



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE
FOR EDUCATION**

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

**Inquiry into Post-primary Schools
Serving Disadvantaged Communities:
Briefing from the Council for Catholic
Maintained Schools**

2 March 2011

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Disadvantaged Communities: Briefing from the
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Trevor Lunn
Mr Basil McCrea
Mr John O'Dowd

Witnesses:

Mr Jim Clarke) Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Mr Terry Murphy)
Mr Paul O'Doherty)
Mr Sean Rafferty)

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Storey):

We move now to the presentation from the CCMS. I thank the representatives for their patience. Jim, you are very welcome, along with your team. I hope you found the previous sessions interesting.

Mr Jim Clarke (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools):

John knows how we came to be after them, so the answer to that is “yes”.

The Chairperson:

The CCMS submission is in members’ information packs.

Mr J Clarke:

We submitted our paper personally because there were a few typing errors in the last one, which was not properly proofed. It is not our intention during this short introduction to repeat what is in the documentation or to reflect too much on the Assembly’s research paper.

We want to give members an overview and pose a question that, hopefully, over time, the Committee will answer, namely: what policies and structures have contributed to the problem? We are looking at this in the very broad sense that there are policies at government level beyond education that have created pockets of social deprivation in society. Specifically, from the perspective of schools’ structures and policies, why is there a preponderance of those pupils in certain schools?

The third aspect is really about what the Committee is looking at. How are schools dealing with the issues, and what makes one school better than another? In any discussion, we have to differentiate between low achievement because many schools, due to our system, have low achievement. In fact, by whatever value-added measure one applies, many schools are achieving quite well relative to the base achievement of pupils, and many of our so-called high-achieving schools have pockets of underachievement. In fact, by and large, some of them are underachieving. Even in the best school, there are areas of underachievement, not just in pupil outcomes but in how the school provides its service. From the CCMS’s perspective, the issue is very much about equity, in the sense that we believe that everyone should have the same entitlements and opportunities. That concept underpins the entitlement framework.

On the specifics of the inquiry, a number of strategic policies and starting points are very important, and Terry Murphy will pick up on some of them later. There are very important issues concerning what makes children achieve success. Clearly, enjoyment of learning is a key to

success. What causes people to enjoy learning is the motivation to learn. In some instances, motivation is related to outcomes: it is a case of “as a pupil, what am I going to achieve?” For many, particularly those in post-primary education, it is the aspiration to employment or to other forms of education. It is a particular problem for boys. Where boys are motivated to learn and there is an understanding of particular learning styles, greater success is achieved, whether in one classroom in a particular subject or across the school.

The Committee needs to pay attention to something that I said last week or two weeks ago when I met members in relation to the budget. If the economy is to be at the top of the agenda in Northern Ireland, we have to ask ourselves in what ways we value education as a significant contributor to the economy. That brings us back to motivation and some of the points raised in relation to the grade D. The important thing is that we set standards that people can achieve, so that they can use those standards to achieve something else. If we do not have an economy that employs people and if the economy does not tell the education system what it needs — and I contend that, in many cases, it does not — motivation is diminished. It is not just about young people; it is about their parents as well, because they are important partners in generating motivation.

As mentioned earlier, successful schools are part of their community. They understand and see their place in the community; they have staff who do not resent working in the school; and they have empathy with the community and pupils. Getting respect can be difficult, because, on many occasions, the parents may not have had a good education experience and do not always share in the high expectations of the school. One characteristic on which we focus, in particular, is how a school’s ethos of high expectations and aspiration is conveyed not just to pupils but to parents; how parents, pupils and teachers can work together to achieve those outcomes.

On the overall issue of addressing underachievement, the CCMS was established largely because it was recognised that Catholic schools were underperforming relative to those in the rest of the system, and that has been a particular focus of our work since 1973, when we carried out research and set out a number of strategies. I emphasise that we can only operate within the structures and policies given to us; and section 4 of your paper identifies some issues, particularly those emerging from the 1989 Order, which actually created sink schools in the system.

It is all very well to look at what schools do, but we have to look at what legislation has done to schools to put them in the position of having to do some of those things. I recognise, as does the system, that Catholic maintained schools have improved significantly over the past number of years. However, that does not mean that they are as good as they could be or that they have reached a level of satisfaction with which we are happy. Those who come through Catholic maintained schools, whether they achieve qualifications or not, are picked up by the workforce and make a valuable contribution to our economy and society.

That is an overview. I will ask my three colleagues to speak. Paul O’Doherty will say a few words about leadership; Terry Murphy will speak about ESAGS and the policy; and Sean Rafferty will reflect on work that we have done on the impact of early-learning communities and the entitlement framework.

Mr Paul O’Doherty (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools):

I will speak first on a few leadership issues as identifying and promoting leadership has probably been one of the most successful strategies in our sector. If the success of schools is to be localised and put into context then we need people who will show leadership not only in their school but in their communities as well. It is the aspiration aspect to which we keep returning. All schools work within boundaries, social and otherwise, that limit children’s achievement.

Good school leaders, governors as well as staff, challenge those boundaries and move them forward. Increasingly, the leadership skills that we see achieving success in our schools are, first, people skills in working in the community and raising parents’ aspirations, motivating staff and ensuring that staff are genuinely involved. They need leadership in their own sections and departments so that they aspire for all their children. They also need the ability to network and collaborate, and the Committee touched on that earlier. Schools must not work against one another; they must work together.

The PISA report shows that most of the education that children achieve is in primary schools. It is critical that leaders in the community and in schools work with primary schools to ensure that transition — a critical stage at which many of our children fall back — is overcome so that

there is progress from preschool and primary school to ensure that the literacy and numeracy achieved at primary level are carried into post-primary education.

As a community and as parents we do not experience schools in isolation. The journey that our children make might be through preschool but will certainly be through primary and post-primary education, and the leadership shown in our successful schools embraces that; it is leadership of a community rather than of an institution. It is about developing the staff in a school to maximise the use of data. That is where the professionalism of our staff comes in because the use of data is about professionals looking at information and challenging themselves about it. It is diagnostic; it is about saying that we are getting information and this is how our school is performing compared to other schools; it is about contextualising it down to the individual department, class and pupil and asking what works and why those children are doing well and these children are not.

That is where we come into a distributive leadership model that says that it is not about an individual at the top of an organisation, who may fall under a bus tomorrow. The great leaders are those who develop leadership in their school, in their senior management team and in their heads of department, so that everyone is engaged on the same journey with a common ethos and common values. It is about believing that all children can achieve and it is about taking them on the journey to maximise what they can achieve.

Those are the leadership qualities that have been prominent in schools in our sector that have overcome difficulties. Jim is right that we are about taking our children beyond boundaries and building on our success. The skills and attributes that I have listed have been shown by our leaders in challenging those boundaries and in moving our children on.

Mr Terry Murphy (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools):

I will make a number of points in three areas. The first area is with respect to the policy, the second area is with respect to the whole issue of policy coherence in the Department of Education, and the third is with respect to the notion of broader cross-departmental policy alignment.

The CCMS broadly welcomes Every School a Good School. It is long overdue as far as the needs of Northern Ireland's education system are concerned. However, we would like to see a few other things recognised. We want to see greater investment in children aged nought to three to improve their readiness for education, which was referred to earlier, and address their needs, particularly children with special educational needs, as early as possible. We want to see the removal of selection and the introduction of a more area-based admissions policy. We want to see fewer, larger, more self-sustaining schools where the curriculum is more aligned to the needs of the economy, as Northern Ireland emerges from the recession, and we want to see continued support for autonomous curriculum development in schools, supported only through the provision of broad curriculum guidelines, which, thankfully, we now have. We want to see these matters considered in addition to those mentioned in the policy.

We also want to comment on the need for greater policy coherence in education. We want to see Every School a Good School as the core education policy, with other support policies aligned to it, including, for example, the policy on the provision of funding to schools, the nought-to-six policy, the policy on numeracy and literacy, special needs, aspects of school development planning, the sustainable schools policy and other policies relating to things such as the relationship between school improvement and governance, inspection, intervention and leadership support.

With respect to policy coherence, we want to see the introduction of earned or accountable autonomy into schools, including the encouragement of schools to be more responsible and more active about their improvement. We also want to see consideration being given to a greater connectedness or alignment between the work of the inspectorate, the employing authorities and the curriculum assessment and support services that schools have on matters of school improvement. We want to see greater joined-up thinking and coherence on how policies in education work together under the umbrella of Every School a Good School, in the interests of improving education outcomes for the community.

Lastly, with respect to broader policy alignment, we want to see fewer Departments and greater policy integration developing between them. We want to see the Executive beginning to integrate policy, planning and budget allocation for aspects of economic growth, social

development and education in the next Programme for Government. We want to see evidence of policy integration and planning for the delivery of the policy and the funding for that delivery. Those are important strands. The lives of men and women on the street are impacted by a whole range of influences, which are not all separate. Therefore, policies affecting people's lives need to join up more as regards development and in the delivery of the services related to them.

We want like to see a long-term strategy for aligning education and economy policy drivers more closely, beginning with the early years of education through to the advice and courses offered to older children. We want to see how that adds up as regards providing an education that leaves young people better placed to access employment and contribute to Northern Ireland's economic development. That needs a cultural shift in education, in which we promote wealth creation based on entrepreneurial development and more private sector growth, rather than well-established, safe routes into the public sector, with which we are all familiar. That is something that is on the lips of people at the moment, not just in this part of our country, but in many other places too.

Lastly, we want to see greater area-based planning for education and training. We want to see a move away from individual institutional consideration to a more area-based consideration, with all education providers in an area being required to align their planning and actions with local and regional policy and planning. A good example of that is what the Department is attempting to do through the introduction of the entitlement framework. The formation of area learning communities and how that has been progressing is an example of an area-based way of doing things. I will hand over to Sean, who will talk more about that.

Mr Sean Rafferty (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools):

For the past four or five years, my role has been a dual one, working to support the entitlement framework and working on post-primary review in the Catholic sector. The two are aligned. The outcomes of long-term capital needs must be informed by the appropriate curriculum that the sector is there to deliver.

The learning communities have been in existence for four years and we now have four years of data. The Department has entitled those first four years phase one, and we can now look the

difference there has been, as opposed to the aspirations in some plans that people submitted to get funding. That is what I have been doing, against the benchmark of the core aims in the entitlement framework, including targets for a minimum of 24 and 27 courses, the target for one-third applied courses, collaboration with others, looking at the economic reality and looking at the number of courses that are being provided with fewer than 10 students in them.

I have done that for all the Catholic-managed schools. However, I work closely with Alison Smyth in the Western Education and Library Board, because the source of the data was the entitlement framework audits for four years. We are now doing that for the entire system, for individual learning communities and also for the different sectors — the controlled sector, the integrated sector — because there are issues that may be appropriate for the different managing authorities.

We found a variable pattern of progress across all levels from school to school. Some schools have made significant progress, but it appears that some schools have not heard that there is an entitlement framework. There is variation across the areas; and, in our sector — I am talking purely about Catholic managed schools — there is a significant difference between the change, or lack of it, in grammar schools and non-grammar schools.

By and large, the figures for the range of courses bear out Bain's figures. Schools that are running sixth forms with 40 or 50 children are not near, and never will be near, the required large provision for post-16. Inequality remains. We have small schools in the same area as large schools, which is similar to having two different restaurants, one with a very small menu of four or five items and one with a menu of 40 things. That is in the same area. The issue is around how we reconcile that.

The Chairperson:

Is that within the same sector?

Mr Rafferty:

Yes, I am talking about our sector. The data is all ours, which is why we felt that it was appropriate for the same set of data to be developed for all the sectors.

We have an issue around uptake of applied courses, which connects to the economic background issue and so on. There is significant variation. Again, and I am talking about our grammar schools, applied course development is not significant. To be honest, a lot of people are hoping that it will all go away. Therefore, for four years there has been a lot of funding, but the evidence is not there to say that there has been significant change in curriculum.

There is variation in collaboration. Where maintained schools have a tradition of working with further education colleges, that tradition has continued and, in most cases, developed. Where grammar schools have no history of working with further education colleges, there is still a sense that we are talking about the old techs, rather than further education or higher education offering foundation degrees. We have mapped that across all our schools.

The big issue is size, which plays in to some of the other factors that impact on our schools, particularly those with social deprivation. Those schools tend to also have demographic downturn.

We still have the mix of large schools, grammar schools and small schools. Therefore, the school at the bottom of that pecking order is trying to provide the entitlement framework but is having a reduced intake. I mentioned that, at the other side of it, the large, successful grammar schools are filling, quite often with a broader range of students, but the curriculum is not changing. The evidence says that, in the past four years, the change to the applied nature that is required for the economy and so on has not happened.

I do not know what it is like in the other sectors, but I have a sense from the 50% poll and from the work that we have done with Alison in the Western Education and Library Board, and I think that that is the pattern. A lot of money has been spent to move this on, and, in phase one, there has been movement in some places but not in others. Collaboration has developed in some places and has realities for the sustainable schools policy, because the numbers are out there and everyone knows about them. There is a proliferation of small sixth forms that do not make economic good sense and which I doubt will be replaced with any capital programme in the future.

Our sense is that, ideally, some notice needs to be given that, two years from now, we will move to sustainable school sixth forms. Sixth forms are costing money, and lots of small classes with less than 10 students are being run. Money for that is coming out of the same school's budget, and the price is being paid somewhere else in the school. The schools will not give up their sixth forms. Two days ago, I was at a meeting with a large school and three small schools, two of which have small sixth forms. The schools say that they need to retain their sixth forms because, if they do not have one, parents will send their children somewhere else.

That is the kind of information that is there, and it has particular relevance for our proposals for future maintained structures. We must test the curriculum that is provided. It is not about providing buildings but about providing a curriculum and then the resource that enables that. That is where we are with the analysis, and it highlights some of the issues and the inequity. That is more profound in urban areas of deprivation, because, as the grammar schools and more popular schools have space, the school that usually serves the poorest part of the community is the one that tends to lose the students. That makes it even more difficult for those schools to provide what they know they should be providing.

Mr J Clarke:

We will now take any questions.

The Chairperson:

The last contribution was interesting on how you see the policy working out. The budget will basically kill off the entitlement framework.

Mr Rafferty:

No, that is not what we are saying.

The Chairperson:

I am not saying that that is what you are saying. I am saying that, if the budget is to be as it stands currently, I cannot see the entitlement framework surviving. That would have an impact on what will happen over the four-year period.

Mr J Clarke:

One reason for our engaging in this piece of work was to prove to the Department that milestones needed to be written in to the entitlement framework and the aspirations for 2013 for schools to achieve them and measure their progress. That has not been done. The only way in which our education system will make sense to motivate those young people is to make sure that it links to the economy in some way and meets the needs of the economy.

The applied element of the entitlement framework is essential not only for children in disadvantaged areas or at the lower end of the achievement scale but for high achievers because many of them will come through with very good qualifications and not get a job. They will either export themselves elsewhere, and the options for that are also constrained, or they will end up in jobs that they could have got with a lower level of qualification. That undermines the value of education. We cannot, on the one hand, try to promote the aspiration for high achievement while, on the other hand, show that that high achievement leads to no economic outcome.

The Chairperson:

Is there a demand in grammar schools for a plan?

Mr J Clarke:

It is irrelevant whether there is a demand in a grammar school or any other school. The really important thing is whether our education system is linked to our economy. It is not about the schools but about the people in them.

The Chairperson:

If you were an employer, how would you interpret that? Would an employer have the same view on that argument?

Mr Raffety:

It connects with the input about leadership. The difference between schools is down to leadership.

Some will say that we cannot have some of those courses because the parents will not want them. Others say that the children need those courses, and they take on the role of not only changing the staff and the curriculum, but of informing, advising and encouraging parents. Leadership is the key. That is what the people who are moving on the curriculum are doing, and they do not meet resistance. However, others feel safer with yesterday's curriculum as opposed to taking on the challenge of tomorrow's curriculum.

The Chairperson:

I noted that point in your submission. It was a point that Terry raised in relation to Every School a Good School. The common curriculum, which is now repealed, still has an impact on the system. It was abolished in 1989, but we are now in 2011. It depends on how you view it, but from CCMS's point of view, are you saying that the legacy remains?

Mr J Clarke:

It was not abolished in 1989; it was introduced in 1989. It was abolished when the revised curriculum was adopted. The impact of that will take its time to work through the system. Karen McCullough made the point earlier that we are talking about generational changes. We hear positive comments from the inspectorate and from schools about the revised curriculum and about the better engagement of pupils, particularly in the skills dimension of learning. The point is that that will not come fully through our system for several years to come.

However, that section of the response reinforced the fact that, structurally, we have created failing schools. We cannot expect to change those schools solely through the work that goes on inside the schools, or, indeed, between the school and the community. We need policy and structural change to facilitate that. Sean's point is that to motivate young people, particularly those at the lower end of the achievement spectrum, there must be factors that motivate them to learn, one of those being employment opportunities.

The Chairperson:

I had hoped that the typographical corrections would have dealt with a phrase in your paper that

baffles me, which is “proportionate universalism”. I thought that other men had written that, and I was beginning to worry. I see that some of you are wearing red ties — *[Laughter.]*

Mr B McCrea:

I am surprised that you do not know what that means; everybody knows.

The Chairperson:

It sounds like a phrase that you would use, Jim. *[Laughter.]*

Mr J Clarke:

I feel honoured to be put in the same context as Professor Marmot, who wrote the report on the Health Service. It was his phrase.

The Chairperson:

What exactly does it mean?

Mr J Clarke:

It means that everyone has an entitlement, but that the support for that entitlement varies according to need. In other words, those who are most capable of managing for themselves, because they are from better home and social backgrounds, are more capable of achieving, have access to computers, have more books and, perhaps, have people who will talk to them need less to achieve the same outcomes than someone from a deprived background, whose parents need support for the basics of informing their growth and development and to make them school-ready. My interpretation is that proportionate universalism is about support that is proportionate to need, and Professor Marmot is very good on that area. Like you, Chair, when I read it first, it took me time to get my head round it, but it is a good phrase to sum up how to drive equality into education.

The Chairperson:

It is in your paper as a concept and as a definition, but how is it put into practice? Does it go back to the other core elements that we discussed earlier? How does it become part of the school framework? We have discussed the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the

middle years information system (MidYIS) and other testing mechanisms. We do not all accept that free school meals are the most appropriate way of defining the challenges. A variety of indicators show, for example, John Smith's needs and his current situation. What do we need to put in place that will ensure that John Smith comes out at the other end of the system having reached his full potential?

Mr J Clarke:

As I said, the education policies and structures must be right. We must get rid of the many impediments that the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 created. There are issues of leadership, high quality teaching and the effective use of data.

Whether we use PISA or any other measure, those are only indicators. We have to draw out whether we are performing as well as we can or whether we could do better. No matter what way we look at it, we are not as good as we think that we are relative to those countries with which we now compete, and I do not mean Scotland, Wales and England — the base is much broader than that.

One contributor to the Catholic maintained sector's comparative success — I use the word "comparative" deliberately — is the fact that we are not the managers of the schools. We try to empower boards of governors and principals to take responsibility. That is one reason that we regard accountable or earned autonomy as an important way forward. People must feel responsible for what they do, and they must be empowered to do it. That is extremely important.

Paul made a point about area-based planning, which we do not regard as the planning of buildings alone. Rather, we regard it as encompassing curricular planning, professional planning and using extended schools to connect with the community. Our notion is one of children's growing up in the community being represented by a V shape. The home is the bottom point of the V, leading up and out from which are Sure Start, nursery school, early primary school and larger post-primary schools, so the social mix is broadened.

PISA information and local analysis shows that we have schools at either end of society. The most important lesson that other systems have taught us is that schools with a narrower social

base and narrower range of ability have a greater chance of success. When I was a principal in a very deprived area, I could almost pinpoint the day on which the school moved from negative to positive. We found things that the children were good at, and we valued them, which meant that the children felt motivated. People think that putting well-motivated children with those who are less well motivated pulls standards down. However, my experience, and, I think, that of my colleagues, is that it pulls standards up. Paul and Terry may want to add a few words.

Mr O'Doherty:

When successful leaders who turn schools round first walk in, they often find that the expectation of the community and the staff in the school is that they are doing the best that they can. They feel that the limitations of the children and the community mean that they cannot go any further. Often, leadership has meant recognising the social and economic boundaries that hold back and limit people, but not accepting them. It has meant telling the staff that, despite the impediments, the school can achieve and can move the children forward.

Part of the complexity of everything that has been discussed this afternoon is that so many factors have an impact on education. We can either be overwhelmed by all those factors and wait for them to fall into place, or we can say that we need to tackle all those factors and change things, starting today. That is what good school leaders do, and they need an education system that is supportive.

Jim and Terry pointed out some of the issues that programmes, such as Every School a Good School, try to address. It is a matter of getting it right when it comes to the curriculum, assessment and school funding, and it is about early intervention, all of which are all worthy measures. Depending on what we do about them, they all contribute to making the task of individuals who try to introduce change easier or harder. The most important person for children is not necessarily the principal but the teacher whom they encounter in the classroom. The principal and the governors behind that teacher need to have the tools and attitude to empower him or her to move forward.

What we have done so far marks only the beginning. We are moving to an area approach. If the biggest part of children's experience and the limit to what they can achieve in education are

defined not by the school but by the community from which they come, how do we have the greatest impact on that? It is not through individual schools, but through schools acting collectively with the community to try to change the aspirations of children and enhance parenting skills. That is where our school leaders are coming from. Those sets of values bind everybody in the community, make the difference and help those children to progress. That is why we are developing tools to help governors in their role to challenge and developing tools for schools leaders to use in their school development planning. By doing that, we help them to turn the school around.

However, principals and governors have to empower their heads of department. In turn, heads of department have to empower teachers to look at individual classes and individual children and say, "This is how we will change things for John Smith. This is how he learns, and this is how he can move forward."

The complexity involved can be daunting, but a school can take the view that changing any of the factors might lead to an improvement and that changing all of the factors might lead to a huge improvement.

Mr T Murphy:

Chairperson, you posed a question about how we achieve change. That is a complex area, but a few basic truths lie at the bottom of all this. One is the tolerance of underperformance and underachievement, and where we are with that at individual, school, community and system level, which brings us back to Paul's point about challenge. In the system, there is not enough challenging of people to be better. We talk a lot about supporting schools, teachers and leaders, which is fine and important, but we also need that element of challenge.

Importantly, governors have a role to challenge. The capacity of governors to challenge their schools to be better is underdeveloped. Many schools do not challenge themselves enough to be better. I would like schools to be challenged more from within their own communities about how they can be better. We could do more to challenge schools.

The CCMS does challenge its schools. We review schools' achievements, and then we have

conversations with them about their performance and about any concerns we have. We ask schools whether they are aware of any problems and, if so, what they are doing about those problems and whether they have plans, as part of their school development plans, to address them to make their school better. The challenge function is, therefore, what we need to develop and be better at, in parallel with the supporting systems that we have.

Mr Rafferty:

Another challenge, which comes from the other direction, is to the system. We talk about putting young people first. For those under the entitlement framework, education between the years of 14 to 19 must be on a continuum and must provide a clear pathway. The obstruction to that is the existence of two separate Departments. For the past four or five years, we have talked about a pending policy on our website. We have to overcome, at a political level, the problem with deriving a policy. Improvement should be driven by a policy, but there is no policy.

There is a disconnect between the further education sector and schools. Our learning communities are not really learning communities; they are schools groups that our further education (FE) people attend occasionally. Those communities should involve representatives from FE and higher education (HE) as well as employers and the Careers Service. However, that is the Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL) agenda. Unless we overcome that problem, some of the aspirations for the entitlement framework will not be realised everywhere. They will be realised in certain areas, where particularly good leaders are able to work with one other. However, at a system level, that will not happen, because other people need the structures to be in place to empower them. Some will build the structures, but not everybody.

The Chairperson:

Last week, a valuable contribution was made during one of the presentations to the Committee on the budget. The chief executive of one board said that instead of a Department of Education we should have a Department for children. I go further than that in advocating that, in line with your last comment, the disconnect means that there should be a Department for children and young people. The existing structures mean that all the focus is on schools and everything that we do concerns schools. However, the focus of all that we do should be on the children in the schools.

You talked about the challenge function. That still exists in the form of parental choice. There may have to be a challenge because there is a variety of major issues, not all of which are down to the fact that we have a selective system. We need to be careful because we are all guilty, to a lesser or higher degree, of tailoring our arguments. If we think that the person to whom we are talking happens to be on the other side of the argument, we tailor what we say to be more applicable. More and more, I now try to say that it is not a case of either/or, but a combination of the two, and I ask how we can take the valuable and important elements from each argument to find a way forward.

Mr O'Doherty:

I will deal with the first point. We do not want to get into political departmental structures, because there are different ways to deliver. Your point about children and young people is broader than that; it is about coherence in the next Programme for Government. Education feeds into and supports many other areas and, in turn, needs support from many other areas. Sean talked about the need for a coherent policy for pupils aged between 14 and 19. Education can support disadvantaged communities, but it needs support from other areas. That is an area for a cohesive Programme for Government, so that the interventions from the Department of Education are in line with the interventions from other Departments. All such interventions must be supportive and not run across each other. There is no choice: either they support each other or they end up clashing with and impeding each other. Thus we return to the idea of a coherent approach.

Then, we move into the area of selection and a system approach. Again, it falls under that umbrella. I recognise that people have different views on that. We support an earned autonomy for individual schools to give them the maximum flexibility to determine a way forward. The research tends to suggest that as the best way to secure an initiative and the best way for schools to focus on moving pupils forward.

All schools have to work within a system, some aspects of which may be impediments. It may be that selection is one such impediment, because schools whose communities are drained of those parents who have the highest aspirations are left with an even more difficult critical mass of pupils and community to motivate. We have concerns about selection because of that impact on

individual schools. We need a system in which all schools, including some excellent grammar schools, work collectively to educate all children to their maximum ability.

Mr J Clarke:

We need to measure parental choice. When I was working on the Costello review, leading up to what became the 24 and 27 subjects, we examined all post-14 and post-16 provision in every school. We came to the conclusion that there could not be unfettered choice but that there had to be choice and that choice needed to be equal.

We must consider those choices that are critical not just to the education system but to the economy. We must moderate parental choice to a degree. There must always be choice. We cannot have a system dominated by prescription, whatever its source. Nor can we have a system that is managed to facilitate some in society but not others. Therefore, we must consider the issue of parental choice. We must also recognise that in a community such as Northern Ireland, which is largely segregated in social as well as religious terms, choice must be managed in different ways in different places.

Given the state of the economy and recognising that our education system led us to where we are, we must ask whether this is where we want to be. If not, what else do we need to change apart from putting a few more papers through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)? We need to change the fundamentals of education.

As Karen pointed out on more than one occasion, this is a generational, long-term issue. As long as we delay starting the process of early intervention, of giving support to children coming through the system, identifying their needs and motivating them to want to succeed, we will not create either the economy or the inclusive society that we hope to achieve.

Mr O'Dowd:

Thank you. As usual, that was an informative presentation and paper. I am going to pay you a compliment, Jim: I think that you are the most capable politician in the room. *[Laughter.]*

Mr J Clarke:

That is not what I set out to be. *[Laughter.]*

Mr O'Dowd:

Your colleagues are not too far behind you. You have told us everything that is wrong with education without mentioning CCMS's responsibility for correcting any of it. You told us that there are too many small sixth forms and too many small schools, that we need to redirect our education system towards the economy and that the economy needs to be reshaped. The CCMS has the capability of solving the problem of too many small sixth forms and too many small schools, and it has the ability to strengthen the education system. I agree that politicians carry the buck for strengthening the economy to a certain degree, but it is almost a chicken and egg situation. How do we improve the economy? In certain states, it is through education, but we could say that it, too, is generational. What will CCMS do about the other matters?

The Chairperson:

There was me thinking that John was serious when he started out.

Mr O'Dowd:

I am serious. *[Laughter.]*

Mr J Clarke:

It certainly was not a compliment. *[Laughter.]*

First, and I am not defending CCMS, because we have made the point several times that we have made some but not enough progress, but we cannot change, for example, small sixth forms. That is a matter of Department of Education policy, and it would have to issue guidelines to allow us to do that.

As for the size of schools, we disputed the rationality of the sustainable schools policy with various people, including politicians and the Department. That was drawn up and advice given to Bain before the 2006 Order came into being, even though they knew what it would contain. Our research, which is similar to that referred to by Sean, shows that the minimum size of a post-

primary school is approximately 900 pupils aged between 11 and 19, with a minimum intake of about 140. We have also recognised that Key Stage 3 can be delivered with about 80 pupils. Therefore, it is possible to construct many different federations.

There is no legislation that would allow us to create different forms of governance to recognise how we can collaboratively use schools to work together. For instance, to pick up on Sean's point, where is the equality between a large, successful school and a small school with pupils aged between 11 and 16? Some of our large schools, grammar and non-grammar, throw children out if they do not reach a particular threshold because there is a fixed enrolment. We believe that we should be allowed to let those schools grow. In federation with other schools, those schools could grow their 11-to-14 or 11-to-16 elements and guarantee access. That would mean not throwing children out of education. We push up standards every year, yet kids cannot access education. Teachers are being sacked because there are not enough jobs in the system, and that is because there are not enough pupils. Things are being done in a highly illogical way. CCMS is not responsible for that.

Several years ago, we invested much time and a bit of the Department's money in a total review of primary schools. During the debate on the budget, it was asked how much money was wasted on economic appraisals that were started and never completed. We have done a lot of that work, and we know what we need to do. Give us the resources, and we will do it. CCMS and NICCE set out the post-primary review. We did that because we saw the need, and we did so unilaterally because we had waited for three years to bring the rest of the system with us, but it did not come.

I accept that we can do more, but only if we are empowered to do so by legislation, by the policies to which we are directed and, to some degree, by the resources. You guys are politicians, and the first thing that happens when we want to close a small school is that you get on a soapbox to defend it. Make a decision: are we to be statesmen, or are we to be little islanders defending the indefensible?

Mr O'Dowd:

I was expecting a spirited defence. You have gone on to the review of the post-primary estate.

The power to deal with that list of issues now lies in your hands. Maybe you have given me an insight into the post-primary review.

Mr T Murphy:

I am sorry for interrupting, John, but that is not true. We can carry out consultation and other processes that will identify how we could realign and rationalise schools in certain areas, but we need a policy through sustainable schools. We need the Department of Education to give us the necessary resources to deliver those changes. Paul and I were members of the group who worked on the review of the primary school estate. A range of primary reorganisational processes is ready to go, but we cannot get the financial and policy support to implement them. I am concerned that we have invested a lot of time and a small amount of the Department of Education's money in that post-primary work.

Mr O'Dowd:

Jim said "some"; you said "small".

Mr T Murphy:

I am concerned that our post-primary process could run into the sand, because we do not get the support to deliver it. We are creating an expectation on the ground, and we need the Committee and the Department of Education to support us in the implementation of those processes. You are as aware of the harsh economic situation as I am.

I hope that, this afternoon, we have demonstrated the strong connect between the community of schools which are appropriately sized to deliver the curriculum that children need and the curriculum itself. The sustainable schools policy, the curriculum and Every School a Good School are closely linked to one another, and we need a policy that will deliver with that understanding at the front of its thinking.

We have done a great deal of work on those changes, but we cannot deliver them all unless we get the support to do so. We are significantly further down the line than some other sectors in education.

Mr O’Dowd:

I do not wish to hog the whole meeting. The post-primary review has to be published. I have no doubt that the four of you, led from the front by Jim, will be able to articulate your views and lobby for it well. If it raises challenges about a number of factors, I think that there will be a debate.

You commented on sustainable schools and the argument about numbers. It cannot simply boil down to numbers. Community connection, leadership within the school and the geographical location of the school must be factored in. I have not disagreed with you; I have just given you a bit of stick. I agree with you on this: politicians will have to restrain themselves from standing on their soapboxes to defend small schools.

Mr J Clarke:

Paul and I sit on the local management of schools (LMS) steering group. At every meeting over the past five years, bar the last meeting, I asked when we would receive the review of the LMS formula. Under present arrangements, it is highly counterproductive for us to amalgamate two small schools into a larger school, because the resource that they lose is massive. There is, therefore, no incentive.

The Chairperson:

You need to be extremely careful. From experience in my constituency, I know about the consequences of the review. I am berating the review, but it impinges on the issue of community. In my constituency, some small schools in the maintained sector feel extremely isolated by what the commission has done.

Mr J Clarke:

I have no doubt about that.

The Chairperson:

I take Jim’s point about moving ahead of other sectors. The Department had given you money to examine the rationale and the review of the sector, and others did not follow.

Mr J Clarke:

Others got the same resource.

The Chairperson:

There was no collaboration between the two to see how they could overlap.

In Ballymoney, the schools must come together to discuss how to preserve the maintained secondary school, which is, as far as I am concerned, an integral part of the community in the town. If Ballymoney loses that school, there will be a massive deficit in our community, but that is not being factored in. To me, community is not about having one school for the Prods and one school for Roman Catholics. Ballymoney as a community is made up of Roman Catholics, Protestants and whoever else, whatever religion they are. The challenge for all of us is to provide education for our young people.

Mr J Clarke:

Let me say something about the LMS formula. The current formula treats every small school in exactly the same way. We recognise that some small schools must exist, but not all of them. Therefore, we set criteria to identify the former and fund them to the limit of their need. However, others can do things differently. That is a general point.

No matter what way the post-primary review goes, whether it is within the Catholic sector or across sectors, some of our schools will disappear. We have too many schools. We also recognise that the way in which we are doing this is not ideal. We would have liked it to be part of a whole area-based planning approach. However, as I indicated earlier, we waited for three years. We are reaching the point at which children are, in a sense, being abused by being placed in schools that cannot deliver the curriculum to them. Do we simply continue with that as the demographic continues to go down and down? We have unsustainable schools, so we have to move.

We are open to working with other sectors, but there is an issue with the kind of communities in Northern Ireland and, therefore, where that would be possible. None of us can impose solutions, but we all have to be open to solutions being suggested. In any post-primary review,

no matter where it is, in Ballymoney or anywhere else, there will be defensiveness, an attitude of “What we have, we hold.” Our role, as strategic providers, is to try to remove that subjectivity and ask what the needs of the children in the area are. I made the point earlier: does the school run the show, or does the system run it for the needs of children?

We are open to that, Mervyn. We will not get it right everywhere, but we will make it better than it is. As I said, legislation will be required to give us the flexibility to do different things. I said that schools for ages 11 to 14 are a viable option. They keep a presence in a community, and children can decide to go wherever they wish post-14. We have to create through the area-learning communities. We saw that as a parallel track, with reorganisation as the goal, if you like. Along the way, area-learning communities would facilitate opportunities for young people, maybe not all on the one campus. However, there are difficulties and costs involved in bussing children around to access their education.

Our budget plan means that much of what we might want to do in reorganisation at both primary and post-primary level will be severely restrained by not having a capital programme of any significance to deliver it.

The Chairperson:

Should we remove the quotas for enrolment and just let the market determine school size?

Mr J Clarke:

Yes. We should do that along with ending selection, which has no positive impact on education at all. We have a common curriculum. We want to broaden the access of every young person. As I said, having the smallest and largest schools working together is a highly practical stepping stone. Nothing in legislation states that an admission number is inviolate in any school. If we establish what the enrolment should be as the first priority, then expand the sixth form and work out what is left for admission, we will achieve community cohesion, because the schools will have to work together. It works in a cycle.

Mr Lunn:

You all mentioned community connection and involvement and the need for the school leader to

lead the community. One thing that I admired about maintained schools as I visited them over the past four years was the connection between school and parish, which was strong and useful. From the point of view of community involvement, it must be priceless. The post-primary review involves a move to much bigger post-primary schools. Is there a risk of eroding that valuable link?

Mr O'Doherty:

One of the difficulties with post-primary schools is scale. We are balancing out several issues. I have gone into small communities with a long history and an emotional involvement with their school and said that this is not the future for our children in the twenty-first century and that the school will have to close.

That balance element means that the world for which we must prepare our young people demands that they have access to a certain type of institution. We are old enough to remember when children left school at 14 years old and went into the factories. The skills that we are trying to help our young people to develop relate to a different type of demand. It is about engaging with those communities and telling them that the restructuring required to meet the aspirations of their children may mean that the schools are no longer on their doorsteps. That is a very difficult process. However, I have taken communities through it, and, some time later, I met parents who appreciated the new structures and institutions and the growth of opportunities at primary and post-primary levels that their children now have.

It is an issue of balance. We will try to create something that neither restricts the aspirations of young people nor disengages them from their communities. Equally, there is a learning process for the communities themselves, and they must be persuaded of the gain that can come with the pain of making that change.

Mr J Clarke:

I want to add to the point that I made earlier about the V-shape of growing up and growing out. The real strength in our system lies in the relationship between nursery schools and primary schools in the community, and we can retain that relationship in some of our secondary schools where the community that is transferring to the local post-primary school is sufficiently large. In

that, I quote the example of St Colm's High School in Twinbrook — that is near your constituency, Trevor, and received probably one of the best reports ever written by the Department of Education — because a significant part of the community in Twinbrook lives close to that school. However, other children leave their communities to go to a grammar school or to an 11-to-19 school because the local school is an 11-to-16 school. The community bond is less strong in those areas, and the challenge of good leadership is to try and retain it

As we look ahead, we must recognise that the community dimension delivers outcomes. Children in areas such as Keady or Maghera, by and large, transfer to the local post-primary school. In those and other areas, the cohesion is not only social and pastoral, it is also academic, and children achieve more because there is a lesser loss of learning at the transition points.

I appreciate and value what you said, and I do not think that anything that we propose will diminish that. However, we recognise that children grow up and grow out.

Mr Lunn:

I understand that you are not trying to diminish that connection if you can help it. Paul, you said that you have taken schools through the process, but I wonder if you have taken them through the type of process that you are now contemplating, which involves some quite major change. Mervyn made the case for a school in Ballymoney, and I could also make the case for St Patrick's Academy in Lisburn, because there may not be a Catholic secondary school in the centre of Lisburn as a result of your review.

Mr T Murphy:

I was centrally involved with the creation of St Killian's College just north of Carnlough. That saw the formation of an area-based school to serve the whole community from Larne to Cushendun, towards the Braid and inland halfway to Ballymena.

Mr Lunn:

Is that Garron Tower you are talking about?

Mr T Murphy:

It is based at Garron Tower. St Killian's College was formed from three post-primary schools, and, although there was a considerable amount of anxiety in areas such as Larne about the loss of the school there, the school is now in its second year, and there has been a significant community adjustment in people's feelings about the new school. They welcome it and recognise the benefit of its formation.

Your initial point was about the link between parish and school in the maintained sector, and, although that is important to us, our schools are open to anyone. They are not Catholic schools for Catholic people. We value a strong link between our post-primary schools and the wider community in which they exist, and we feel that the connectivity to that community is important for the children in those schools. We do not want a connection only between the Catholic school and the Catholic community; we also want a broader connect into the wider community. That is an important dimension of what our schools should be doing.

Mr O'Doherty:

Different community possibilities arise as well. Like Terry, I was involved in merging three schools in Strabane into Holy Cross College. That school is still on a journey. Everything is a point on a journey: nothing ever stops, and there is no end point. It is about moving on and helping children. However, by and large, all the children in that area go to the school, and that has allowed a different type of relationship to develop with the feeder primary schools, and that has aided some of the transition issues. It has also allowed that school to offer its resource to the primary schools.

I cover a large rural area, and I have concerns that the change element, which will affect primary and post-primary schools, will be very difficult for some rural communities. However, at the same time, we have to maximise potential, not only of the children but of the community resource, because those schools have an opportunity to support parents in their community. An economy of scale can reinvigorate those communities. Therefore, we are talking about a paradigm shift. We have to move to a different way of engaging with and supporting communities.

Mr Lunn:

You made a comment about Larne. If you ever manage to convince the people in Larne to accept St Killian's or, as I know it, Garron Tower, inside a year, you had better prepare yourselves to declare a miracle because that certainly was not the case a year ago.

Mr J Clarke:

Indeed it was not. When we started that project several years ago, the first question that we asked of the then parish priest was whether the people of Larne regarded Garron Tower as their school. He was sent off to find out, and he came back and said that they did. There is resistance among some groups of people, as there will always be some resistance. However, as Paul said earlier, my experience of amalgamating schools is that it is a major upheaval at the time but that, by and large, it is appreciated further down the track. Some people even come back and say so.

The Chairperson:

I do not want to get off track. However, you mentioned the school in Strabane. There still are issues with that because it is a bilateral school and because of the number of parents who have made other choices and have gone to other places —

Mr O'Doherty:

The fact that 300 children have applied to get into the school shows where it is at now. I attended meetings with those communities and went through the parents' concerns. I cannot guarantee that there is 100% acceptance. However, there has been a total sea change, and part of the difficulty is the stage of the journey that they are at currently. When talking to parents about a proposal or a plan, there is bound to be uncertainty. We may have gone through that journey but they have not done so yet, and, therefore, they have fears and natural concerns. As that school has bedded down, there has been a complete change. Some parents still have links with other schools in Omagh and Derry, and, pupils have older brothers and sisters there, but that is an historical issue.

That school has been accepted as the future. People recognise what it can offer and see how it has reached out to other primary schools and established itself in the community. However, it is a

new entity, and it needs time to become established. It is much better established now because it has had time to become so and because there is a greater acceptance of it. However, as I said earlier, it is still on a journey. All our schools may be embarking on some difficult journeys and may need a support structure to help them along the way.

Mr B McCrea:

I will start with a positive comment. As ever, all of you made a well thought-out presentation. Today is not so much about taking information from you as having dialogue. It is an expression of opinion. First, I will tell you here and now that I will close schools. I am on record in Hansard as saying that. The sustainability issue cannot be argued against, and, for too long, we have refused to bite the bullet. I take the point — I am still on the positive bits by the way — that many people object because of what could happen, but when the reality becomes clear afterwards, people adapt and accept it. That applies to schools, flyovers, and so on.

I hope that you know me well enough to know that my next comment is made not from a sectarian point of view; it is just an observation or statement of fact. People from the controlled sector have a different experience and feel continually under pressure. You spoke about Maghera. When the controlled school in Maghera closed, all the pupils ended up going to Magherafelt. That scenario leaves an entire hinterland with no schools to which people from that community think that they should go. As a result, they feel beleaguered. We could talk about the same situation in Strabane, which still has a grammar school. Also, you might be happy with what the parish priest thinks of where the people from your community go to school, but the people of Larne might want a more integrated community. You know my position on integrated schools.

I see a real problem. You spoke about Derry/Londonderry. Lisneal College feels under huge pressure now because of the entitlement curriculum. The worry is that it will have to farm out its pupils to the other side of the river. The attitude there is that they will burn it rather than do that. Those are serious and emotive issues. Although I understand why, tactically, every step that you have taken is correct, I worry about where that takes us strategically. We will end up with really big Catholic schools — I understand that you say that they are open to everybody, but they are large culturally orientated schools — on one side and a number of people who feel threatened on

the other side. The mismatch is the problem.

When I see area-learning communities that work—in Limavady, for example—it is because there is equity and balance. Where they do not work is where there is too much democratic power on one side and not the other. I am firmly with you on the view that cross-sectoral area-learning communities must be brought together in a non-threatening way. All I can tell you is that I understand and accept that you put your position forward with good intent and goodwill. Sometimes, however, such issues are perceived differently by other people.

Mr J Clarke:

We cannot control perception. Indeed, perception is reality for some people. At the start of the post-primary review, in recognition of the points that you made, we set out to acknowledge that some areas' populations were mainly Catholic, so we had an obligation to support other sectors to deliver their education. Similarly, we hope that reciprocation would occur in predominantly Protestant areas of Northern Ireland. So it was in our interest to set up inclusive structures.

None of us defended the way in which that happened, but it happened because there was a failure to reach political agreement and a failure of people to move in any given way under a policy of sustainable schools. We are where we are. We are aware of the points that you make and are trying to ameliorate those, but we cannot do that in every individual case. There will, undoubtedly, be communities where the tradition is that children from one religious background do not go to a certain school. In other communities, that tradition is slowly breaking down. It is all about personal decisions.

If we or the controlled sector had commissioned the Oxford Economics report that was commissioned by the integrated sector, it would, as has been admitted, have said the same thing. We have to secure economies of scale. Northern Ireland, because of its religious and social demographic, makes that difficult, particularly in urban areas, but we have to address it. The purpose of this session was to look at the impact of disadvantage, and we have a preponderance of children from disadvantaged areas in certain schools. We are not providing a service for those children, who tend to go to small schools in urban areas. They do not feel connected to the economy or included in society, and we risk losing them. If we lose children or young people

coming through the system, we may risk a return to another form of expression that we lived through for more than 30 years.

Mr B McCrea:

I had a meeting with some permanent secretaries recently, but I will not break their confidence by saying what went on. However, the gist of the conversation was that I advanced an argument and was then asked what I thought was the biggest challenge and what I was most worried about. I said that I was most worried about a return to violence because socially disadvantaged young people were being exploited against a non-conducive financial backdrop. Interestingly, no one around the table agreed with me that that was the big threat. They mentioned other threats and issues instead. However, I know about that threat from my work on the Policing Board.

I want to make it quite clear that I understood your points and that I was not being critical of you or saying in any way that what you did was illogical, irrational or unhelpful. I understand why you are where you are. My point comes back to the discussion on the bigger picture that we must have. Education in this country does not exist in isolation. Cultural issues and fears need to be addressed. There are also logistical issues such as transportation. The big problem in Strabane is —

Mr T Clarke:

Basil, I just want to come in at that point to say that I agree entirely. Education in our country has to contribute to giving people hope, particularly in the communities that we are talking about. That is the central point. We have seen what is happening across the north of Africa, and as Jim indicated, people here might begin to take actions, possibly negative, in their own interest. I am not necessarily talking about going back to violence. There might be an increase in criminality and other behaviours that we do not want to develop in our community. We want education to work with social development and the economy to preside over and contribute to that hope. That is why I made the point earlier about the integration of policy. Policymakers need to sit down together to think, talk about and then come up with policy.

Mr B McCrea:

I just want to reinforce what I have already said: all four of your contributions were of the

highest order. I heard what you said, and I agree with you. There is an issue with the integration of policy, whether it is in higher and further education or DETI. Why, for example, do we produce so many people with qualifications that are not needed? That is the type of big debate that we need to have. Unfortunately, everything is linked and topical. Part of the reason why you were not able to get people to move forward for three years was not because they were not willing to do so but because the systems were not in place to enable them to do so. You are more organised, but that is mainly because of other sectors. We have been raising that issue for some time.

The political, with a small “p”, reality that is hitting politicians is that there are financial constraints on what we can do. There are also strategic issues about where we want to take this part of the world in which we live, and education is the more positive side of that. When we get round to having the hard-nosed discussions — I do not mean that to be negative — we will have to make difficult decisions, and it will be difficult to close a school in Ballymoney or anywhere else. I know that a large number of schools in north Belfast have deficits from which they will never recover. The educational or financial solution does not necessarily represent or reflect the cultural reality on the ground, and we have to find a way of dealing with that.

Mr T Murphy:

It is about compromising, and the Chairperson rightly said that, with respect to Ballymoney and similar places, it is about balancing the educational need and the community need. We understand and accept that there may be places where people will be asked to go a step further than our community may be prepared to go at this stage. It is a big, complex and difficult process, but that does not necessarily mean that we should step back from it. We just need to work carefully and closely together to try to achieve it.

Mr Rafferty:

The point that you made about your concern is the same point that we have represented in many of our discussions on our post-primary review. We talked about small sixth forms, and before we started, we had a conversation with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) about the appropriateness of the curriculum. I have a major concern, which is voiced in all our post-primary reviews, that there tends to be a barrier to sixth form, which is

that pupils have to get five GCSEs at grades A to C to come back to the school. That raises a big question: what do we provide for those children who do not get over that hurdle? We have a major debate with many of our catholic managed maintained schools as to what exactly they are doing. Are they providing for all the children, or are they providing for those for whom there is kudos in the community? It connects with the curriculum. We do not have appropriate qualifications and structures in Northern Ireland for those children.

The GCSE model is a way forward to A- levels and university, but, in the absence of a link with FE qualifications, apprenticeships, and so on, the pathways model is required, but it has not been developed. It means that a number of our schools do not take back some students, and they are the very children about whom you are concerned. There is also a social concern, and the long-term cost to the community will be much greater. The level 2 students whom you mentioned do not need to be on a high level, but they need a pathway, and it has not been built. I do not even know of anybody drawing up a plan for that.

Mr B McCrea:

I think that we are losing the audience here, but I agree with you. There are many issues that we could discuss, but we will leave it there because other people may want to say something.

Mr J Clarke:

I want to make one final point. The Budget will change the way that we do things, and we can moan about that, but the fact is that we cannot deliver the education system that we currently deliver with the resources that we will have. The imperative, therefore, is to do things differently. We have to set aside some of our prejudices, and we have to establish agreed priorities. To my mind, those start at the highest levels of government. As Terry said, it starts with the Programme for Government. I met Sammy Wilson in November 2010, and I asked him whether it was possible to have a conversation that would allow all the parties to discuss their priorities before getting into the departmental argument. This is a long-term endeavour, and the 0-3 age group is the starting point.

We must also recognise that our system is not connected to the employment cycle. Employers have responsibilities. Why do they asking for five GCSEs at grades A to C when, in fact, they

want something different? They should be saying what they really want, and that would impose a rigour on the curriculum to deliver.

I take Mervyn's point about Ballymoney and areas outside the metropolis. We do not focus our education on meeting economic needs that could be developed in some of our local communities. Larger institutions with more flexibility in curricular delivery allow us to focus that curriculum more particularly on areas. Fermanagh, for instance, has a strong tourist dimension, but what do our schools do to promote that? Northern Ireland has potential through the green economy and through its food sciences and agricultural background, but our education system does not promote those areas. Therefore, those are important challenges that we have to face. It is not just about creating communities; it is about creating an economy that allows those communities to feel at peace with themselves.

The Chairperson:

Jim, your paper has been very useful. I have one question, which requires a yes or no answer. Should we revisit the entitlement framework?

Mr J Clarke:

Yes, if anything, to extend it.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much. I hope that you enjoyed this afternoon.