theory it is a positive move.

**Penny Earl:** This is a bit tangential, but I hope it is relevant—stop me if it is not. In real terms we have had budget cuts, but for me that can be a positive, because it forces people to think more creatively. We changed our practice quite a lot in response to the findings of the DISS project on the deployment and impact of support staff. To support children right, it is not a case of having an LSA stapled to the side of a child. The fact that we have been forced to look at things more efficiently has led us down a certain path, whereby we are meeting individual children's needs more effectively. I am being a bit garbled about this.

We are running a pilot scheme in our school at the moment, which is based on a model of social and academic inclusion. Most of the children in my resource provision are immersed in classes of 30 and that works very well for them, but that is not the only model of inclusion. Not every child thrives in a class of 30. Children who really cannot function in that situation are creating pressures for teachers and their needs become greater, and the whole thing escalates into a negative spiral. This year we have a group of children who just cannot thrive in a class of 30. We have a mainstream class, but it has only seven children in it. That is a model of social and academic inclusion. We have other children in the school who function in immersive inclusion in classes of 30.

**Chair:** Thank you. Ben, could you come to the question.

Q255 **Ben Bradley:** On challenges, we have talked a lot in previous meetings about funding. I think all of us on the Committee recognise the challenges that exist there. My question is more about the practical challenges in school. Funding aside, what do you feel you are missing? What are the hurdles in terms of training expertise that might be available? Are there barriers to you accessing the support that you need, and what about relationships with local authorities? What do you feel are the big practical challenges?

**Tania Beard:** I think we could do a lot more in schools if some of the money that currently goes into private provision, or other provision for children, came into schools and allowed us to work creatively with it. We have done something similar to Penny: we have set up a provision, staffed by two adults, for six or seven children, to avoid the need to have someone stapled to someone's side. Some children can manage in a class of 30, but they need someone to help them to do it, and they need that person there all of the time—not because they need them all of the time but because when they need them, they really need them.

A lot of children in different classes across our school are on the spectrum. You could say, "Actually, each of those children needs a grown up



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

alongside them for a third of a day only, because they manage the rest of the time.” The trouble is that one is here, one is there and one is over there. You cannot do that; it does not work practically. As our budgets have become more constrained, we have had to have less and less. Our school has grown rapidly from 32 children to 450, because we were in a new town. Seven homes were occupied when we started; 1,800 homes are now occupied. It has been a really rapid rate of growth, but we have fewer staff for the 450 children we have now than we did when we had 340 children.

We have 33% special needs and quite high numbers of disadvantaged children. It is a challenging cohort. I would like that to be recognised more. I was really pleased that our context was very much taken into account by our recent Ofsted. They really looked at progress and understood. But they wanted to know, and we had the data to prove, that the high level of SEN did not cause the attainment of other children without SEN to dip. It takes a lot of energy, time and expertise to support those children effectively and well. If schools were more relaxed about that understanding being very prevalent and part of any inspection or other process they go through, they might be more open. We have 33%; the school down the road has 1%. Across Devon there is a real disparity of schools that will be inclusive and schools that will not, because of what Penny was talking about—the need to achieve the scores on the doors.

**Q256 Ben Bradley:** I certainly find at local level there are schools with a good reputation for SEN support, which then get a greater concentration. At the minute, there is very tight limitation on how much of that SEN funding within local authorities can go into school budgets. Is that something you would like to change so there is flexibility?

**Tania Beard:** Yes. The other thing is that schools with those reputations attract staff who are interested in working with children who might be more challenging, and staff who are interested in gaining further expertise through training. If those schools were funded to be able to do that well, that would be an effective way of going forward.

**Penny Earl:** I agree with everything you say—there are budget challenges. To add to that, for my resource provision I have a delegated budget. Although it has been reduced, it is still delegated. The headteacher I work with very much honours and ring-fences that budget, but it comes into the school centrally and relies on the finance officer transferring the money into my budget. People have come in from above to advise that the school, which has a deficit budget, should use my SEN budget to offset their deficit budget. That happened in my previous setting and it would happen if I was not working with a headteacher who stuck to her guns and said, “No, that money is for those children.” That adds to the challenge. We still face the same challenges you mentioned. I do not disagree with anything you say.

**Sabrina Hobbs:** I think it will be difficult to discuss challenges without talking about funding. However, perhaps it is more about where the funding is going; to pick up on what Tania said, it is about the money





going to the right people. Local authorities are the middle men as a funding agent for SEN. They no longer have the capacity or capabilities to be able to fulfil that role. They are hugely over-spent in their high needs budgets; they are running into deficit models and they are spending in excess of a quarter of the high needs budget on private school provision. That could be a specialist private school, but it is a private school none the less, which means that public money is being spent in an avenue that does not bring it back to mainstream schools or the maintained sector—and that is despite the lack of quality and positive outcomes that those schools can give.

That makes it difficult to understand the value of the spend, with the private school sector charging up to 10 times as much as what a maintained school would get. It is worth looking to change that format to make a fair funding formula that is high-needs focused and focused mostly on the spend on resource, rather than allocating funding attached to a pupil's need. It is difficult to cost out what a pupil's need is and then moderate that across the country—it is impossible. That is why my colleagues on the West Midlands SEND forum, the Headteachers' Roundtable and I have discussed this and tried to work out what that formula could look like. Costing out tangible resources that cost real money would lead the way to a funding model that makes sense. Schools would find it a more strategic way of moving forward if resources were put into making that make sense.

**Ben Bradley:** That's the same feedback as we have heard before.

Q257 **Chair:** Are you talking about the need for legislation to protect those with SEN needs as well as those with an EHCP?

**Jon Boyes:** To go back to the original question and link it to funding: we are a large school. We have 1,600 students and a lot of looked-after children. Another area of funding you could look to support is related to the fact that about 25% of our looked-after children are out of county. The funding streamed into a school for looked-after children who are out of county is complex and unpredictable. It is down to the school more than to the local authority.

Since the reform, over the last couple of years the local authority in Kent has exponentially lost control of how it deals with high needs funding. They are similar to the other counties: they are running a massive deficit budget and have taken a lot of money out of their schools grant budget to make that work. As a school, the biggest frustration for us is the combination of access to specialist services. You have to go through all the testing, the resourcing and the working out of a child's exact needs and get it right. I have students in my school who have been going through the process for 30 to 40 weeks. Legislatively it should be around 20 weeks—that is the target. Everything takes a lot longer, and you are never quite sure what the outcome will be. The decision made about the support needed seems very random, be it a specialist place or a mainstream place, or whether you have a plan in place with no funding attached that you then have to try to manage yourself.





## HOUSE OF COMMONS

We are fortunate as a school because we are quite big, and we employ a child psychotherapist for two days a week and an EP for one day a week. We have speech and language access, and all of that enables us as a school. I might be wrong, but the school is the fantastic place to know the child's whole context.

**Q258 Chair:** Can you answer the question about whether or not you need to change the law to protect those with SEN, if they have no EHCP? What do you think?

**Jon Boyes:** In terms of what you mean by "protect", two years ago we had 254 students on our SEN register; we now have 120. We re-categorised all of our SEN students to make sure that I could balance the resources I had to fulfil the need and make sure they could access their learning. That is much more manageable. We have 34 students with an EHCP in the school, none of which have specific funding attached. It is just down to us to try to meet the need of the EHCP. It does not statutorily tell us to do anything in particular. I have 11 students for whom I have claimed high needs funding—six of them in the last six months, specifically because the budget has been cut so much that I need to try to fund the resources I have to enable all of their needs to be met.

**Tania Beard:** I think it might add an extra layer of complexity to the SEN process that might hold things up even more. Some children identify as having SEN, but they have it for a very short period of time and you support them for a short period of time, and we then start getting bound up in legalities. What we need at the moment is a clear route through that is fair for all children. I am wondering how supportive it would be to add an extra layer of legality. I can see the idea behind it but I am not sure, seeing how things are rolled out.

**Jon Boyes:** I agree exactly. The more you make anything statutory or legal, it adds a process, and process costs money and makes everything take a lot longer.

**Tania Beard:** The focus should be on children.

**Dr Lowther:** Just to back up and answer your question, we could perhaps think of something a bit different. I wonder about legislation to protect all children who might have additional needs. We are focusing very much on the local authority as a purse string holder, processing the SEN and the application for the EHCPs, but actually the local authority has been a supportive structure for schools, in terms of providing educational psychology services.

Where I work we have moved into a sold service model because the local authority did not have the funding to fund us to go into schools. Legislation to protect the availability of support for children when they need it would be helpful. That perhaps overcomes that extra stumbling block and hurdle that might be there.

**Q259 Chair:** Sabrina, then Penny and then Ben.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Sabrina Hobbs:** If a high needs funding formula was put in place you could remove the funding element from the local authority, fund schools directly via the ESFA, which is a solid structure for mainstream schools, and then allow local authorities to focus on placement. You are essentially saying monitoring, so that would be supporting, monitoring and training—all of those things that must be put in place to protect those students.

Q260 **Chair:** Good point. I beg your pardon, Penny, but Nicola hasn't said much.

**Nicola Jones-Ford:** Because I am a SENCO, I am at classroom level rather than funding level, with respect to headteachers. It is so difficult to have a clear and transparent idea of what the funding is for students with SEN. We have about 25% of our students on the SEN register, so yes, we are one of the SEN magnet schools.

Trying to have the conversation with the school business manager and say, "I need this resource because I have this many hours or this child needs this way of working," is very difficult. I am then held accountable for a pot of money when I have no idea how much money there is in it, because it is not clear at all. It is all in together and muddled together within the school funding formula.

**Penny Earl:** Schools need to be allowed to feel that they can meet the needs of the SEN children without worrying about the impact that those children's outcomes are going to have on their whole school data. That is an issue I really come up against because they are trying to achieve a balance. That means trying to meet the needs of the children with SEN, but some of them have got very complex needs and they are not going to reach age-related expectations by the end of their key stage.

That is counterbalanced by the huge pressure on the school to improve its external data. That reduces their capacity or willingness, if you like, to work with the children at the right level and give them the right input that they need. Even though they probably could do that within their own budget, it does not always happen.

Q261 **Ben Bradley:** I just want to bring Callum in because he has been waiting to make a point.

**Callum Wetherill:** Thank you. One of my biggest concerns is the fact that the educational climate at the moment is very much—it is a systemic failure—almost encouraging SEN. We are seeing a mixture of school funding and pressures on schools in terms of exams and external pressures, and off-rolling is obviously a big issue in schools at the moment.

I am a big user of Twitter and last night there was a big debate on Twitter around a school in Poole. It is a secondary academy and it got a section 8 for high pupil movement, which turned into a section 5 Ofsted inspection. The actual quote from the report was: "A very successful approach to managing behaviour," which was the high exclusion rate. So, Ofsted is

actively encouraging high exclusion rates. The national director praised that that evening.

The teaching and learning innovation fund was money that was there specifically to support schools in terms of behaviour. The way that money was spread in terms of behaviour specifically has very much gone to somebody with questionable experience, very much ideologically driven for exclusions. As an SEMH special school, we are getting a high influx of pupils wanting to come in who have institutional trauma, not lifelong developmental trauma. It is just systemic failures.

**Q262 Ian Mearns:** I want to go on to assessment and identification. The lead question I want to kick off with is whether the system, and the current conditions and circumstances within it, allows children's needs to be properly identified and assessed in a timely fashion, and to be met in an appropriate way.

**Penny Earl:** No.

**Tania Beard:** I would like to talk about early years, because what happens in the early years is that, quite often, very experienced practitioners, who know children and who understand child development really well, notice that something is not going right for that child and that there is some way in which that child is not experiencing the world, or not able to experience the world, in the way other children do, so they cannot do the same sort of learning. But we have to wait and wait until we can get enough educational psychologists' reports, enough speech and language reports and enough referrals to a GP and then on to a specialist doctor.

Actually, if we were able to meet those children's needs earlier, they would never turn into the however many per cent. of special educational needs children there are going through schools. If we could address that in our school between three and five—or even before three—we could make a massive difference.

**Q263 Ian Mearns:** Can I ask a quick additional question? Within your school, are you having to ration referrals to the educational psychologist in the first place?

**Tania Beard:** Yes, because of the length of the paperwork that you have to do, and we have a SENCO for four days a week.

**Q264 Ian Mearns:** Penny, in addition to your, "No"—

**Penny Earl:** I agree with everything that you are saying, Tania, 100%, definitely. On the flip side, though, I have experience of children arriving in early years and coming to my resource provision with an EHCP in place—that is because they have come from a pre-school that has been very good at identifying a need, and it needs to be there—but in some cases the wrong need has been identified. I had a child arrive in year R who was diagnosed with autism, but we realised within half a term that she was profoundly deaf, so her first year was spent undoing the first



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

diagnosis and getting a second diagnosis so that we could get the right support in place.

Equally, I have another couple of children who had significant specific needs but who have made progress and no longer need the level of support that we are being paid to give them, but the process to exit them from that is sometimes as long as the process to get them in. That is in parallel to what you are saying, though, Tania; I totally agree with what you are saying.

**Dr Lowther:** In terms of assessing early years and identifying need accurately, there was a question about efficiency when you called for written evidence. I am quite concerned about that sense of efficiency because, yes, it saves money in terms of professional time and people being involved, but pre-school children change a great deal and educational psychologists are being asked to identify need, get a real sense of this little person and write their advice for an education, health and care plan almost in one visit. Having worked in post-16 work, doing some transfers, I know that they do not see an educational psychologist until they are 19, maybe. That has been the basis of a lot of what has been put in place.

Q265 **Chair:** How do you make the transition from primary to secondary school easier for children with SEND?

**Dr Lowther:** There needs to be more access to external support. It goes back to the funding question. That is a recent state of affairs. Previously, a few years ago, we were seeing pre-school children maybe three or four times before we wrote their report, because we were aware of them, but now we do not have the capacity to do that and we do not have the capacity to do transitions either, unless schools—

**Tania Beard:** We do not want an EHCP for those children. What they have done is they have come in, they have been buggy-bound or container-bound—they have either been in a buggy or in one of those wheelie things that they walk around in—so they have not developed any muscular tone here, so they cannot do this or that and they cannot then hold a pencil. They are not toilet-trained—40% of our nursery children came in at age-related expectations this year, and that is not very many; we are not asking for a lot at three or rising three. They are not toilet trained. They can't drink out of a cup. They have not got the social and emotional or communication and language skills that they need. If we had the money—we are not asking for an EHCP, but for some additional resource. It is social need.

**Chair:** If we can just take a brief comment from Callum, please.

**Callum Wetherill:** Coming at it from the other side, as a special school, all our pupils already have an EHCP, so they have gone through that assessment process—whether that is right or wrong is another conversation. Once our pupils get to us, they all have a primary need of social and emotional mental health. As I touched on earlier, that is often



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

misunderstood, so authorities will send pupils to us and kind of think, "That's it. They are just naughty boys essentially. They just need a different approach to it." So in that respect, it can often be very challenging. When we are trying to get CAMHS support—additional support for our pupils who genuinely have mental health needs or developmental trauma—the timescales for pupils with the highest need, not those drifting out but those with the highest constant mental health needs, is a challenge. It is almost impossible to try and get an assessment in that way—it is six to eight month's wait.

**Sabrina Hobbs:** Briefly, my thoughts will be on the development of assessment and identification of need as young people go through school, because it does not stay the same. At Severndale, we have put in a process of a funded, formulated and structured reintegration programme for our key stage 1 students and we have successfully reintegrated six young children back into their mainstream schools. For a rural county like Shropshire, where some of our students travel 30-plus miles to get to a special school, it is a massive achievement to bring them back into their local communities again. It draws on the fact that identification and assessment should not just be at the beginning of the process, but all the way through.

**Nicola Jones-Ford:** You were asking about the transition from primary to secondary. That takes an awful lot of time from the primary schools to the secondary schools—I am quite central to that within my school. It depends on how good the primary school is at SEN, to how many EHCPs and how much information you get. Obviously in London, we get children from many different schools, so it is very dependent on that. I have had children who have walked in and still cannot read or write at the age of 11. It is then about starting that process again with absolutely nothing from the primary school. So it just depends on what you get when they walk through the door.

**Jon Boyes:** To go back to the original question and link it to other things: no, the system is not particularly quick at all. Access to educational psychologists is very hard. I have had EHCPs that have been issued and am still waiting for EP reports on them—I am not naming anything. On access to CAMHS—most of the students going through SEN now need some sort of mental health support—it can be six months, eight months or a year before you get any support. Nationally, the support from CAMHS for adolescent mental health is really important.

One of the biggest differences is that a child's needs are not static. We need to somehow enable constant development, identify the support within the school, and a combination of training and funding the right people—not in single schools, but in clusters of schools—and schools need to work together to actually alleviate the funding problem of schools working in isolation. We take predominantly from five main junior schools. If it were a much more fluid system between the junior and the secondary sector—some multi-academy trusts with primary and secondary links might potentially do that better—larger scales of schools could share and



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

have access to resources, whether educational psychologists or speech and language therapists. It is about actually monitoring change and not constraining what a child needs by having an EHCP that says, "This child should be doing this," because it changes, and sometimes that does constrain it.

Most of the effort goes into getting the right thing on paper so that you can then have a long period of time for somebody to say, "Yes, go here." But then there is not a specialist place to send the child. I have four children who are being paid four or five hours' a week tuition by a local authority, and they have got an EHCP-naming specialist. It is just fundamentally wrong. We need joined-up thinking between junior and secondary and to put the resource into schools. We are the best area for social cohesion. We know the families; we know the students; we know it all. We could do this if we were funded properly.

**Chair:** Penny, can you just make a very brief comment, because of the time? Then I'll hand over to Emma.

**Penny Earl:** Yes, it is just in addition to that: we have an added challenge around the fact that we work in parallel with NHS services. There are differences in the definitions around speech, language and communication that are applied within NHS parameters and education parameters, which adds to the difficulties of getting appropriate assessments and appropriate professionals involved.

Q266 **Ian Mearns:** I have a quick supplementary question and I am looking for answers of just one word or a couple of words on a recurring theme. Given that these are meant to be education, health and care plans, is health regularly missing from the table?

**Witnesses:** Yes.

**Chair:** That has also been the evidence that we have had in our sessions so far.

Q267 **Emma Hardy:** I want to focus on SEN support, so children before they get to an EHCP. I was particularly interested in what Tania was saying. I think we all acknowledge that children's needs are fluid; they do not stay constant. I know, having been an infant teacher myself, that children can dip in and out of needing SEN support. I would like to hear first from Callum, as someone who has worked as a teaching assistant with these children. Do you think that children with SEN support—children before they get EHCPs—are getting enough support, or are they being failed by the current system?

**Callum Wetherill:** Coming from a specialist background over the last few years, I can't give a direct answer, but I can give an opinion, which I have already touched on loosely with regard to ideology and funding. You would imagine that that funding is being streamed to the pupils who need it most—who have the EHCP, who have the provision—and they will be getting support as they absolutely deserve. But then there are those pupils who do not have it written in legislation that they need this or that. We





## HOUSE OF COMMONS

know that there are schools where up to 11 teaching assistants are being made redundant year on year. They are usually the primary giver of support to the child, so they are not going to get that. So from a distance, I would suggest that no, children are not, because schools, with the best will in the world, cannot manage it, both in terms of provision and funding-wise.

**Q268 Emma Hardy:** What do you think, then, is the recent motivation, particularly given Michael Gove's criticism of velcro TAs, as he referred to them? Do you think that this is motivated by finance and the fact that teaching assistants are expensive, or by the fact that there is a different way to do it?

**Callum Wetherill:** The velcro TAs issue is very difficult. Somebody—I can't remember who it was—talked about the specific needs of pupils. Some need that constant support—just a body there—to feel comfortable. Other pupils will become over-dependent, over-reliant, on staff who don't need to be there; they just need to be there to offer that support in and out. It might be just a case of having one person in the room. It's very much pupil dependent in that way, in terms of their specific needs, I would suggest.

**Q269 Emma Hardy:** Tania, while we are thinking about children with SEN support, what do you think would be a better way to ensure that they get the support they need—if you believe that at the moment they are not getting the support they need?

**Chair:** Before you answer that, can I just ask whether you think that Ofsted should have a serious focus on SEN provision as part of their inspection framework and reward inclusive behaviour, which is relevant to what you are saying?

**Tania Beard:** Yes, I think schools that include should be acknowledged and rewarded for that—well, not rewarded, but at the moment it seems like they are punished for it. Because your overall data does not look as good, they come in with one particular view of your school, and it's not until they get through the door that they see a very different picture. So I think that acknowledgment would be really helpful.

**Q270 Ben Bradley:** Do you see the funding element of that as well? One of the problems that we have had locally in Nottinghamshire is that a history of being inclusive leads to the historic element in the funding formula; you have not been spending as much previously, so you do not get as much now. Does that ring a bell?

**Tania Beard:** The thing is that the way the funding works is not transparent in SEN. We are told that this notional £6,000 comes in for every child. Nobody can find it in the budget. That is why a school business manager can't find it. We don't know where it is. It's not ring-fenced; it's not clear. It would be fairer, I think, if the schools that had a higher percentage of SEN had a greater amount of the school budget share that was ring-fenced for SEN. The trouble is that, at the moment, if you have over a certain percentage of children with EHCPs, you get



additional funding, but that percentage has gone up and up. I don't know about other counties, but it has in Devon. So to get it is almost impossible. Does that answer your question?

**Ben Bradley:** Yes.

Q271 **Emma Hardy:** Can I just pull you back? I'll gently tap both my colleagues for interrupting us there. If you are unable to access the finances that children who have SEN support need, which you alluded to before, what would be a better model?

**Tania Beard:** I think schools should be given greater autonomy to come up with creative solutions. To go back to Sabrina's point on the money going out into specialist provision and not into schools, I have a concrete example of a very traumatised child who came to our school and who would obviously struggle enormously in a mainstream setting. We had said that if we could have two trained people—one with particular skills—working with that child, after a year she would probably have needed only one person alongside her. After another year, perhaps she would have been in mainstream education without any support, but because there was a block put on a creative solution the parents became disillusioned and removed her from school. She became a child missing an education and she has now become a problem to the county because she needs to be found a school place. She is in specialist provision, which is costing so much more than our two people and her being in a mainstream school and going on to a mainstream secondary would have cost. That freedom and flexibility is difficult with the legislation. The more legislation that comes in, the less freedom and flexibility you have. If, as a school, you have proved yourself to be able to think outside the box and get good solutions for your children, you should be given that autonomy.

Q272 **Emma Hardy:** Sabrina, what are your thoughts?

**Sabrina Hobbs:** Following on from Tania, there are good examples of how that works in schools, such as the pupil premium, which is a ring-fenced funding amount that goes out to schools. They are able to think of creative ways to meet pupils' needs. The focus is on how they have met that need and filled gaps, and on how they have spent the money on what resource, provision or service. Those are tangible things that we report back on. If the notional budget was replaced with something like that, I think you would find more creativity in the system. Looking at the special school side and more complex needs, you could reallocate some of the funding that is going out to the private sector and find new solutions for provision that might not necessarily exist at the moment.

Q273 **Emma Hardy:** Do you have any more thoughts on SEN support? Are your children getting the SEN support they need?

**Jon Boyes:** I would go back to one of the earlier points: schools are very good places to meet the dynamic needs of a child, which do not stay the same. As a large school, we cover a wide range of needs. We have had to be much more creative in the last 18 months. Last year, which was my first year of headship at the school, we unfortunately had to make seven



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

of my support staff redundant—this is the bizarre irony of education—to enable my budget to be met. When my school allocation for this September came in, I had five children who should really have had some sort of support in place beforehand. We claimed higher needs funding for five students and employed four new people in September.

I have to be much more creative in school. In the past, the higher needs funding model—this is maybe controversial—where junior schools have put one-to-one TAs with students has created big problems for secondary schools, because there is a common expectation from parents that they have somebody with their child all the time. There is also an expectation that that is the way the child's needs are met. With the correct diagnosis, and with the correct professional support, if it was available, they would probably see a different need for the child that you could meet in a mainstream school. We have gone a long way from the idea that a TA is the answer towards what the child's needs are. We now have a specialist SEN support room and have bought a bungalow on the school site. We do it on a needs basis.

**Nicola Jones-Ford:** With respect to SEN, it is also the amount of time I'm spending fighting for EHCPs, doing the paperwork for them or getting annual reviews done. I have six sitting this term that were done in March this year. They really need a rewrite, and nobody in the local authority is skilled enough to do that.

Q274 **Emma Hardy:** Is the effort and time you need for EHCP plans taking you away from providing SEN support?

**Nicola Jones-Ford:** Yes. Absolutely. All the time. And it has done since the change of paperwork to the EHCPs.

**Penny Earl:** I agree with what Tania said, and what Jon said. We are also being creative in our school and I think we are meeting the needs of children with SEN, but not EHCPs, really well, with a model that in the longer term will be cost-effective because we are potentially saving some children from going to special school. Maybe they won't need to go to special school at all and maybe some of them will, but later down the line, and they are still getting a solid grounding to their education in year 1 and key stage 1. It is a pilot this year and we want to sustain it and move it on. There is definitely a need, there is a big interest from parents, the children are doing really well and their needs are being met, but the county is finding it difficult within its budget constraints. It is more of a long-term vision. It maybe looks more expensive in the short term, but it won't be in the long term. I think that is similar to what Tania was saying.

Q275 **Lucy Allan:** In quite a number of the points raised so far, we have talked about the education, health and care plans, some of the flaws in them and how they are working. I wanted to specifically drill down on that. Could you comment on whether the right children are getting the right support through the plans? If they are not, how should it be done differently, so we can improve the process?

Callum, would you like to kick off on that? Have you had personal



experience of that?

**Callum Wetherill:** Could you just rephrase the question?

Q276 **Lucy Allan:** The principal question is, are education, health care plans working and are the right children getting them? If, as we could probably glean from the conversation up to now, the right children may not be getting them, what could we do differently?

**Callum Wetherill:** If I hone in on SEMH, because that is my experience predominantly, a lot of our pupils that do need EHCPs are getting them. In that respect, that is a positive. They are getting it.

Q277 **Lucy Allan:** And it's the right ones that are getting it? It's not just people squeezing in because they make enough fuss?

**Callum Wetherill:** It depends. We have had a high influx at the moment of year 2 and year 3 pupils coming in. Can you really diagnose social, emotional and mental health needs in six, seven or eight-year-olds? It might be, and some come in and absolutely do need our support and will be with us right the way through to leaving education, but at the same time, it may be pupils who just need a visual timetable or something as simple as that, which they just do not get—it might be five minutes in another room or a bit of extra play time. There are pupils coming into our service and our school who might just need that; they don't need the EHCP.

I refer back to earlier, and the systemic failures. It is institutional trauma. The pupils who need to be with us have experienced years of developmental trauma for whatever reason—a whole host of reasons. It is not because they have gone into school and the support has not been the support that they need, and they live with that traumatic experience day after day and then the trauma builds up, and then they are medically traumatised—but that has come from school, not from everything else.

Q278 **Lucy Allan:** Penny, are the right children getting the help through the EHCPs?

**Penny Earl:** Sometimes yes, sometimes no, but for the ones that should have EHCPs, I think the paperwork we get is quite generic and it does not always define the right type of help that they need. Therefore, we need something more fluid, maybe coming from the school up rather than from the country down, because we are the ones who know the children. Pupil-centred processes are really effective, because that really does start with the child and enables us to move as the child develops and change things as the child develops. It is too static and it is too generic, in my experience.

**Sabrina Hobbs:** I'd like to bring in what Ian brought up about health. They should be a big player, and there should be a partnership with education. That is what the Act was trying to achieve. That hasn't happened. We can bat around stuff like funding and resource and all the rest of it, but education is currently paying for health needs within schools. That could be speech and language therapy, it could be mental health, it



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

could be nursing and all sorts. As a special school, we are currently paying in excess of £90,000 a year just for nursing care, for our students who have been assessed by health to need wraparound care provision for their health needs. That is not to do with education or access to education; it is just to be secure in their health while they are at school—or anywhere—but when they come to school that stops and it becomes the responsibility of education, which means that we are using educational budgets to pay for that. That is happening in our school as a specialist school, but it is happening across all schools, in mainstream schools, in primary and secondary, and it will have an impact on how school leaders can use the money they have for SEN support.

**Dr Lowther:** I agree and maybe disagree on especially the mental health element. In my experience, the mental health needs have to be much more significant, it seems, and even then they do not feel as recognised. Having that wraparound support and access to educational psychology and psychological input in schools may prevent it reaching the point where it needs to be at that level. That also links with health. If there was more resourcing within schools, they could tap into not necessarily CAMHS, but educational psychologists who can do a lot on mental health and understanding the communications of behaviour, helping your year 2s and year 3s to manage school a bit better and that sort of thing. That is really important and it links with that connection to health, if education and health could work more closely, as well as recognising that some children are missed, particularly those with mental health needs, in my experience.

Q279 **Lucy Allan:** Are you saying that if a child has a mental health need, they are less likely to get an education, health and care plan?

**Dr Lowther:** From speaking with colleagues and from my own experience, it feels much harder for them, and their needs have to be much higher. This decision got overturned—it did not go to tribunal, although a tribunal was requested—but an assessment was turned down for a significantly unwell young man. He had a range of complex needs and was on suicide watch; CAMHS had given parents the “lock away your knives” leaflet, and he was turned down for an assessment. That was overruled and he has now got one, but at the same time there was a young lady who had a dyslexia diagnosis, and was almost at age-related expectations, who had a straight go-ahead.

Q280 **Lucy Allan:** So the emphasis is on the educational part rather than on the health?

**Dr Lowther:** Yes. Mental health feels like a lesser sibling, somehow.

Q281 **Chair:** Jon and then Callum.

**Jon Boyes:** Very quickly, I think there are a number of students who are absolutely right for an education, health and care plan, and it goes through and they get the support. Where parents are very well-educated and articulate and they push for it, there are a number of students who can just work through mainstream education perfectly. I go back to the same thing again, though: if the right resource, the right diagnosis and

the right professionals are available to schools, you have a much better chance of getting exactly the right place. There are not enough specialist school places for everyone who is going there. If you have the right people with the real specialist professionals, you will free up capacity within mainstream schools to manage, educate and deal with it. I completely agree with what Sabrina says. As a school, the vast majority of our funding goes on supporting the health and mental health and the wraparound care of students, not just on their educational needs. That is one of the biggest failings with SEN. Access to CAMHS and really good mental health support is really hard these days.

**Tania Beard:** Can I just say that, on mental health, one of the ways we support mental health effectively in schools is through our pupil premium budget. Since the roll-out of universal credit in Devon, we have noticed that, where I used to have a difference of about 10 children between free school meals and children who were classified as disadvantaged—so there were 10 who were still on Ever 6—the difference is now 43 children. There are lots of families who are now not getting free school meals. That will have an enormous impact in six years' time when those current children lose their Ever 6 funding. A lot of schools use that money to support children who have those social and emotional problems because of their lives. Those problems translate into special educational needs, because, quite often, they are behind as they are not in an emotional state to learn well. We really need that money.

**Jon Boyes:** I completely agree with that point.

**Callum Wetherill:** I agree with Cath on mental health. There is still that transitional stage of "What is SEMH? Is it just behaviour? Is it actual trauma? Is it mental health?" There is a real lack of understanding of what it actually looks like. I agree with Cath on getting that diagnosis.

Q282 **Chair:** Before I pass on to James, could I go back to the question I raised earlier after Emma asked her question? Should Ofsted have a stronger focus on SEN provision and reward inclusive behaviour? Can you very briefly say yes or no to whether or not you think that is a good idea? I know that you do, Tania.

**Sabrina Hobbs:** Yes.

**Nicola Jones-Ford:** Yes.

**Dr Lowther:** Yes.

**Penny Earl:** Yes.

Q283 **Chair:** Thank you. Do you think there is enough scrutiny of whether schools are meeting the needs of SEN children, and do you think local authorities have the power to hold schools to account when they do not?

**Jon Boyes:** Going back to one of the earlier points, the Ofsted system recognising the good work that schools do would be much more positive, rather than schools trying to hide or offload a lot of their problems





because of school-to-school accountability. It is not about penalising a school if they do not meet that, but about recognising the good work that a school does. That would be really positive.

**Callum Wetherill:** Going back to the Ofsted report that I was on about earlier, there is a difference between accepting and justifying why an exclusion takes place and actually praising a school publicly for its high number of exclusions. There is a big difference. Justifying it is fine. I work in special, and we have our role in the education system. However, publicly praising a school for exclusions is another thing.

**Chair:** We come on to an important section now. We will finish just before 11.15 am, if not before.

Q284 **James Frith:** We touched almost immediately on the relationship between a school or college and parents, which we will now return to. How have the SEN reforms impacted on your relationships with parents?

**Penny Earl:** Actually it has improved my relationships with parents. I have seen a lot more of them because they are trying to navigate bureaucratic systems, which they find increasingly difficult. That is more positive than negative, I suppose. However, as I said at the beginning, it has forced us down the line of a more pupil-centred process, where we sit down with the child, the parents and the EPs.

My personal experience of the parents is pretty positive, actually. I think that we are a creative school and we are very flexible in how we meet the needs of each child, and I think the parents recognise and understand that. I feel as if we are working as a team on that. For me personally, it is more of a positive thing.

I had one case that went to tribunal, but that was not about our placement. It was about the next phase of education. That particular parent was articulate and managed it in an adult way, so we were able to be on opposing sides in an adult, polite way. It has not been particularly negative for me.

**Sabrina Hobbs:** As a special school, we have very tight relationships with our parent population anyway, on a day-to-day basis. However, since the Act, we have shared their same battles against health. Parents see the same situations occur. They are trying to navigate through a really difficult structure of who is accountable for the different health needs of the same child. One child might have different consultants for different parts of their need. That is a ridiculous system for a set of parents to navigate.

A lot of schools have the exact same issue—you cannot find the accountability through the health system at all. In the past three years as principal of Severndale, I have met maybe eight different health commissioners, all of whom have raised their shoulders at me and said, "That is not in my remit." That is not very helpful for moving things forward, and it is an experience that our parents have shared as well.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Through the Act, lines of accountability sit with certain people, which has been made more obvious, so parents know where to go to. However, when they go to that place, it is not always easy to unpick how to move that forward. That is what we are finding with accountability with health. It stipulates that local authorities have a duty to make sure that things happen and that provision is in place, but they do not have the authority to hold health to account either. Robert, you asked earlier whether the local authority actually has the authority to hold schools to account. At the moment, to an extent, the answer is no.

**Q285 James Frith:** I think that that is changing in different areas—with CCGs coming into local authority control, it will begin to change. Tania, what is your experience?

**Tania Beard:** I don't think that the reform itself has made a difference. At our school, relationships—whether with children or with parents—have always been at the core of everything we have done. I don't think that it has changed our practice, our way of being or our way of thinking of the child and putting the child at the heart of everything.

We have had a few parents applying for an EHCP themselves, which we would not necessarily have had before—I think somebody else recommended that as a route forward for their child.

**Dr Lowther:** To back up what Sabrina said, there can also be tensions in the education, health and care element, particularly for older students at the post-16 stage accessing adult services. Relationships with parents have always been very positive, because that is the way we work as educational psychologists, but there was one particular instance that was very tense and reached tribunal level because adult services were not involved in a young man who was about to leave education and who needed that support. You have talked about health, but I think the care element can also be tricky or tense.

**Q286 James Frith:** It is a really interesting space between the SEND and the EHCP, isn't it? That is where a lot of the time spent on this debate is occupied. Are tribunals universally pursued by parents appealing against a decision not to award an EHCP, or are there instances in which tribunals are pursued simply because the SEND support has not been up to scratch, in your view?

**Tania Beard:** I think it is very much about the idea that the funding has not been awarded or that the amount awarded cannot possibly cover the level of support that is in the plan. When the plan comes, it sets out in writing the child's needs and how they will be met, but the top amount of money that we can get per child in Devon now is £4,500, which is not going to pay for very much. We have worked incredibly creatively, in the same way that Penny Earl has spoken about, but it is still difficult. Parents will say, "My child needs this, this and this," and we will cost it out for them. We will say, "We put in a plan that said it would cost us £13,500 to meet your child's needs, but we have been given £4,500, so this bit of



paper doesn't marry up with this amount of money." Again, that is where appeals come in.

**Jon Boyes:** Going back to your original point, I don't think the Act has made a massive difference to relationships with parents. I find that parents are more knowledgeable now than they have been in the past, but I suggest that that is possibly a result not of the Act but of the availability of information.

You mentioned tribunals. A case is going to tribunal now because what was written in the EHCP plan was not what the parent wanted. The parent is taking the authority to tribunal over the EHCP because it is very poorly written, and I would probably concur that it will not get there.

The biggest change that we have noticed as a school is the frustrations of parents not being able to get what they believe their child deserves, because of a lack of resources and horrendously long timescales. Those frustrations sometimes boil over on the school, although parents do understand that it is not entirely the school's fault. To be honest, it is not the school's fault at all—it is the system's fault.

Q287 **James Frith:** This is an open question to all the witnesses. Would you concur with the evidence that we have received from local authorities that it is more manageable to deal with the political and management element of paying local authority legal department fees for tribunals than to say, "We need to spend more money upstream in schools on SEND support"? I looked at my figures and the sorry evidence I referred to: 90% of the cases are lost, with a 55% increase and £30,000 to £40,000 per case. They are readier to spend that money in legal fees because it can somehow be swallowed by the wider public more easily than saying, "Actually, we are going to fund even a slight proportion of that."

**Jon Boyes:** My anecdotal evidence is that it is probably the same across most authorities and that there is just a lot of wasted money.

Q288 **Chair:** It's millions of pounds.

**Jon Boyes:** Yes. The rapid change—the rapid increase in need, the rapid increase in parents pushing through, and I would suggest it is the same across lots of authorities—has meant that they struggle to cope with the system in place. Therefore they revert to the easiest thing, which is to elongate everything and to rush things. You are not getting the right solutions. There aren't the professionals there to support and get the right guidance.

Q289 **James Frith:** Finally, Chair, from me. Am I right in concluding on that view and on the evidence that Surrey and others have given that if you picked that money up, you would put it in the middle of the SEND support, as opposed to it being given to EHCP—

**Jon Boyes:** Put it into the school.

**James Frith**—to bolster the support that is given at SEND, negating the reason—to go to your point, Cath—to escalate to an EHCP or tribunal



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

level, or a threat of tribunal?

**Jon Boyes:** Fund it into schools and have the accountability system that is already in place to recognise the good work that the schools do and do it that way. Don't put it into schools and then put in a great big accountability measure on top of schools, because that will just waste more money. We have really good systems in place.

**Sabrina Hobbs:** Something that we haven't touched a huge amount on is the assessment system in mainstream schools. It is absolutely having a detrimental effect on inclusion, and therefore the inclusion agenda and the funding for inclusion. Although what you are suggesting—putting the tribunal costs and pulling it upstream of the problem and putting it into the middle of school support—would work, you are then using money to provide a new structure and a new assessment system for those young people, because the current framework does not work for them. It is not inclusive.

Q290 **Chair:** May I finally ask you, Tania, to repeat what you said about universal credit? I understand what you were saying, but I want to be very clear about what you were saying about the universal credit issue.

**Tania Beard:** It is only my opinion, because we have had a pilot roll-out. I have just given Emma Hardy all the figures, but in Devon we used to have a discrepancy of about 10 between free school meals and disadvantaged, and now we have a much larger number: 93 disadvantaged children and only 49 eligible for free school meals. In six years' time, our funding is going to drop dramatically and we use that funding to support our youngest children. We frontload it on our youngest children so that they don't become children who have special needs as they go through. They have additional nurture, they have additional movement support—they have all of those things. If that money goes, this SEN crisis is going to get worse.

Q291 **Chair:** We have got the minutes and we will have the *Hansard* transcript of the Committee, but I would like to raise that, so if you could send something through, I would like to raise that with the DWP Secretary.

**Tania Beard:** I've got a briefing paper that I have just given to Emma.

**Tania Beard:** Who do I send that to?

**Chair:** Could you send it to the Officers of the Committee?

We could talk to you for the rest of the afternoon—

**James Frith:** It would be preferable.

**Chair:** It would.

**Emma Hardy:** Because there's nothing else on today!

**Chair:** The evidence you have given is absolutely magnificent; this is gold for our inquiry. Thank you so much. It is wonderful what you are doing in your areas and your work, while taking the time to come and make sure



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

that we get really good evidence for our report, which will be, as the civil service officers say, sometime in the spring. Is that right? Hopefully. Spring to summer—let's put it that way. It is a very long inquiry. It is a huge issue and we are doing a lot of work on colleges as well as schools. Thank you and I wish you well.