

# Official Report (Hansard)

Tuesday 13 November 2012  
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to arrive not later than two weeks after publication of this report.

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Wells, Jim (South Down)  
Wilson, Sammy (East Antrim)

# Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 November 2012

*The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Public Petition: Athletics

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Steven Agnew has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject.

**Mr Agnew:** I submit a petition on behalf of over 350 sportspersons, both athletes and coaches. The petition calls for the development of a strategic plan for athletics as a priority sport and for the strategy to include the development of a dedicated indoor athletics training facility.

Athletics is the blue riband sport of the Olympics. It is also an inclusive sport that receives support from all sections of our society. However, those behind the petition believe that insufficient support is being provided by central and local government. No strategic plan exists to develop and promote the sport, and the facilities available in Northern Ireland are either shared or of an inadequate standard to meet the needs of the next generation of athletes. The petition recognises the positive outcomes that are possible when government invests in and lends its support to sports.

Northern Ireland has an ideal opportunity to capitalise on this year's Olympic legacy to inspire a generation. Sport makes a valuable contribution to our society through not only the enjoyment of participants and viewers but the lifelong health benefits that it offers our young people. Sportspersons from across Northern Ireland believe that a strategy coupled with a dedicated indoor, all-year facility would encourage more people to get involved in athletics and help Northern Ireland to nurture elite athletes, maximising their potential to win medals at Commonwealth, European and Olympic games.

The petitioners would like the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to explore the possibility of a dedicated indoor athletics training facility at the current site of the Mary Peters Track. The petition is timely, given today's debate on the legacy of the Paralympics

and yesterday's announcement that, in the near future, the Executive may find that they have unspent capital. Let us not let the legacy of the Olympics and the Paralympics pass us by, but let us rather lend our support to this worthwhile sport. On behalf of all of those whom I represent today, I call on the Minister to give the issue due consideration.

*Mr Agnew moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.*

**Mr Speaker:** I will forward a copy to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and to the Chair of the Committee.

## Ministerial Statement

### North/South Ministerial Council: Environment

**Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):** With your permission, Mr Speaker, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the sixteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in environment sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 31 October 2012. The statement has been agreed with junior Minister Bell.

Jonathan Bell MLA, junior Minister to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Mr Phil Hogan TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, who chaired the meeting.

Ministers discussed the environment sector priorities for Ireland's presidency of the European Union in 2013 and looked forward to the informal meeting of the council of EU Environment Ministers in Dublin on 22 and 23 April 2013. Quite a bit of time was spent on that issue. I think that, in the rundown through and after Ireland's presidency of the EU, you will see a gear change when it comes to the environmental interest and funding for the environment out of EU structures. The Irish Government have 1,600 meetings in the six-month period of the presidency. They hope to get various funding decisions over the line in terms of funding issues 2014-2020, including the common agricultural policy. Around all of that, the environmental interest is becoming much more significant in terms of its profile, its importance and potential funding streams.

Ministers noted the publication by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government of a new waste management policy, 'A Resource Opportunity: Waste Management Policy in Ireland'. As Members know, we are currently revising the waste management strategy here in Northern Ireland, and hope to have that published by April next year. The Council welcomed the presentation by rx3 and WRAP — the equivalent bodies in Dublin and Belfast that deal with these matters — on the all-island bulky waste reuse best practice management feasibility study, which is due for publication this month. That feasibility study should open doors for business to better use bulky waste and reuse it for other

purposes, rather than it going to landfill or being incinerated.

Ministers noted that a final report on an all-island tyre survey, led by Department of the Environment, is also expected to be completed by the end of the month. There is a series of interventions around the issue of tyres, not just the final report on the survey. Ministers noted that consultants appointed by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to conduct a review of the producer responsibility initiative (PRI) model in Ireland will examine the structural and environmental outcomes of the current system for dealing with used tyres and examine areas for enhanced co-operation with DOE.

Ministers welcomed the new chairperson of the North/South market steering group, David Surplus, and noted that a further meeting of the group will be arranged to consider strategic priorities identified in the work programme. The new chairperson will be invited to provide Ministers with an update on progress at a future NSMC environment meeting. I particularly welcome David Surplus's appointment to that post. He is one of the leading lights on this island when it comes to renewables, and the mind that he will bring to the steering group, in terms of the reuse of plastics and bulky wastes and other interventions, will further embed the green and clean credentials of the island of Ireland and, I hope, create increasing market and job opportunities around that type of business going forward.

The Council noted that two sites in Clogher, County Tyrone — Seskinore and Eskragh — have been agreed for the 2012-13 repatriation programme. Work has been completed at Seskinore site. I think there was 3,700 tons of waste. That has now been repatriated, in this case to a site in Monaghan. Preliminary works have commenced at Eskragh. Those works are of more significance because around 30,000 tons of waste, I think, have to be repatriated. That work will take 10 to 12 weeks, but it is ongoing.

Dublin City Council has established a framework agreement for the disposal of repatriated waste and has commenced the preparation of tender documents in advance of a public procurement process for the haulage of excavated waste to authorised disposal facilities from 2013 onwards. That is important work because, if it were not done, there could be an issue about the ongoing repatriation of waste. However, the fact that the council has established a framework agreement and is now moving towards tendering will ensure that, from

2013 on, the repatriation framework strategy will continue.

The Council noted that joint enforcement action to deal with illegal operators is a priority for both Environment Ministers, and Departments continue to target resources at the issue. There was a meeting in May in that regard, at which the agencies, North and South, further scoped out what intelligence was telling us and what joint enforcement might look like. Obviously, I will be a bit coy about commenting in any detail on those matters.

Ministers noted that officials have researched and considered further opportunities for mutually beneficial joint working to facilitate effective and efficient policy approaches in the context of EU directives on air quality, industrial emissions and noise. Air quality and noise provide most opportunities for mutually beneficial joint working. Ministers agreed that officials should commission further research to examine the issue of airborne pollution from residential smoky coal combustion and provide an update to Ministers at the next NSMC, to be held in 2013. The calorific value and cost of smokeless fuel suggest that a ban on smoky fuel on the island of Ireland would not have a financial impact on consumers but would have a potential impact on air quality, especially in some urban locations where there are air quality issues. The Council welcomed further engagement by officials to discuss the potential for mutually beneficial approaches when considering the third-round noise maps due in 2017.

As I indicated, the Council noted that nothing of immediate cross-border interest was identified in the industrial emissions directive, but obviously that will be kept under review.

Ministers noted that discussions were under way in the North/South working group on water quality (NSWGWQ) on co-ordinating the timetable for preparations of the second-cycle river basin management plans under the EU water framework directive. Obviously, given that our rivers, watercourses and lakes, in some instances, are shared cross-border assets, it is important that those co-ordinations are ongoing. The Council welcomed the workshop involving representatives of both jurisdictions on 17 October 2012 under the auspices of the International Centre for Local and Regional Development to explore practical measures that could be pursued as part of the joint implementation of the river basin management plans.

Ministers welcomed the continued co-ordination in relation to the blue flag and green coast schemes and, in particular, the role played by both jurisdictions to standardise and expand the running of the green coast scheme. Tourism Ireland, as Members know, markets the island beyond this island to Britain, Europe and the international market. Having a common approach to beach quality and having the greatest scope of blue flag and green coast schemes is part of the marketing of the island by Tourism Ireland. In that regard, this work to protect beaches and develop coastal communities is important.

Ministers noted that the NSWGWQ will receive regular updates, as appropriate, on EU policy developments in the area of water quality that may arise during Ireland's presidency of the European Union in the first six months of 2013.

Ministers noted the successful launch and publication of the Environmental Protection Agency's state of the environment report, 'Ireland's Environment 2012', on 25 June. The Council noted the successful international symposium on domestic waste water treatment systems organised by the EPA and Trinity College Dublin, which involved presentations from leading researchers and included regulators from the EPA and the NIEA.

Ministers noted that, following preliminary research into the environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing — fracking — in May, a more comprehensive research study is planned before the end of 2012. The intention is that that research study will be commenced by the end of 2012. However, given the different science and views around fracking, the research will clearly take some time. The DOE is represented on the steering group, which met on 5 July.

The Council agreed to hold the next environment sectoral meeting in Dublin in April 2013.

**10.45 am**

**Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment):** I thank the Minister for his statement. It seems that a lot of issues have been discussed by the two jurisdictions. I am heartened to hear that a higher profile will be given to environmental issues and about the potential for us to have access to more funding for environmental protection in the coming months.

There are so many question that I would like to ask the Minister, but I know that I am limited to

one. We published our inquiry into used tyre disposal in April. So far, we have not seen the Department take a lot of actions to meet the recommendations in our report. I am pleased that the Minister has discussed the issue with his counterpart in the Republic. Will he expand on what has been discussed and give a time frame for action?

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member. She rightly identified that, arguably, the NSMC environment sector covers issues that other sectors do not. That only leads me to the point, Minister — sorry, Mr Speaker; maybe one day — that the North/South review, which was agreed at St Andrews and commenced five years ago, is stuck; arguably, it is badly stuck. In June, the deputy First Minister came to the House following an NSMC meeting and said that "decisions" — that is the word that he used and that was used by both Governments in the communiqué — in respect of that review would be taken in November. When it came to November, no decisions were taken except that officials were asked to go out and bring forward proposals — whatever that might mean — before Christmas. Here we are, three or four years into a recession and five years into the review, and there has been no outcome whatsoever. A lot of issues on the island of Ireland could be scoped out and worked up and a way forward agreed; yet, five years later, the North/South review is badly stuck. I have a view about why it is badly stuck. I am saying to the parties in the Chamber and to the Irish Government that it is time to move it on and get it unstuck to maximise opportunities for the people of this island so that we position ourselves in the global market and get work for the increasing numbers of people who are out of work.

I do not agree that nothing has been done on the issue of tyres since the interim report. What has been done, or what was already being done and has now been moved forward? Let me give you six examples. First, as I said, the all-Ireland tyre survey will be published this month. That will be the first time that we have had an audit of where the issue lies on the island of Ireland. It is sometimes difficult to have good practice without good evidence. Secondly, in June, a code for a duty of care in respect of those who manage tyres was issued. There was an obligation on businesses to respond to that code, and those that did not respond are now being individually chased up by the Department to ensure that the requirements under the duty of care are fulfilled. If they are not, action could arise. Thirdly, there are now nine pilot studies with councils in the North to deal with the issue of fly-tipping,

including the fly-tipping of tyres, which is known to so many of us. The relevant people in the Department have set up a dedicated enforcement section to deal with the tyres issue, as well as the more significant enforcement section, known as the environmental crime unit. You have only to look at the papers of the past two or three months to see that a very significant commercial organisation in the North of Ireland that was involved in the management of tyres was brought before the criminal courts because of various breaches. In court, admissions were made, pleas were entered, and, under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA), £120,000 was taken from that business. At the same time, we continue to liaise with councils on the issue of part-worn tyres. Yes, there is a lot more to do, but I have given you six examples of good work to date.

**Mr Hamilton:** The Minister knows that I am interested in the cross-border movement of waste. I have asked him about it before in response to NSMC statements. Some time back, he told me that around a dozen to 15 cases had been identified in Northern Ireland. Will he clarify whether the sites included in the statement were part of that initial dozen to 15 and whether there is any evidence of new sites at which there has been illegal dumping or of the illegal cross-border movement of waste into Northern Ireland?

**Mr Attwood:** First, I will correct myself: I said that I thought that the site in Eskragh was 30,000 tons; it is 17,000 tons. The two sites — Seskinore and Eskragh — were part of the family of original sites. They are not new; they are the latest two. Under the framework agreement with the Irish Government, the ambition is that two sites every year will be cleared, provided that, when you dig into the ground, you find what you thought that you would find. It is subject also to the weather and ground conditions allowing for the material to be removed and not discovering other environmental risks arising from leachate that might lead to further work being needed to manage the waste properly. The pattern is that two sites a year will be cleared.

At the end of the day, there are people who know what happened here. Now that everybody is saying "Report all crime to the police" — well, nearly everybody is saying, "Report nearly all crime to the police" — let those who were responsible for such environmental damage on the island and in those communities be reported to the police. We make that plea because, in Ballymartin, which is one of the most significant sites from



which waste is repatriated, although a lot of information about where it may have come from was extracted from the waste, to date, the authorities, North and South, have not been able to get a prosecution over the line. The more co-operation we have to identify the criminal gangs who did what they did in Ballymartin, Seskinore, Eskragh or in the other 10 sites that have yet to be repatriated, the better off we will be.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement.

Minister, my question follows on from that of the Chair. What intervention will you make to ensure that we are able to track tyres? Over Halloween, a number of tyres were burnt on a bonfire, and it is unacceptable that that still goes on. Also, will you indicate whether you propose to introduce anything to help those who want to recycle heavier-gauge plastics? I have brought this up in the Committee on a number of occasions. There are certain types of plastic that we do not recycle at the minute, and I would like to see something brought forward to encourage the recycling of heavier-gauge plastics.

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for his question. I will answer the second part of his question first. A report is coming out this month in respect of bulky waste on the island of Ireland — major items of furniture and white goods, for example. Given the profile that is now gathering around the reuse of existing materials, that report will advertise not only that there is a lot of opportunity to reuse that we are not taking but that there are market opportunities, given the added value. Some of the figures in the report will be astounding. The value added from the reuse of white goods and bulky furniture is huge. Because you get the product at no cost or a very low cost from civic amenity centres, for example, if you then reuse it, on the far side of your own costs, there can be a significant markup simply because you are getting the product at such a low price.

Touching on Mr Boylan's question, the same is true in respect of the previous report — the Horizon report on plastics. Mr Boylan is right: the headline figure that jumps out in that regard — I keep saying this — is that 30% of plastics on the island of Ireland are recycled, and, of that 30%, only 30% is recycled on the island of Ireland. So, we have a situation where 70% of our plastics are not recycled, and 70% of that which is recycled is recycled outside the country. The purpose of the group that David Surplus chairs, the all-Ireland market

development strategy steering group, is to exploit the opportunities to have more reused and recycled for green and environmental reasons and because of the pressure of EU requirements, in order to create job opportunities. There are huge job opportunities. If you were to close your eyes and think back 20 years about the growth of recycling, you would find it unimaginable. Over the next 20 years, the growth of reuse can similarly be unimaginable, given the scale of the reuse on the one hand and the job opportunities on the other.

In respect of the issue indicated to the Chair of the Committee about tyres, action is being taken. There are mechanisms to monitor what happens with tyres. There is a process around the disposal of tyres, and waste documentation has to be completed. If the Member is asking whether we will put a tracking device on every tyre, that is beyond the scope of what we do at the moment. That is an initiative that will have to be co-ordinated with the buy-in of the tyre-making business and the car- and lorry-manufacturing businesses and all those sectors. In the meantime, we will do everything short of that. In order to have the best auditing of where our tyres go, the proposal is ultimately one that will have to be given serious consideration.

**Mr Elliott:** I thank the Minister for the statement. Towards the end of the statement, he talks about hydraulic fracturing or, as we all know it, fracking. He said that an initial impact assessment had been carried out in May 2012 and that more comprehensive research was to follow. He also said that an initial meeting of the research steering group was held on 5 July. Will the Minister give us any more detail on that? If he has not the detail with him, perhaps he will give us a written report at some stage.

**Mr Attwood:** In the near future and before Christmas, I will make an oral statement to the House. It is time to take stock of where we are with fracking from the Department of the Environment's point of view. Part of that statement will outline where the research is in respect of fracking. The United States Environmental Protection Agency has two strands of work ongoing. We must be mindful that in America, in his last state of the union address, President Obama clearly gave a green light to the roll-out of fracking, which, he said, could produce 50% of America's energy needs over the next number of decades.

**11.00 am**

To date, there is obviously the research that Dublin did. However, that was a desktop study in which Dublin commissioned the University of Aberdeen, I think, to undertake research. However, to be fair, that was light-touch research. That is why it was agreed that there would be a second phase of much more probing research, commissioned by the Irish Government, with the involvement of my Department and officials involved in the steering group. That will be announced and launched in the next few weeks.

At the same time, the European Union is undertaking work on fracking, given the divergence of opinion in Europe and among members of the EU, not least between Poland, which is gung-ho for fracking, and France, which, as far as I recall, still has a fracking ban in place. Therefore, there is clearly a need to interrogate the science and the evidence to determine that we know the full consequences of fracking's impact and whether we can draw a conclusion on whether it is or is not safe. It seems to me that everybody is looking at the science of fracking, but that does not discount the need ultimately to make a judgement on it. The DOE's role is to assess the planning and environmental impacts, as well as to take into account whether fracking is or is not safe. I will say a lot more on that in a statement to the House before Christmas.

**Mr Rogers:** I thank the Minister for his statement. I have no doubt that, when he mentions a gear change, it is an upward gear change on environmental issues.

How will the work in the environmental sector be taken forward at a European level when Ireland takes over the EU presidency at the beginning of next year?

**Mr Attwood:** As I indicated in my opening remarks, Ireland will have a very busy time. I am worried that, as we approach Christmas, whether the officials who have been appointed to take forward the North/South review will have much time to do the work that I think needs to be done, which, in some places, does not appear to have been done over the past number of years.

In the rundown to Christmas, officials will be very busy, because they will have 1,500 to 1,600 meetings in that time frame. They have ambitions to get funding agreements for 2014-2020 over the line, and those would include CAP reform and potentially some decisions around Horizon 2020, which is a successor programme to FP7, the £80 billion programme for R&D and innovation. However, the

interesting point about both those programmes is that 30% of CAP in indicative terms at present will go to countryside management — that negotiation has concluded — reflecting, as I indicated, the gear change on environmental issues around the management of the countryside. It might not end up that way, because the Council and Ministers will have to discuss the final shape.

As I said about Horizon 2020, there are also significant funding streams for environmental and green issues. One of my staff has been seconded to the Irish Government's structures for the lifetime of the EU presidency and the rundown to that to give us some further inside track.

The reputation of Irish presidencies of the union is that work gets done. The Irish Government have huge ambitions concerning the work that can be done. The more that we observe and are involved in that work — not at this stage as part of a different system of government, but perhaps in the future — the better that we will be, because, together with Barroso opening the doors, I think that the European presidency in Ireland will open the doors and give us access to understanding the opportunity out of Europe.

That is why I welcome the fact that the Northern Ireland Minister of the Environment and other Ministers will attend informal European Council meetings. Why? The Dublin Government are recognising that this is part of the island of Ireland, and, although we do not have a seat at the table of council meetings, since, at the moment, we are represented by the London Government, they are putting a seat at the table for the northern Ministers at informal meetings, in order to recognise that there is a special relationship, to borrow a phrase, and that there are opportunities for us being in those rooms.

**Mr Weir:** I thank the Minister for his statement. He mentioned the issue of the blue flag and green coast co-operation. Obviously, this has been an area, in terms of improvement in our beach quality, where we have had some success. While I welcome the reference to the improved beach quality being used, for example, as a marketing tool for tourism, will the Minister expand on the references to co-operation and the practical benefits of improving the beach quality?

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member. The four areas around beach quality that are reflected in the blue flag and green coast schemes are water quality, environmental management, environmental education and safety. Those are the four standards against which both those

awards are considered. They are international awards, not just awards in the two parts of Ireland. The environment sector, which addresses issues of water quality and environmental management, is, by its very nature, addressing issues that impact upon the quality of beaches, and, therefore, has consequences with regard to the award of blue and green flags.

Take the issue of water quality. Besides the river basin management strategy, there is a lot of contact between the two Departments. There are a lot of conversations, including at ministerial level, about water quality, not least around the more demanding requirements of the water quality directives that are coming in 2016. So the character of the environment sector touching upon water quality, environmental management and other issues works itself through in a whole lot of expressions, including the quality of beaches.

It is self-evident, I suggest, that the more beaches we have with the status of blue and green awards, the better it is for tourism and the marketing of Ireland globally. Last year, 11 blue flags were awarded in the North, and seven were awarded in the previous year; there were 11 green, and 10 the previous year. This year, it is not going to be so good. Given the severity of the weather, there will be one or two places which, in my view, on the far side of the appropriate marking process, will end up not getting the awards. However, the direction of travel is very good, and, on the far side of that, if it is sustained, it can only be good for tourism. It can only be good for the tourism of the island.

**Mr Byrne:** I welcome the statement by the Minister. I particularly welcome the appointment of David Surplus and the repatriation works that have started at Seskinore and Eskragh. Will the Minister outline what the general thrust of the waste management review is likely to be here in the North and if any consideration has been given to the waste-to-energy option that might form part of a comprehensive recycling programme?

**Mr Attwood:** I will touch upon the last question. People are aware of the ongoing procurement, for example, by local councils for their waste infrastructure over the next 25 to 30 years. People are aware that the SWaMP contract has been collapsed, for various reasons, and that I have been saying very clearly that there is a need for certainty in respect of the affordability, deliverability and finances around Arc21 and North West Regional Waste Management Group — the two schemes that are still live. I hope that all of those matters will be concluded

quickly, because I think there is a need for certainty. However, on the far side of all that, if one or other of those schemes, or a similar scheme, were to emerge, it would be very much about creating energy from waste, and we should be collapsing, as far as possible, the threshold of our waste that ends up not being reused, recycled or turned into energy, so that we reach our ambitions more and more.

What are those ambitions? In the recast waste management strategy, which is all about efficiency and not about management — there is a difference — we hope that, by 2020, 50% of household waste and 70% of construction and demolition waste will be recycled. More controversially, there is a 60% statutory recycling target for local authority-collected municipal waste. Having a statutory target makes things more rigorous. Having a 60% target is more rigorous than what we were looking for in the previous non-statutory target for that category. In that way, we are demonstrating where we are going with recycling, as a Government and a country. On the far side of that, we will have more reason to portray this part of the island as green and clean, which is all part of our offering towards tourism growth, the character of our island and the quality of our lives. As people know, there are growing employment opportunities around all that. We hope that the recast strategy will be in place by April 2013.

**Lord Morrow:** I welcome the Minister's statement and thank him for bringing it to the House. I welcome his very fulsome answers to the questions that have been asked. I draw his attention back to the two sites, at Seskinore and Eskragh, where illegal dumping has been going on. I welcome the fact that work is ongoing there. Will the Minister tell us what, if any, liaison is going on with the local councils where that is happening, in this case, for instance, Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council? Is the council liaised with in relation to that exercise? Furthermore, will the Minister assure the House that the practice of illegal dumping has discontinued and is not happening elsewhere in Northern Ireland as we speak?

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for his question. It is anticipated that work at the Eskragh site will take eight to 10 weeks. Work commenced on 25 October, so I hope that, in the rundown to Christmas, the 17,000 tons of waste will be repatriated.

The question was whether there is co-ordination with the council. I do not have an answer to that. There are sometimes moments when you do not have the answer. The

framework agreement is between the Department and the Dublin Government. The actual management of the repatriation of waste is done by contractors, further to the work of the NIEA and Dublin City Council. That is the structure of it; intergovernmental, to begin with, and then managed on an operational basis between the NIEA and Dublin council. I will come back to the Member on that, but, given that waste is being moved, there may be some requirements to bring that to the attention of the appropriate authorities and local council in the area. It may simply be that that should be brought to their attention, or there may be some monitoring role, if even that. I will come back to the Member in that regard.

I would love to give an absolute assurance to the House that no illegal dumping of waste is going on in the North, either movement of waste from the South to the North or movement of illegally dumped waste within the North. I would like to give that reassurance, but I am not able to. The character of the criminal gangs involved — there might be others involved, beyond criminal gangs — tells me to answer that question in a precautionary way. The criminal gangs are forever trying to find ways and means of subverting proper process when it comes to the issue and disposal of waste. Therefore, I cannot give that absolute guarantee. Similarly, people who are licensed could be acting in a way that is in breach of that licence. I cannot give that reassurance. Indeed, I will go further and say that my intuition, if not my judgement, tells me that there will be illegality, either through licensed operators or criminal gangs. I will not say more than that for now.

To address the issue of illegality fully, a flow of information is needed from the community, on the one hand, and proper enforcement is needed through the various agencies, on the other hand. There are a range of agencies at council, policing and DOE level that have a responsibility in that regard. That is why my Department is looking at how we can grow that model, now that 11 posts have been allocated to the environmental crime unit (ECU).

In my view, when it comes to waste and various activities, the growing threat of illegality requires heavier departmental enforcement, which will come through the Department, via the ECU, having more environmental policemen and women. I cannot give Lord Morrow and the rest of the House an absolute assurance about what is or is not happening. I would be foolish to do so because I may have a bit more knowledge that I am prepared to indicate at the moment. However, in respect of the departmental

response, the ECU needs to become a much bigger force of enforcement than it is at present.

11.15 am

## Private Members' Business

### Schools: Chief Inspector's Report

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

**Mr Craig:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly acknowledges the recent report by the chief inspector of schools into the leadership and management of schools in Northern Ireland; notes, with concern, the underperformance of some managers and teachers; and calls on the Minister of Education to give greater leadership and to introduce more stringent measures to increase confidence in the system of schools management.*

It is quite alarming to see such a report from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). It highlights a number of serious issues in the education system. The chief inspector, Noelle Buick, details that the leadership and management quality in many schools falls below standard. The report clearly states that 22% of primary schools and 39% of post-primary schools have issues with management quality. It is an interesting statement that almost one in five schools in the primary sector and two in five schools in the secondary sector have an issue with how schools are run.

The report does not criticise the overall achievement of those attending the schools or the teaching quality, but it does criticise how those schools are governed. That is concerning because the report does not highlight one sector only but addresses schools across the board. It states that there is an issue about how schools are managed in all sectors, but it does not state how a lack of leadership quality has been identified. It sets out some of the difficulties that now face management in secondary and primary schools, such as problems that are due to the economic downturn. All schools face that issue and have great difficulties in meeting all the programmes that are put on them with the same resources or, in some cases, diminishing resources. Therefore, huge challenges are built in, which at least the report clearly identifies.

I want to point out that I am reporting directly from what Noelle Buick says about those schools. Personally, although I see some issues, I never would have dreamt that they were as large as described in the report. It is not up to me to say whether the report is right, wrong or indifferent; that is what the inspectors found. I have a lot of sympathy for teachers. I have always openly admitted to any teacher that it is a job that I could not do. I would not have the patience to teach in a classroom. I have huge admiration for all teachers, some of whom not only teach but have to manage and run their schools.

I feel that there is a lack of understanding among the general public about how schools are actually managed. That is why I want to take a few moments to outline some of the ways in which that happens.

Normally, schools have middle management, which is made up of the heads of departments, year heads, etc, who run their particular department or look after the children in a particular year. The general public may think that those are full-time positions. The simple truth is that they are not. The positions are held by full-time teachers who have part-time management roles in their schools. That puts a completely different slant on the difficulties that those individuals face in the education system. They do work that goes far beyond their original role as teachers. Although they get training, help and assistance, at the end of the day, they are being asked to do two jobs, something which is frowned upon in the Chamber.

Beyond middle management is senior management, which includes heads of the junior and senior school, finance managers, curriculum co-ordinators, timetable managers, vice-principals and principals. Again, we are back to the same issue in the management of schools. All of those positions, bar those of principal in most schools, are carried out on a part-time basis. Most — in fact, all — are teaching positions, so those staff have to teach. They also have to look after all the serious managerial issues that occur in schools. That may give the general public an idea of the difficulties and pressures that face those in "management" in the primary and post-primary sectors. In fact, even in many primary schools whose numbers have decreased to a certain level, principals are also part-time teachers because the schools' budgets do not allow for them to be full-time principals.

The other level of management in a school is the board of governors. Yet again, a group of individuals go into schools and give of their time

on a part-time, voluntary basis. There is no recompense. Governors go in and give of their time freely to serve in schools.

What does all of that lead to? It leads to massive pressure on individuals to do two jobs. Then, we get reports that state that there are problems with the management of many schools. Is it any wonder? I do not want the public to think that, for some reason, full-time managers in schools cannot do their jobs. The simple truth is that, in many cases, they are being asked to do far too much, and we need to read the ETI report in that context.

That brings us to some very serious issues in education, and I believe that the Minister himself needs to look at those.

First of all, teachers have to take courses and train up before they are ever allowed to even apply for a lot of positions, especially those in senior management. If that is the case, one really has to ask this question: if there are failings in the system, how did those people get the qualifications to take on senior management positions in schools? Why is it that we are sitting with one in five in primary schools, which, according to the report, is not good, and two in five in our secondary sector, which, again according to report, is not good. If that is the case, are there serious failings with the way in which we train and qualify teachers to take on senior management positions in schools? I hope that the Minister will have another look at that, because according to the report, it is a big issue.

Is there a problem with the way in which senior management in schools is selected? I have to say, from my experience of all this, that it is a very long, drawn-out process. You go through a number of interviews with potential principals and then the boards, as they are today, take over the process. I have seen things in that system that are very alarming. Is there a need to overhaul the process of selection and how we process and select senior management in schools?

To my mind, it not good enough to see reports that condemn the management in our schools. What I want to see is what the inspectorate and others will do to help out hard-pressed managers — VPs, principals, heads of departments, etc — who are under huge pressure to deliver education to our children —

**Mr Speaker:** Time is almost gone.

**Mr Craig:** — and to run our schools. The inspectorate has to stop coming down on those

individuals with a hard hammer and, instead, help and assist them to become better.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member's time is up.

**Mr Craig:** I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

**Ms Boyle:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion and thank the Members opposite for bringing the issue to the House today.

High-quality, good leadership and management are key in any organisation and, indeed, in our schools in helping to raise standards and in providing good-quality education for our children. The ETI report identifies areas of good performance and the many challenges for our education system. It realises the challenges facing the delivery of education in our schools today. As the Member opposite alluded to, the quality of leadership and management was not good enough in 22% of primary schools and 39% of post-primary schools. It is clear that there are problems, and more needs to be done to address the quality of management.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair)*

Schools and organisations that have problems have an adverse impact on pupils' learning, and that can leave those pupils with a poor outlook on their learning experience. The flip side to that is good, effective leadership, which can make a difference to the quality of pupils' learning experience. Schools must have a strong vision and place a strong emphasis on promoting learning and teaching attainment. Effective management of a school, where staff, the board of governors, parents, pupils and the wider community they serve work together, will promote best practice and demonstrate high levels of awareness. To help develop good leadership skills, they will encourage and empower staff.

What we need in our schools is effective, motivated management that is not afraid to challenge and, where necessary, take the appropriate steps. If a school leader has the commitment, drive and energy to deliver the ethos of the school, that will have a positive effect on others.

**11.30 am**

As recently as last Friday, I visited two schools in my area. I was delighted to be in the presence of such good leaders and principals.

Both principals demonstrated to me that they give a strong personal commitment to key priorities such as improving learning and what they do to inspire and motivate staff, parents and the wider community.

Recognising the contribution of others and involving them in school activities is key. For example, one principal told me of a parent who they identified as being very good at art and who was brought into the school to work alongside the children. That demonstrates good leadership in schools, where they involve parents and the wider community.

Leadership is about setting out and inspiring others with a long-term strategic vision. The report highlights many good examples of improvements in the sector, and that has to be welcomed. Where many schools have overcome economic and social disadvantage — Mr Craig spoke about schools experiencing problems in that area — they have a clear focus on achieving value for their resources and raising standards to achieve good outcomes for all learners. Those organisations enable learners to develop their skills so that they can progress to a later stage of learning. However, the report clearly identifies the resource difficulties that schools experience.

The report highlights areas that could be given further consideration: the plans to review the notice period given to schools; the emphasis on a two-way process in Scotland and here; the more challenging approach in England; and the use of unannounced inspections as in other jurisdictions, such as Ireland, which aim to determine the effectiveness of education during a normal school day.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say on the findings of the paper. I concur with the Member across the House —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member's time is almost up.

**Ms Boyle:** There are many good schools, and teachers find themselves in difficulties at this time.

**Mr Kinahan:** As ever, I very much welcome being able to speak on the subject and welcome the motion. I speak as a Member and not as the Vice-Chair of the Committee.

The inspectorate is phenomenally important to everything that happens in schooling. Before I get into that, I must say that, normally, I am mild, meek and discerning and do not go for a

fight — the Minister may not necessarily agree; it is good to see him here — but, when I see something that needs changing or needs work, I will make sure there is a fight to make sure that we get for Northern Ireland what is needed. At the moment, most of our problems are from the point of view that we have one dogma, one line being forced on all of us. We get the impression that the Minister is not really listening and will go on regardless.

I will get back to the debate. Last week, I visited a school and saw exactly how inspection should work. It was a school with a new head, and, while he was taking over the reins and getting things to work, the inspectorate did not bother him. It let him have the time and place to get everything correct and in the right order. When it did come in, it discussed all the matters with the parents and teachers rather than finding holes and trying to pick the school apart. It was all done from a very constructive standpoint. That is how the inspectorate should work, and it should not be a body that terrifies everyone in schools.

On some more general points, it is vital that the inspectorate is seen as totally independent. That means being independent from the Department and the Minister. I propose that we should get the inspectorate to report to OFMDFM or some other body, so that it is separate from the dogma that is being pushed on us by the Education Minister. We should also review how the inspectorate does things. You have already heard me say that it does some things extremely well. However, many see it as a blunt instrument or bludgeon used on their school. We need to view it as a school assessment body that works hand in hand with schools. This week, we all received a list of district assessors who will work with the schools. That is a step in the right direction. We need to have a nice assessment system but with a dynamic, stringent and strong control at the end and only at the end. We do not want to see it published all over the web until it is absolutely necessary.

Today, in the answer to a question from my colleague Mr Gardiner, we learn that 38 of the 59 people who are inspecting schools have no classroom experience. We need to make sure that more teachers are involved, and we need to look at having some system that includes teachers throughout so that everybody has faith in it. We know from the report that Northern Ireland is doing very well when it comes to A\* to C grades; we are on 75.6% against the UK's 68.4%. However, we also know that we do appallingly at the other end. Only 32% of school leavers on free school meals achieve

five GCSEs. That is on where the inspectorate needs to concentrate, but we need to move away from judging purely on GCSEs. As we have hinted today, we need to judge on leadership and management.

**Mrs Dobson:** I thank the Member for giving way. Is he confident that good leadership is coming from the Department?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Kinahan:** Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. Sometimes I am confident that we are getting good leadership. However, look at the principles of leadership, of which I will choose five: know your staff and look after their well-being; keep your followers informed; ensure that each task is understood, supervised and achieved; build a team; and know yourself and seek self-improvement. Those are just five of the 11 principles of leadership. The Department achieves the other six, but it does not set the example on those five. I am concerned that we are judging leadership more on the paper exercise of whether we do well against one another in league tables rather than by assessing properly the teachers and giving them the time, the place and, as we heard, the resources so that they can lead.

In some people, leadership is born; in many others, it has to be trained. That is the example that the Department should set. That means consulting, listening and bringing everyone together. That is what I ask the Minister to do from today. Today's debate is important. There is so much more that we would all like to say. We need to see more resources going to the schools so that they can do the leadership and the management. We need an independent inspectorate, and we need it to be a bit more softly-softly, with a whip at the end. We support the motion.

**Mr Rogers:** I thank the DUP for tabling the motion. I support it.

It is worth noting that the chief inspector's report states:

*"We have a sound education system that serves many of its learners effectively."*

It disappoints me that there is little acknowledgement of those who give us that sound education system and continue to deliver at the chalkface: our school staff. I mean not just our teachers but all the staff who help to create a stimulating learning environment for

our children, despite, in some cases, experiencing poor classroom conditions and having to cope with half-baked ideas such as computer-based assessments and levels of progression, never mind increased bureaucracy. We all recognise the challenges facing us in difficult economic times, but a little acknowledgement, especially from the inspectorate, would go a long way.

Minister, you said last week that school leaders played a vital role in raising standards. You are right. Whether it is the classroom leader, the department leader or the school leader, leadership starts and ends in the classroom. That is where school leaders are born. You have to have the ability to ignite the minds of your audience, whether it be the four-year-old, the 14-year-old or the 44-year-old member of staff. We all remember teachers who made a significant impact on our life and possibly inspired us into various careers.

I am disappointed that the SDLP's amendment did not make the debate today. It was simply an additional line, basically saying:

*"and support to further embed the use of effective monitoring and self-evaluation strategies to effect improvement"*.

If effective monitoring and evaluation strategies are embedded in classroom practice, the conversation about what constitutes good practice begins to effect improvement. Then, this conversation begins to occur naturally at a departmental level, and the development of a culture of learning for all extends from the classroom to the Department and throughout schools. We need monitoring and self-evaluating strategies embedded at senior leadership level. Certainly, the statistics of 30% in preschool settings, 22% in primary and 39% in post-primary settings where it is deemed not good enough would be significantly reduced.

I give credit to John Anderson from the ETI, who, in the report, stated that the report acknowledged that there was a "fragmented approach to leadership development". However, that is not necessarily the fault of schools. As one who, in the past, was responsible for trying to translate the DE guidance 'Together Towards Improvement' into practice, I know that it is no mean feat to embed that advice in an effective manner in the day-to-day running of a school.

Schools cannot do this work on their own. With the winding down of the boards and the promise of ESA, one of the first casualties was the boards' CASS service. How can one post-



primary maths officer service the needs of all the schools in a board area? Is that a contributing factor to poor performance in maths departments? The report states that, in those departments:

*"some heads of...departments take insufficient responsibility for leading improvement and sharing best practice in teaching, learning and assessment."*

At a senior leadership level, the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) is a starting point. However, it needs to be supplemented with a master's-type study. Minister, I urge caution when you acknowledge the wide range of skills required for school leadership, from pedagogy to financial management and from human resources to business-style leadership. You should not underestimate pedagogy. Our school leaders are leading a wide range of individual and unique talents. It is not an assembly line. Principals in Finland — I am not advocating this, mind you — are required by law to have been a teacher and must continue to be engaged in classroom teaching for at least two or three hours a week. This lends them credibility among their teachers, enables them to remain connected to their children and ensures that the pedagogical leadership is not merely rhetoric but a day-to-day reality.

If we want a first-class education system, we must invest in first-rate leadership development not only for new teachers but for all our staff. Some good experiments are taking place on a cross-border basis and can be seen in some of the work from the RTU and the Centre for Cross Border Studies. Good leadership and a strong system of self-evaluation in our schools make people feel better. If people feel better, they will perform better. If they perform better, leadership will become better, and, as a direct consequence, pupils' achievements will improve.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member's time is almost up.

**Mr Rogers:** Minister, begin the conversation on what constitutes good practice; get monitoring and evaluation right in our schools; give the right support; ensure that, within ESA, we have a properly funded school —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Your time is up.

**Mr Rogers:** — development unit with pedagogy at the centre, and we will get the right result.

11.45 am

**Mr Lunn:** I welcome the motion today because it, at least, gives us an opportunity to discuss these things. When I first read the motion, I thought that it was unduly critical of teachers, governors and principals. However, in his opening remarks, Mr Craig clarified that that is certainly not the intention, so we are happy enough to support the motion.

Jonathan also referred to the onerous duties placed on teachers in terms of extra activities rather than just teaching. I completely agree with him. However, a lot of those problems are, indirectly, of our making. There is a lack of progress at a political level, and layer upon layer of reports, duties and initiatives come from the Department. Just this morning, I heard from a primary school headmaster who has been told by letter that he has to complete the assessment tests by Christmas because the computer glitch has apparently been sorted out. He has 400 pupils and is expected to complete those nonsense tests by Christmas. That is another one.

I will not go into a lot of statistics, but the ETI report is not entirely negative. There are quite a few positives in it as well, although I would not want to downplay in any way the obvious items that require attention. It states that the proportion of students achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, which is not a measure that I like to dwell on, went up from 64% to 73% in the reporting period. Leadership and management in post-primary English departments evaluated as good or better has gone up by 10%. In addition, the quality of strategic leadership by governors was evaluated as good or better in 80% of primary schools. So, it is not all negative by any means, although that is not to say that I am happy with the situation or that things do not need to improve: clearly, they do. The Minister, in his Putting Pupils First statement last week, acknowledged quite a few areas where there was room for improvement and various initiatives are in place. Sir Robert Salisbury will, hopefully, report shortly on the common funding formula.

What I really want to talk about is the Minister's initiative to bring in the OECD to do a report on our entire system. That is a very worthwhile initiative that is to be welcomed. He has not given us the terms of reference for that yet, and we would like to know exactly what the OECD will be asked to do. However, he indicated that it would examine the whole structure of the system and that leadership and management would certainly come into it. He indicated that his Department would be examined like everybody else. In particular, I hope that the

OECD will examine the situation with the inspectorate and the argument over whether it should be independent or happily attached to the Department. The current inspector and the previous one have both indicated that they are not unduly unhappy with the present arrangement. Some of us beg to differ, but that is for another day. I certainly look forward to hearing what an organisation as august as the OECD will have to say about our education system.

I wonder what we will do when we receive the report. If the OECD comes down heavily on the side of academic selection, says that it values our system and thinks that it works very well, will the Minister accept that? If it comes down the other way and says that academic selection is a monstrous anachronism that should have been done away with 40 years ago, will the supporters of academic selection accept that? I doubt it. The OECD may say that our separate school systems that educate Catholic and Protestant children separately until they are 18 are marvellous, and pigs might fly. I wonder what we will do with the heavyweight recommendations of an OECD report when they come through. I see that my time is nearly up, so I will have to leave that one hanging in the air.

For the meantime, I am glad to see a truly independent body having a look at our system, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say later in the debate.

**Mrs Hale:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this serious issue. I welcome the debate so far. I welcome the number — apologies; I shall get my speech in order.

I welcome the number of success stories highlighted in the report by the chief inspector of schools, but, like many, I was shocked but sadly not surprised that some children still fail to fulfil their potential. Outcomes need to improve for learners of English and maths across all sectors, especially those who come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. Only 32% of school leavers entitled to free school meals achieve grades A to C in five subjects. How can we turn that round? How do we ensure that those who need the greatest support can fulfil their real potential? One of the answers is to support and inspire both the current and the next generation of educational leaders and managers, whilst ensuring that current inspectorate processes and mandate reflect the needs of learners and those responsible for management in the education system.

Like my party colleagues who tabled today's motion, I strongly believe that more needs to be done to improve leadership and management across all sectors, in particular post-primary, where the quality was not good enough in approximately 39% of schools inspected. That does not come without many challenges. All leaders face significant challenges in managing budgets and ensuring viability. While trying to look after the interests of their organisations, they must ensure that money being spent gives added value to our learners. They must be equipped to make sound, professional decisions, while ensuring that they have the foresight and ability to provide accountability and to support change.

Although the chief inspector's report highlights the issue of inadequate leadership and management, I find it difficult to accept that it takes almost three years to deal with an underachieving senior manager. If a senior manager is unable to make the grade, procedures must support that person to improve but not to the extent that it puts learners, staff and their organisation at risk. If you want to improve the level and capabilities of leadership and senior management, you must start by ensuring that those who are inadequate for the job are moved on. That is met by creating a system in which leaders and staff are supported in their role and are appropriate for the role into which they move.

A recent report by PricewaterhouseCoopers showed that a number of anomalies were contributing to lower levels of management and leadership skills in the schooling system. Some 57% of principals in Northern Ireland had not received formal leadership training prior to appointment. Key reasons for not accessing that type of training while in post included availability, awareness of training and lack of time to undertake professional development. Some 63% of teachers who had recently taken up a new leadership or management position felt that they had a lack of confidence in carrying out their role and had been parachuted into the job. The report also highlighted the need to encourage younger professionals and females to come forward into leadership and management positions. There was also the need to cut bureaucracy and administration and the worries about financial management and accountability, while striking a balance in personal life. This issue was especially prevalent for principals who manage small schools and have to strike a balance between teaching and management time. The report underpinned that, if we want to improve leadership and senior management skills in the education sector, we must be sure to challenge

the stigma associated with leadership and management jobs, while ensuring that we break down the barriers preventing rounded professionals from coming into those roles.

As I stated at the beginning of my speech, we must take a holistic approach to the issue to ensure that we raise leadership and management skills and standards. In doing so, it would be wrong not to consider our inspection process. How can we be critical of teachers, leaders and senior managers if we do not ensure that the current inspection process is fit for purpose and question the position and status of the inspectorate as part of the Education Department?

In 2010, the ETI moved to a new risk-based approach to determine how often a school should be inspected. I must say that I found it difficult to determine when the ETI finds a school or its pupils are at risk, and I strongly believe that the current approach stifles real leadership and management by prioritising compliance over innovation. It also brings me on to ask whether the Education and Training Inspectorate should be independent. Like other Members in the Chamber today, I believe that an independent inspectorate would have a stronger hand in holding government and the education services to account. I also believe that, if we want to prioritise the improvement of leadership and middle management, having a fully independent organisation to monitor that will encourage the Department of Education and the Minister —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member's time is almost up.

**Mrs Hale:** — to tackle this growing concern.

I ask that the Minister of Education also consider the need to have the ETI as an independent organisation to be critical of government on the one hand, while making sure that it can ensure best practice for the needs of learners and leaders, free from departmental politics —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member's time is up.

**Mrs Hale:** — and not being used as a private army.

**Mr Hazzard:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. The need for strong, innovative leadership in our education system has been clear for some time, and I am pleased that the DUP recognises that we need to implement various education

reforms so that we can build the world-class system that it has talked about for so long.

Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. There can no longer be any doubt that those seeking quality education must ensure its presence and that the development of potential leaders must be given high priority. It is said that, if you scratch the surface of an excellent school, you are likely to find an excellent leader; peer into a failing school, and you will find weak leadership. To learn well, students need access to high-quality instruction and a well-crafted curriculum. After that, they benefit most from the positive effects of strong school leadership. Case studies of exceptional schools, particularly those that succeed beyond expectations, provide detailed portraits of leadership. Large-scale quantitative studies of schooling conclude that the effects of leadership on student learning are small but educationally significant. In these studies, as in case studies, leadership effects appear to be mostly indirect; that is, leaders influence student learning by helping to promote visions and goals and by ensuring that resources and processes are in place to enable teachers to teach well.

Efforts to improve educational leadership should build on the foundation of the well-documented and well-accepted knowledge about leadership that already exists. We know that school leadership is most successful when it is focused on teaching and learning and that it is necessary but not sufficient for school improvement. We understand that leadership can take different forms in different contexts. We understand some of the mechanisms through which educational leadership has its effects. We should promote strong, creative leadership that ultimately increases educational success for all. Research suggests that, in the past, principals have been able to succeed, at least partially, by simply carrying out directives from central administrators. Such management by principals is no longer enough to meet today's educational challenges. Instead, principals must assume a greater leadership role. Good leadership envisages goals, sets standards and communicates in such a way that all those directly or indirectly associated know where their school is going and what it means to the community.

We all have a responsibility to show leadership when it comes to enhancing the educational outcomes of our young people. Sinn Féin puts the spotlight on standards with its zero tolerance for the stagnant belief that, in previous years, we somehow had a world-class

education system. Various parties extolled that education system as world-class, yet thousands fell through the net. Slowly but surely, we have broken down the toxic culture of toleration. The discourse has changed, and today's motion symbolises such change in the mindset of most education commentators. Sinn Féin set about the task of putting the child at the centre of our system. No longer could we justify putting the needs of institutions ahead of those of our young people.

**Mr Craig:** I thank the Member for giving way. I listened with interest to what he had to say about the so-called failing system that we have. If it is such a failing system, I need to remind the Member that his party has been in control of this failing system for the past five to 10 years. To be honest, I sat through the previous Assembly mandate and listened to the wrong debate taking place in the Chamber time and time again. While others fixated on the 11-plus, no Minister ever tackled the real issue: the one third of our education system that fails our children. I am glad that the Minister has reversed that —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. That intervention was rather long.

**Mr Craig:** Thank you.

**Mr Hazzard:** I will go on to my point that, during a recent six-hour debate on ESA and the need for reform in our schools, only one Member on the Benches opposite referred to Protestant working-class boys. Those on that side of the House need to reflect on that. Indeed, political unionism needs to ask serious questions of itself when it comes to showing leadership on educational reform. In recent months, that has been particularly true of the Ulster Unionist Party. I had a fair idea that there was something odd about UUP political analysts from the first debate that I attended in the House. In April, Mr Kinahan was speaking to a motion calling for the establishment of a cross-departmental working group to explore ways in which Lough Neagh could be utilised in the best interests of the public when he said:

*"I am concerned that hidden behind the motion is ... stealth towards a united Ireland ... driven by Marxist and communist philosophies." — [Official Report, Vol 74A, No 2, p48, col2].*

Unfortunately for our young people, the UUP's McCarthyite double vision and contribution to education debate has been just as decrepit, as Mr Kinahan and his colleague Mrs Dobson

have been unable to show political leadership on various education issues. Instead, they have busied themselves with attempts to spread fear and confusion. Despite calls during the summer from his party leader for legislation on ESA to be introduced, Mr Kinahan stood in the Chamber and described ESA legislation as:

*"filled to the brim with hidden intentions". — [Official Report, Vol 78, No 3, p25, col1].*

He also said that it was "chicanery" and a one-way stop to a united Ireland. Just last week, Mrs Dobson spoke of her fears of hidden Sinn Féin agendas and that a support service for boards of governors would be a Sinn Féin-manipulated entity. The UUP needs to get real and demonstrate that it is fit to show leadership and to work to improve educational outcomes for all our young people.

Similarly, when it comes to the SDLP's educational analysis, we once again see the strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. The SDLP needs to stop riding two horses: it is either for or against academic selection, and it either wants to address education underachievement or it does not. It can show leadership or continue to flounder — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Hazzard:** During an Adjournment debate on post-primary provision in my South Down constituency, the SDLP's education spokesperson asked the House whether all the things could be done in one school.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Time is almost up.

**Mr Hazzard:** Yes, they can, in all-ability schools to meet the needs of all of our children.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Time is up. I remind Members to try to stay on the subject, otherwise you might get no marks.

**12.00 noon**

**Mrs Dobson:** How do you follow that? I thank the Member who previously spoke for making all of my colleague's points again.

No one in the Assembly will have failed to notice the banner headlines in October that pronounced failure and poor leadership in our schools. We must first recognise the schools that have shown improvements and whose inspection reports showed strong leadership

and vision. Nevertheless, it is to the underperformance that the motion refers.

The inspection reports were, indeed, critical of school leadership and raised many more serious concerns, but I am certain that, in many cases, principals would be prepared to concede that their inspection reports would improve were it not for the continual conveyor belt of conflicting policies and regulations coming to them from the Department. Budgetary concerns, with schools continually asked to raise standards in a climate of falling budgets, are totally and wholly unsustainable. Those concerns, coupled with, among many others, the need to respond to potentially far-reaching area planning proposals, can only lead to the deflection of the leadership roles within the schools.

Our principals and teachers are highly dedicated to their roles and will always strive to do their absolute best for their school. If, however, in the minority of cases, they fail to do so, that must be clearly illustrated in their inspection report, and swift action needs to be taken by the Department to help bring the school into line for the sake of the pupils and, indeed, the staff. However, when the Department is directly responsible, who will bring it into line? Principals being hampered by the Department when attempting to fulfil their aim can be directly linked to the inspection reports being debated here today. If we were to turn the tables and ask principals to rate the leadership and performance of the Department, we would hear a damning verdict. We would hear of the continual and unrelenting pressures being placed on the principals and boards of governors — pressures that, many believe, have gone past breaking point and are only set to increase in the coming months.

It has been made clear many times in the Chamber that there is an urgent need to address the issue of underachievement among working-class Protestant boys, yet the chief inspector's report points out some disturbing statistics. Only 32% of school leavers entitled to free school meals achieve GCSE grades A\* to C in five subjects, including English and maths. That is one of the reasons why the Ulster Unionist Party proposed a pupil bonus scheme, as announced by my party colleague Danny Kinahan at our party conference, through which schools would get additional money principally on the basis of the number of pupils who qualify for free school meals.

**Mr Storey:** Will the Member give way?

**Mrs Dobson:** Yes, I will give way.

**Mr Storey:** I know that the Member has a question tabled for the Minister about the Dickson plan. Will she outline how, from her perspective, working-class Protestant boys in the Craigavon area will be protected and provided for under the Dickson plan, given the current uncertainty that some schools within the Dickson plan are mooting in the local papers in her area?

**Mrs Dobson:** I thank you. That is a concern, but, as you know, I am continually fighting for all of the pupils of Upper Bann.

I will go back to my speech. Perhaps the Minister will explain what direct assistance his Department gives to schools, especially in areas where pupils struggle to attain basic English and maths skills.

It is right and proper that schools undergo a rigorous inspection process, and, where deficiencies are found, they should be thoroughly and swiftly resolved. However, the inspection process must take into account the full picture of the pressure under which school leaders find themselves. The Department cannot, on one hand, call for higher standards and, on the other, provide principals and teachers with a much harsher climate in which to deliver that change. If the Department expects inspection reports to improve in that climate, it must stand up and recognise its accountability when that fails to be the case.

Perhaps the Minister could take a look at the Department for Employment and Learning's track record. Since the consolidation of the six regional further education colleges, we have heard that 80% of provision has been evaluated as being good or better. The quality of teaching has been deemed good or better in 81% of cases. Perhaps the Department of Education could learn lessons from the FE sector, which is, in general, performing well.

In conclusion, I echo the sentiments of many in the education profession when I say that it is the Department of Education that is failing our schools and, ultimately, our young people, not the other way around. It is failing in its budgets and its policies and in providing the vision necessary to look towards a 21st century education system for the children of Northern Ireland.

The Department of Education has a responsibility to ensure the maintenance of public confidence in school management. To do that, the public will need to have the confidence that the Department is ready, willing and able to do its part, not sitting idly by and

leaving principals and staff to do all the heavy lifting. Only then shall we stop reading banner headlines about poor leadership and failing schools.

**Mr D Bradley:** Tá áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht thábhachtach seo faoi thuairisc an chigire. I am pleased to participate in the debate on the chief inspector's report and thank the Members opposite for tabling the motion.

There is no doubt that we have much to be proud of in our education system. However, we are not in a position, nor should we ever be, to rest on our laurels. The headlines coming out of the report, especially those to do with the quality of school leadership, are extremely alarming: 22% of primary schools and 39% of post-primary schools are characterised as being not good enough.

That is especially important when we consider that leadership and management are pivotal elements in ensuring that each and every child in our education system gets the maximum benefit from their time at school. School principals and management need to promote a culture of continuous self-improvement among themselves at managerial level as well as among their staff in the classrooms.

I welcome the significant improvement of 10 percentage points that has been made in the leadership of primary schools, but there is still quite a bit of room for improvement there. I hope that, in the two years before the next report is due, that gap will narrow even more.

The chief inspector notes that continuous self-evaluation is key to sustained improvement and that it needs to be robust and rigorous at all levels of management. She says that the embedding of a culture of self-evaluation should become an inherent part of a school's work. Mr Rogers mentioned that earlier.

The report states that the combination of self-evaluation with good use of data is seen as a key element in bringing about improvement across primary schools, post-primary schools and even FE colleges. Successful schools are those that have embedded and combined critical self-evaluation and the relevant use of data.

Therefore, there is plenty of good practice in schools, but the question is whether it is being disseminated. Poor performance requires early intervention, before a situation gets to an extent that it cannot be recovered. It is not about statistics, although there are plenty of statistics

in the report. It is about children and their life chances. In a situation in which 39% of post-primary leadership is not good enough, we have to look at our programmes for preparing teachers for leadership.

The Minister of Education made a statement to the Assembly last week in which he generalised quite a bit about what he intended to do to improve the situation, but we did not get much detail nor did we get a timescale. We need more detail and more urgency. Our children deserve the best, and they deserve it now.

There are structural issues that contribute to the difficulties. Among those are the selective system and the nature of the schools estate. In many cases, selection is draining non-selective schools of their best talent, with the result that some schools are left with an extremely challenging cohort but without the necessary role models to have a strong influence on raising achievement.

In the interim, the Minister should consider measures to deal with the leadership deficit. He should review headship qualifications and other managerial qualifications; ensure that leaders and managements have the time to lead and manage; intensify the dissemination of good practice, of which there are plenty of examples; and use successful school leaders as mentors to a greater extent than is the case presently. Such support and assistance is worthwhile and is proven to work.

The idea that a principal is immediately ready for any challenge when he or she is appointed needs to be questioned. Continuous professional development is necessary for the classroom teacher, and it is also necessary for the principal.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

**Mr D Bradley:** As regards Mr Hazzard's points about the SDLP, he should remember —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Sorry; time is up.

**Mr D Bradley:** — that Ms Ruane claimed to have ended the 11-plus. Yet, we still have tests.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member's time is up.

**Mr D Bradley:** In fact, we have more tests now than we ever had before.

**Mr McNarry:** When I read school inspection reports and the sensational headline that the quality of leadership and management is not good enough in many schools — 22% of primary schools and 39% of post-primary schools — I ask this simple question: who inspects the inspectorate? If the inspectorate is to be used as the tool to deliver the Minister's school rationalisation policy, we should know how well-qualified the inspectorate is for that task. How much recent classroom experience has the inspectorate? I ask that question because 21 of 59 inspectors have been appointed in the past five years, which indicates that 38 inspectors cannot have had either classroom or school management experience in the past five years. So, almost two thirds of the inspectorate have experience that is five years out of date. That is an issue that needs to be addressed.

I, like everyone in the House, am for better schools; schools that are rooted in, and relate to, their communities; schools where excellence is the norm; and schools that are housed in new, state-of-the-art buildings. The decisions that shape the future of our schools must be evidence based. We must know how valid the comments of those providing the evidence really are. An expert witness in court must demonstrate his or her fitness to comment by showing how relevant and recent their qualifications and experience are. Inspectors are like expert witnesses. Much will be based on their conclusions. Their recommendations will affect the lives of large numbers of teachers, principals and pupils. Let us parade their credentials publicly for all to see and evaluate, so that we can have the confidence that we need to make widespread and far-reaching change.

The motion quite rightly calls on the Minister to:

*"give greater leadership and ... increase confidence in the system of schools management."*

Effectively, it could say that the Minister needs to increase confidence in his Department and call on schools management to follow that confidence. We are dealing with underperformance all round. The motion calls into question the qualities of some teachers. That quality is left up in the air, which — like it or not — creates doubts in parents' minds about opportunities potentially being neglected and, therefore, impacting on their children. This is not a good situation to be in.

Pointing the finger is all very well, but who is it being pointed at? Are underperforming

teachers new to the job or have they been in place long term? Either way, how has the problem arisen? How have poor teachers been appointed and how have poor teachers remained in position? Parents would like answers to those questions because this clearly indicates that the system is unable, so far, to clear its own fault lines. Just like the poor reporters and the poor managers being exposed in the BBC, parents have the right to know that poor teachers and poor school managers are not only being exposed but, as a result of this report, are being moved out and cleared out of the system and that that is being done as a matter of confidence. After all, we are talking about standards. If the standards are not met, they are failing the pupils. That is a matter that we cannot stand over. I welcome the report, and I support the motion.

12.15 pm

**Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé tiomanta d'fheabhsú sna caighdeáin oideachais fud fad na hearnála oideachais. I am committed to an improvement in educational standards across the whole education sector. In all my Department's responsibilities and functions, my efforts and my Department's efforts are there to drive up standards.

Today, we are debating the most recent chief inspector's report, and it is useful to set out what exactly the chief inspector said in that report. The report is an analysis of the schools that were inspected. It does not extrapolate the figures across our entire schools estate in any way, and Members should bear that in mind. The chief inspector states that our education system provides good value but with too much variation and reports that 42% of the primary schools inspected are very good or outstanding and that a high proportion of teaching and learning is good or better in primary and special schools. The report states that the proportion of school leavers achieving five GCSEs or equivalent has risen to 73% and that 80% of achievements in standards in the preschools inspected were good or better. Over 80% of primary school leavers achieved the expected level in both English and maths; 82% and 83% respectively. Through the school improvement policy, more robust action is being taken to follow up on inspection reports and ensure that schools receive the support that they require to address areas of improvement and achieve the best possible outcomes. The report states that 81% of schools that were inspected have improved by at least one performance level in follow-up inspections and that, in 82% of

primary schools and just over 76% of post-primary schools, lessons observed were evaluated as good or better.

There are also negatives. The chief inspector states that our education system provides good value but with too much variation. There is a need to improve the outcomes in literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 2 and GCSE English and mathematics, particularly for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Improvement in the quality of leadership and management is required across the phases. In around 39% of post-primary schools inspected and 22% of primary schools inspected, the standard was evaluated as not good enough. Leadership development is fragmented and does not respond quickly or effectively enough to the changing needs of our education system, a point that I touched on in my most recent statement to the Assembly in response to the education report. This area does need improvement. My Department acknowledges that, and we will be improving upon it.

There is a need to improve the effectiveness of the boards of governors. In 20% of primary schools and 30% of post-primary schools —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. The Minister will resume his seat. I ask Members to please refrain from conversation when the Minister is making his speech.

**Mr O'Dowd:** — transitional arrangements for children and young people between organisations at key stages need a stronger focus to ensure no regression. Post-primary schools are not as successful at exiting formal intervention as their primary school counterparts, and use of ICT needs improving in 50% of post-primary schools.

That sets out a picture of where areas have improved and where we require challenges to improve those. I listened intently to Members speak during the debate, and there have been some informed contributions that require further analysis and study. Some contributions have no basis whatsoever. I ask Members to reflect on and, indeed, study the motion that they are being asked to vote on because some of them appear to be voting on a different motion. The final section of the motion reads:

*"and calls on the Minister of Education to give greater leadership"*

— I have no difficulty with that challenge —

*"and to introduce more stringent measures to increase confidence in the system of schools management."*

It is not to introduce more stringent measures to increase the confidence of school managers but to increase confidence:

*"in the system of schools management."*

The dictionary definition of stringent is: "strict, precise and exacting". I take from that that the motion calls on me to introduce more robust policies to give the public and the Assembly more confidence in schools management. Perhaps I read the motion wrongly. Some Members seemed to be asking me, as Minister, to introduce more stringent measures to increase confidence in something else. Members should read the motion.

Members across the Chamber stood up and criticised me — quite rightly; I am open to criticism and challenge. Members are quite right to do so; that is their role. They criticised policies and budgets, which is fair enough. However, the vast majority of our schools and people in leadership positions are doing well or improving. They work under the same circumstances as everyone else. So why do we still have questions about the leadership in some schools, and why do we still have poor teaching? That cannot be blamed entirely on the Minister of Education of the day or the Department of Education. I have a responsibility that I take very seriously. Every policy proposal that I bring forward is targeted at improving educational outcomes for young people. However, Members will have to accept that, every now and again, the fault lies with an individual in a classroom, in a principal's office or around a board of governors' table. Those individuals have to be held to account.

Mrs Dobson asked who holds the Minister to account. It is her job to hold me to account. She, along with 106 MLAs, the Education Committee, the media and, ultimately, the electorate holds me to account. I am rightly held to account. So why should we not have an inspection system that holds our schools to account? We entrust our young people to our education system and schools. We allow those institutions to help to shape those young people for the future. Thankfully, the vast majority of our teachers and school leaders provide them with that chance in life.

Perhaps it is an electoral ploy, and Members do not want to criticise teachers because teachers have a vote. However, are Members — on the Ulster Unionist Party Benches, in particular —



seriously suggesting that there is no such thing as a bad teacher or a bad leader? Of course there is. I will tell you who is most critical of poor leadership and teaching: fellow leaders and fellow teachers. When I am out and about in schools, talking to professionals on the ground, it is constantly raised with me that we need a more robust system to deal with failing teachers and leaders.

Brenda Hale's speech, in fairness to her, requires further study and analysis. It raised a number of interesting points as to how we can tackle those matters. She referred to a PricewaterhouseCoopers report that requires further analysis. We need to know why younger people, in particular, are not coming forward for leadership positions. What are the barriers in their way? Why can we not get the best and the brightest to come forward for school leadership positions? If there are barriers in their way, let us remove them. You are not giving any benefit to the Minister or the Department, but by denying that there is a small minority of poor teachers and leaders, you are letting down the young people under their charge and denying those young people's rights to a good and proper education system. That is a challenge for us all.

As regards policies on the way forward and how we deal with these matters, every policy that I bring forward is about raising educational attainment. As the inspector's report states, we are improving and getting better. However, we are not getting there quickly enough. We are not achieving the outcomes that young people deserve quickly enough, and I have no difficulty in continuing to examine different ways to go forward. As was said, I have introduced OECD. It will come into our education system, and its terms of reference will be made known to the Education Committee. I have no doubt that it will engage with the Education Committee and with individual Members. OECD is coming in to examine our education system in its totality, and it will present challenges to us all. The question was asked: what if OECD comes in and refers to academic selection as the best thing ever or refers to the number of policies that different parties have? That is the challenge for us all and the big question that we will all have to face.

As I set out in my previous statement, I want to bring in OECD to examine our education system because I believe that we are far too insular, that we need to internationalise our education debate and that we need to learn from the best. Let the OECD come in, do its job and report. Then, let us, as an Assembly and as a society, analyse its responses.

The leadership programmes in place are good but could be better. We have had difficulty in identifying potential leaders early, bringing them through the system and ensuring that they have enough confidence in themselves and the system to move forward and apply for leadership positions. Mr Bradley challenged me on the fact that my speech was light on detail. I want to analyse potential programmes further before I give details. However, we acknowledge that the leadership programmes need to be improved. The proof of the pudding is in the inspector's report.

I also put out a challenge on our negotiating machinery. Again, this comes from a challenge placed on me by teachers and school leaders and, again, Mrs Hale referred to that in her speech. It can take up to three years before a final conclusion on the future of poor performing teachers and leaders is reached. That is far too long, and the machinery involved is too cumbersome. We do not assist the teacher or leader under focus by having that long, drawn-out system, and we certainly do not help the cohort of young people under the responsibility of that teacher or leader during that time. However, negotiations between the trade unions and employers will be required to improve that. My message is quite simple: those negotiations need to come to a conclusion sooner rather than later for the benefit of teachers, school leaders and pupils as we move into the future.

Members, there is no easy solution to any of these matters. Mr Craig, who opened the debate, referred to the fact that a lot of responsibilities fall on boards of governors who are voluntary and part-time. I have acknowledged the important role that they play in education many, many times in the Chamber. However, that is where the current legislation states that the responsibility lies. Time and time again in the Chamber, Members from across the different Benches insisted that we allow the autonomy of boards of governors to remain, and I have never challenged that — it should remain. However, we have to ensure that boards of governors are empowered or given the training or support to make the difficult decisions that they have to make on human resource issues in those schools. Decisions on personnel are never easy. Regardless of the size of the business you may be involved in, dealing with personnel matters is the most difficult issue. However, we have to ensure that boards of governors have the ability to do that. I have set in motion training and support for our boards of governors, backed up with financial support, and they will have to make such decisions. The new ESA body will

be in place to ensure that they are backed up in such matters.

In conclusion, I acknowledge that our school system has to deal with one of the most difficult budgets in modern education history. I have never said that the education budget was the right budget to deliver our education system. However, when I look at the performances across our schools estate; when I see schools, including those in socially deprived areas, achieving excellent results and producing well-rounded and well-informed young school leavers who value themselves and others around them; and when I see those who give leadership in the principal's office and in the classroom, I know that we simply cannot turn round and say that the budget is bad, therefore the results will be bad. The two do not necessarily equate. The previous inspection report from two years ago was carried out at a time when education was relatively well financed, and there were similar findings then. It is, therefore, not simply budgetary.

### 12.30 pm

We are talking about the need to improve leadership. I accept my role in that as Minister, but we are also talking about leadership in the principal's office and around the table of the board of governors, and from our Members and our community. It may be uncomfortable for Members to hear this, but we have to accept that, occasionally, we have bad teachers and bad leaders. We have to put mechanisms in place to deal with that matter more effectively and efficiently than we do currently.

**Mr Storey:** At the outset, I thank all Members who took part in the debate. I thank them for the support that they are going to give to the motion and for the contributions that have been made. I will not bore you by repeating them, but, in the course of my comments, I may refer to them. I also thank the Minister for being in attendance and for the contribution that he has made to the debate.

We welcome the opportunity to have in the House a debate that notes the inspectorate's report. The inspectorate's report is always very important in giving us an overview and assessment of our education system. There is much to celebrate within our system, despite the confusing and conflicting messages that come from the Sinn Féin spokesperson on education. I will come back to his comments later.

There is much to celebrate in our education system. There is something that we need to do, but I think that the House is the classic example of how you do not do it. We have an inherent inability to talk something up, but we always seem to be capable of talking it down. Every party in the House does it, and members of my party are not exempt. If we find that the opposition says something, we will always make sure that we find something critical to say about it. That seems to be the nature of the beast that we have created here. I think we need to stay relatively within the realm of facts and of what is the case. We welcome the fact that the statistics from the report highlight that over 75% of the institutions inspected, in all sectors, are in the good or the better category. That is to be welcomed. If political parties were being assessed by the inspectorate, I doubt whether some in the House would ever come anywhere near the 75% mark. However, the electorate has made its choice on that one.

I come now to children from disadvantaged areas and the community that continues to underperform against the current benchmark of five GCSEs. It has to be said that, despite a decade of control by the Minister's party, a period in which we have had much of the rhetoric and repeats of the same mantras, we still have a situation in which only 32% of children leave school with five GCSEs. The initiatives that seem to deliver are often discredited or starved of funds.

That brings me to an issue around initiatives. Schools are tired of initiatives. We had a circular from the Department — I think it was from 1993 — that called for less bureaucracy in our system. There has been more bureaucracy in our system since that circular was sent out to our schools than we have had in the history of our education system. We have to recognise that we desperately need to free our teachers to allow them to do what they were employed to do, and that is to teach in the classroom. Last week, I spent some time in schools. I will be honest and say that it is depressing to see the number of forms, reports, assessments and various documents that teachers have to fill in. By the way, they also have to teach in the classroom.

The inspectorate report referred to ICT in our schools. That is a very concerning issue. Considering the significant investment that we have made in ICT, to have 50% of schools in the "less than good" category for their use of ICT is very worrying. Between 2000 and 2011, £470 million was spent, and I am not even going to include the figure for Northern Ireland literacy assessments (NILAs) and Northern

Ireland numeracy assessments (NINAs), because we know the ongoing crisis around those. However, the teachers are not to blame for that. Let us be very clear: the teachers are not to blame. It was a badly thought-out process. A bad set of arrangements was put in place to bring in the contracts, and we moved from one contract to two contracts. I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but let me say that, three years down the road, we will be in the same place, because the contracts will probably be mismanaged by the Department. Perhaps we will have four contracts by that time, and the system —

**Mr O'Dowd:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Storey:** Yes, I will give way.

**Mr O'Dowd:** In three years' time, the Member may be the Minister of Education. Is he predicting that he is going to mismanage the contracts?

**Mr Storey:** I am just hedging my bets.

We need initiatives that can clearly deliver. Does anybody really have any confidence? Whether or not we in the House have any confidence, do teachers have confidence? Let us ask the people who are delivering in the system. That is the issue. That is why the motion talks about confidence. We have to have confidence in those who are leaders, but our leaders have to have confidence that there is a system in which they can participate.

A significant number of schools appear to demonstrate failing in leadership and management, yet there has been huge investment in leadership training and almost 2,000 staff are now accredited with the school leadership qualification, as was referred to by Mr Rogers. However, we still have coming to the Education Committee this week a paper on the school workforce review. When was that initiative announced? In 2008. What does the Department have to tell us on that very important initiative? It is anticipated that the review will be completed by 31 March — wait for it, and hold on to your seat — 2013. From 2008 to 2013. Please, let us have some reality in the way in which initiatives are brought to our schools and commented on by the inspectorate.

What about the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS)? The report highlights the need for CASS to be more flexible in its support for newly qualified teachers and calls for more training and support for teachers, at a time, as some Members said, when CASS has

been decimated through the introduction of a vacancy control policy. From 2006 until now, I have repeatedly highlighted that in the House. Some people will probably say that I am a cynic on the issue, but why was vacancy control introduced? It was an attempt to force us all into accepting an ESA. That is not the best way in which to do policy. A few weeks ago, the Minister admitted in the House that that will probably be looked at when ESA is brought into existence. I have said in the House, as he knows, that the first thing that ESA will have to do is employ more staff. Why? Because we have cut and cut and cut away, and the support mechanisms for our schools and teachers are not there in the way in which they should be. We need to look seriously at CASS. *[Interruption.]* Does the Member want to intervene? Go ahead.

**Mr Lunn:** I am glad to hear the Chairman mention ESA. Does that mean that his party has now withdrawn its opposition to ESA and will give it a fair wind?

**Mr Storey:** Perhaps I am in a different House from the Member, but I do think that the legislation has had its Second Stage and is coming to the Committee for consideration. I am quite open to scrutiny of ESA, as we scrutinise the Bill over the next number of weeks.

On improving the efficiency and effectiveness of boards of governors, the report highlights the fact that 20% of primary schools and 34% of post-primary schools have issues with boards of governors. If that is the case, why is it that an element of governors out there, particularly those in the voluntary grammar sector, is very concerned about the way in which governors are being treated by the Bill that the Member referred to? Yet, the way in which they have organised their board of governors is an example as to the way in which they deliver for their particular schools. Irrespective of what you think of assessment, irrespective of what you think of the transfer debate, there are a number of schools in the maintained sector and in the non-denominational sector that have been very good at putting together boards of governors who are very capable of giving exceptionally good leadership to their schools. That should not be put in the bin and ignored; it should be recognised.

The Programme for Government sets 49% for the target of five GCSEs for disadvantaged groups by 2014-15. At present, we only have 32%.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member bring his remarks to a close, please.

**Mr Storey:** The report highlights the good outcomes of, for example, Achieving Belfast and Achieving Londonderry, yet the Minister has told this House that he has no plans to introduce similar programmes elsewhere.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member's time is up.

**Mr Storey:** Let us use good practice, and let us use initiatives that work. I support the motion and thank Members for their contributions.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly acknowledges the recent report by the chief inspector of schools into the leadership and management of schools in Northern Ireland; notes, with concern, the underperformance of some managers and teachers; and calls on the Minister of Education to give greater leadership and to introduce more stringent measures to increase confidence in the system of schools management.*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I, therefore, propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.41 pm.*

*On resuming (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair) —*

**2.00 pm**

## Oral Answers to Questions

### Culture, Arts and Leisure

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Questions 5 and 14 have been withdrawn. Question 5 requires a written answer.

### European City of Sport 2013

1. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the funding her Department has allocated for Lisburn as the 2013 European City of Sport. (AQO 2841/1-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** I thank the Member for his question. I would like to acknowledge the recent success of Lisburn in being designated European City of Sport for 2013. Since the designation, Sport NI, which is responsible for the development of sport, including the distribution of funding, has been engaged with Lisburn City Council to discuss opportunities for partnership working during the 2013 European City of Sport year. A working group, which includes Sport NI, has now been established to further develop plans and initial ideas, which, I understand, are still at an early stage of development. Until that process is completed, it will not be possible for me to comment on what funding or other form of support might be considered for Lisburn as the 2013 European City of Sport. However, I have to say that it is a good news story for Lisburn and, indeed, the entire North.

**Mr Craig:** I thank the Minister for that full answer. I note that she agrees with me that it is a huge achievement for Lisburn to be European City of Sport. It is something to be acknowledged. We owe a lot of that to the sporting groups in Lisburn; the likes of Salto Gymnastics Club and the National Badminton Centre, which brought Olympic teams to the city. The Department is taking part in that working group. A number of key events will take place in 2013.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member must come to his question.

**Mr Craig:** Will the Minister look in her Department's budget to ensure that funding is given to Lisburn that will bring it up to a similar level to that of the City of Culture events that are taking place in Londonderry?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I would just like to remind the Member that over £30 million has been put into Derry City of Culture by the entire Executive. I do not know whether he is requesting the same amount of funding for Lisburn; maybe he is asking for that — £29.75 million would be welcome says the Member.

It is important that the badminton and gymnastics groups have been acknowledged, particularly for the work that they did for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. They are now world venues for events to occur. It is important to support sport and, indeed, what it produces. I am encouraged and delighted that Lisburn has received that status. I will be encouraged by the reports that I will receive. I will look wherever I can to try and give as much support as possible, but it will certainly not be in the region of £30-plus million. I do not think that that is realistic at all.

**Ms McCorley:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Has the Minister received any request from Lisburn City Council for funding for the 2013 European City of Sport?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as ucht a ceiste. I thank the Member for her question. I have not received any request, apart from the one that Jonathan made a matter of seconds ago, when he invited me to put in millions of pounds. I have not received a request formally, although I imagine that it will certainly be on my desk fairly soon.

It is important. Lisburn, like many other cities, towns and villages, has neighbourhood renewal areas and areas at risk within its boundaries. It is important, particularly when we are talking about new initiatives, that we provide additionality and add value and facilities to cities, towns and villages that, in the past, have experienced a lack of investment. I congratulate Lisburn on its success and look forward to hearing what its future plans are and what impact it may have for my budget.

**Dr McDonnell:** I thank the Minister for her comments and her answers so far. It is important that we all congratulate Lisburn and share in its success, because it is a tremendous achievement. Although I appreciate that it is in

the early stages and there are various partnerships and other things being worked out, I would ask the Minister whether a programme cannot evolve in the Department to feed into those partnerships. Such an achievement is a major challenge in itself. Lisburn may require a bit of extra help. I would certainly welcome, as would a lot of people, a proactive approach by the Department.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I agree with the Member. The budgets were set some years ago, and it is hard to predict, from one comprehensive spending review period to another, what new opportunities will emerge. All Departments need to be flexible not only to assist such bids, which benefit the entire vicinity, but to ensure that opportunities are always there, particularly those for match funding. Groups and sports clubs are often told that they need match funding, but when they go to one Department, more often than not, they are passed to another one. We need flexibility to ensure partnership working, because that comes with the budget, and an outcome for people, because we are all here to deliver outcomes.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Mitchel McLaughlin is not in his place for question 2.

## Football

3. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding and support is available for young footballers who wish to progress to professional football in Great Britain. (AQO 2843/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Responsibility for supporting young footballers in the North who wish to progress to professional football in Britain rests, in the first instance, with individual football clubs and, indeed, with the governing body for the sport, the IFA. Sport NI provides assistance to sports organisations, including the IFA and football clubs, in developing young players. That includes support for the IFA's centres of excellence, the development of coaches in partnership with the Sports Institute and the talent network aimed at identifying and developing talented players more effectively.

**Mr McClarty:** I thank the Minister for her response. Will she encourage and develop professional football in Northern Ireland by encouraging the cream of our young crop to play football here for longer before the bigger clubs in England snap them up, which is of no benefit at all to Northern Ireland?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I have sympathy with the Member's point. I will use an example in my constituency. Cliftonville recently lost Rory Donnelly, but Swansea gained his skills and expertise. Needless to say, that loss has not been too painful for Cliftonville, particularly given the recent result.

When we invest in young players, we hope that they stay, but we should not keep people here for the sake of it. It is up to Sport NI, the Department and the clubs to try to make it attractive for young players to stay, but if those players wish to move elsewhere and have great career opportunities, we should not only wish them well but support their development.

**Mr Humphrey:** Does the Minister agree that the House and the whole country should be proud of the recent successes of the Northern Ireland women's under-17 and under-19 teams in qualifying for the elite sections in Europe? Will she join me in wishing our national team all the very best as we take on Azerbaijan at Windsor Park tomorrow night?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Member will appreciate that his definition and my definition of a national team are completely different. I wish the team all the best, despite the fact that five are not fit to play, which will surely have an impact. Either way, I wish them all the best.

I agree that it is important, particularly when talking about young women in sport, that the House and those further afield give every support. That support is a resource and is part of the overall development of encouraging, nurturing and assisting the talent of sportspeople here.

**Mr Kinahan:** Has the Minister or her Department had any discussions with the IFA about setting up a centre or centres of excellence around clubs such as, in my case, Crumlin or Ballyclare? There are lots of great teams that such centres could be built around.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I had preliminary discussions with the IFA some time ago. The IFA has centres of excellence. If the Member is talking about subregional development, that is for the next CSR bid in 2015, and more serious discussions will soon commence. We were focused on the three stadia and on moving those on before looking at the next tranche. This is the first time that I have heard Crumlin mentioned for its skills and expertise, but I have to take what the Member says. I have absolutely no doubt that, as the IFA rolls out that programme, it will only be good for the

sport of soccer. The provision of facilities that are fit for purpose can only be good for the constituencies that host them.

**Mr Rogers:** Is any funding available specifically for talented young female footballers, considering the increased popularity of the sport?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I thank the Member for his question. Yes, there is funding for female footballers. Funding over the past three years was just over £81,000. I expect that to increase as the programme rolls out and more female footballers are identified as being in need of assistance and support as part of that package. It is crucial that the imbalance, particularly in gender and in talented sportspeople, is addressed by my Department and the governing bodies.

#### City of Culture 2013: Programme of Events

4. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the recently published programme of events for the Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 is sufficiently inclusive and has a wide enough scope to deliver for the entire north-west region. (AQO 2844/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The City of Culture bid included a commitment to deliver benefits to the north-west. Although most events will take place in Derry city, the 2013 programme provides opportunities to achieve positive change for all.

The 2013 programme provides opportunities for people across the North to attend international events on their doorstep. It also provides opportunities for accommodation providers to benefit from increased visitor numbers and spend. The north-west will be showcased during 2013, and neighbouring areas and communities should maximise the opportunity by hosting complementary events. Arts organisations and businesses in the north-west have a great opportunity to build capacity in 2013. The Culture Company has engaged with, for example, Strabane, Limavady and Donegal and helped to plan projects in Bready and Strabane and Donegal's On Home Ground project.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answers to date. Two of the three previous questions were about the European City of Sport and professional

footballers. So I wonder whether the Minister will join me in congratulating Derry City on winning the FAI cup. The team is an example of good, professional footballers, and their win ensures that there will be European football in Derry next year. That will, I am sure, ensure that the Minister's wish for the City of Culture to be a truly north-west event will —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** I am sure that the Minister has taken a question from that.

**Mr McCartney:** There is a question. Will that add to the Minister's sense that the City of Culture will be truly a north-west occasion given that the person who scored the winning goal was from Strabane?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I thank the Member for his question and congratulate Derry City on five in a row. It is great that the winning goal was scored by somebody from Strabane. That makes it truly north-west.

**Lord Morrow:** *[Interruption.]*

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Well, I do not know. I would not comment on that, Lord Morrow, because I am on my feet and will be heard. You are speaking from a sedentary position, so I will not repeat what you said.

I believe that Derry and the towns and villages surrounding it should be able to maximise the benefits from 2013. It is incumbent on the Executive, who, as I said, put over £30 million into this bid to ensure that the city and surrounding areas benefit from the legacy that the 2013 City of Culture will deliver.

**Mr Campbell:** The question, of course, relates to inclusivity in Londonderry as the UK City of Culture next year. Will the Minister give an assurance that all the discussions and meetings that have taken place to try to ensure that that is the case will be built on, that no one will be allowed to try to hijack events and that people will be able to celebrate a cultural showcase, not just in 2013 and not just for Londonderry but for all of Northern Ireland for the future?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Yes, absolutely. I agree with the Member, which is a rare thing in itself, that it is important that everybody can participate and feels that they can participate in an inclusive way. It should not be an afterthought but in a way that their community, culture and, indeed, city is identified in the City of Culture programme. I am sure that the Member is aware that a number of events will be showcased around Derry City of Culture. It is

important that the legacy of 2013 and afterwards is felt by every citizen, regardless of how they choose to describe themselves.

**2.15 pm**

**Mr Durkan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's stated support for the City of Culture and the support that she has shown for the 2013 celebrations. I also welcome her congratulations to Derry City FC. She spoke of the need to maximise the potential of 2013 for the city and the north-west region. Does she believe that that potential could be further capitalised on if the Brandywell stadium were improved in order to host bigger crowds for European ties?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** A bid has not been put in by the Brandywell, or by Derry City Council for the Brandywell, as part of 2013, although I am well aware of the situation. For the record, Derry City Council and the Brandywell will be talking to the IFA and others about the proposed bid for subregional development for 2015 and beyond. I also put on record that the vandalism that happened in the Brandywell was disgraceful.

Despite the success of Derry City — I am sure that you agree with Raymond; there is no need to repeat it — the Brandywell's facilities are not fit for purpose. The city of Derry needs to help the Brandywell to improve its facilities. It is unfortunate that a small minority of people felt that the Brandywell was an easy target. We need to do a bit of heavy lifting to help it out. I cannot guarantee anything for the Brandywell or anybody else for 2013, but I certainly know what the Brandywell is. For some strange reason, every time I am in Derry city, I happen to walk past it at least twice, so I know where it is and what it sits beside.

**Mr Swann:** I think that we all look forward to Londonderry's year as the UK City of Culture. Can the Minister give any detail of any work that she has done with the Minister of Justice or the security services to ensure that the festivities and everything that happens there pass off peacefully and that there is no security threat at that time?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I have not met the Minister of Justice or the PSNI. It is not my role. The Culture Company has been working with the PSNI, as has the rest of the community on an ongoing basis. That is the way that it is; it is not up to me to go the Minister of Justice, who would pass it on to the PSNI anyway. He does

not have responsibility for operational matters; he is on the record as saying that. If there is a need to meet the PSNI or any other statutory body to make sure that the City of Culture is a success, I will do it.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Question 5 has been withdrawn.

## Boxing

6. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the success of the scheme which she and Sport NI launched that allows boxing clubs to apply for financial help. (AQO 2846/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The strategy to provide financial help to boxing clubs is still under development. As the Member will know, the consultation was released on Friday. Consequently, it will not be possible to offer a full assessment of the scheme's success until that strategy has closed. However, it is clear that my announcement of the boxing strategy initiative has helped to raise awareness of the importance of boxing in many communities and the urgent need for strategic facilities and equipment.

As a result of the announcement, a number of organisations, including Belfast City Council and the Youth Justice Agency, have approached my Department about the possibility of providing additional support. That is very welcome. I hope that more organisations will become involved in the process. To that end, I have asked Sport NI and Belfast City Council to jointly consider how identified shortfalls in infrastructure in boxing clubs in the greater Belfast area can be addressed and to agree a costed implementation plan that can be used as a template for discussing further opportunities with other councils.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she indicate why the governing body affiliation is a requirement for all sports clubs when they apply for funding?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Affiliation is a requirement, because a governing body ensures that there is proper governance in place. Part of that governance is around financial accountability and, most importantly, child protection. It looks at how a club regulates itself, and it makes sure that the club is up to date and that it implements statutory duties and provision. In this case, it is

a requirement. A boxing club has to be affiliated to an internationally recognised governing body.

**Miss M McIlveen:** In an interview on 'Good Morning Ulster' today, the Minister stated that Nelson McCausland did nothing when he was Minister about the concerns that were raised by Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club. However, in a letter to the Committee, the Minister was able to detail the work that Minister McCausland had in fact undertaken. Will the Minister retract her statement this afternoon?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** If I have accused Nelson McCausland in the wrong, I will certainly retract the statement. I have a transcript of the interview, and the Member is free to have a copy of it. In the interview, Noel Thompson accused the Department of institutionalising sectarianism in boxing, including Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club, over the past decade. My question to him was to ask what other Ministers, including Nelson McCausland, had done. I assume that the Member has a copy of the transcript, but if I am wrong, I will put it on the record now and apologise in public to Minister McCausland. I will also apologise in writing and copy it to the Committee.

When allegations are made, I think that it is incumbent on us all to show evidence. People need to do that. They also need to make sure that they can stand over allegations when they make them.

I think that what the Member is saying is that her colleague Minister McCausland did do something. However, Minister Campbell, Minister Poots and Minister McGimpsey were also in post during the period. For some reason — allegedly — they did absolutely nothing in the 10 years after the allegation was made.

**Mr McGimpsey:** As far as my term as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure is concerned, I say to the Minister that she needs to look at the records. However, I want to ask her about the money under the boxing strategy and her speech in the House yesterday. In that, she indicated that Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club would be eligible for part of the £3.27 million of funding because it had been affiliated to the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA) within the past three years. She appears to have said something different this afternoon here and earlier on 'Good Morning Ulster'. Will she please explain to me and the House exactly what she means?



**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Any club that has been affiliated to the IABA within the past three years can put in an expression of interest. However, a club must be affiliated to receive any funding. That is what I said yesterday, this morning and this afternoon.

On your performance as sports Minister, you will be aware that Ministers cannot look at previous Ministers' papers. Again, if I am wrong, I will apologise, but the Member's name was not on the list of people who stood up for Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club and tried to do something about the situation, either as an elected representative or as the Minister for sport.

## Sports Facilities

7. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps her Department is taking to encourage sporting clubs and societies to share their facilities. (AQO 2847/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Under my Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters, I am taking steps to encourage the provision of shared services and spaces for sport and have encouraged all stakeholders to identify opportunities for greater sharing of sports facilities. For example, as part of the delivery of Sport Matters, Sport NI, in conjunction with the Department of Education, is developing a document aimed at promoting an opening-up and sharing of school sports facilities with the rest of the community, including sports clubs and societies.

Under its places pillar, Sport Matters further identifies the need to provide multisports facilities and services generally that can be made available on a shared basis by clubs. Sport NI is supporting a number of those developments through its Sports Matters community capital programme. The Department has set aside over £10 million in the current CSR period to support the delivery of the community capital programme.

**Mr Lyttle:** I thank the Minister for her answer. Has she given any consideration to introducing a requirement for sharing in the distribution of any funding?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Member will appreciate that when clubs — in this case sports clubs — apply for funding, they will be asked how they share their facilities with others in the community. Quite often, if not on every occasion, they give a list of people with whom they have worked

and shared their facilities. It is a requirement to share facilities. Indeed, it is a statutory duty under section 75 to share facilities.

**Mr Cree:** I thank the Minister for her responses so far. Will she give a commitment to working with the Education Minister to open school facilities for community use, especially after school hours?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am working with the Minister of Education to make sure that school facilities are opened up. Indeed, the document that I referred to in answer to Chris Lyttle is about producing guidelines. Those guidelines will be available to the Sport Matters monitoring group, which meets on 21 November. After that, they will go out for publication.

We have all seen many facilities that are closed after hours when the community could be using them. No one is happy with that, but we need to make sure that we bring forward guidelines that are clearly understood and lay out exactly how those facilities can be used.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht na bhfreagraí sin. I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Will she clarify her view on the primacy rule? How might that rule enhance the sharing of facilities to meet the needs of soccer?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am on the record as saying that the removal of the primacy rule would enhance greater sharing. Chris Lyttle is nodding, and with his IFA background he will be aware that there is a need for greater sharing of facilities. There is a difficulty in terms of land available in urban areas, but the fund is available to try to meet the needs of every club. The primacy rule has been used to exclude certain football clubs.

## Windsor Park Football Stadium

8. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will ensure that access to Windsor Park will be made available from the Boucher Road to contractors working on the redevelopment of the stadium. (AQO 2848/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** My Department is proactively involved in discussions with the IFA, Belfast City Council and the Department of the Environment to remove any barriers or obstacles that might prevent Belfast City Council from granting that construction access.

Access from the Boucher Road would address community concerns about the volume of construction traffic in the Village area. In addition, the robust community consultation exercise currently being undertaken by the IFA and its planning consultants will further develop proposals to alleviate the community's concerns about the management of traffic from the redevelopment of Windsor Park.

I am confident that Belfast City Council will have granted access from the Boucher Road to the stadium well in advance of the proposed construction start date of August 2013.

**Mr Spratt:** I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that the site offers excellent potential to combine Midgely Park, the Olympia leisure centre, the playing fields and Windsor Park to make one large sports area in that part of the city?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I absolutely agree with the Member. It is silly that proposals are developed separately. For years, we complained about footpaths. You get a surface laid, the footpath is dug up and another surface comes along. We need to have a creative approach to redevelopment and the planning of all the developments. That pays off.

Twice in one week, I have paid credit to Belfast City Council, but credit where it is due. When you are in discussions, particularly with councils, about other developments in the community, they should all be in sequence and in concert. That is the way it should be done. The people in the Village have been waiting for regeneration for decades. They deserve the maximum facilities but the minimum disruption and obstruction in the development of those facilities.

**Mr Eastwood:** I ask the Minister to clarify what she meant when she said in an earlier answer that the Brandywell would not be eligible for funding until at least 2015. The people of Derry, and the Derry City supporters especially, will not find that acceptable or good enough.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** You have gone back to a question that has already been dealt with. Maybe the Minister will reply in writing. It is not particularly relevant to the contractors working on Windsor Park.

## Football, Gaelic Games and Rugby: Funding

9. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding football, Gaelic Athletic Association and rugby have received from her Department in the last ten years. (AQO 2849/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I would not have minded answering the Member's question, because he is on the record for being misleading in his responses. I will write to him, and I will share that with the rest of the House in case he gets it wrong again.

Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding to sport in the North of Ireland. Over the past 10 financial years, up to 31 March 2012, Sport NI has paid out almost £51 million of Exchequer funding to football, GAA and rugby in total. I am happy to furnish the Member with a breakdown of that funding.

2.30 pm

## Education

### Schools: Dickson Plan

1. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education to outline how the Dickson plan will be affected if the Education Bill is passed. (AQO 2856/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education):** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Dickson plan will not be directly affected by the provisions in the Education Bill. The Bill will make the Education and Skills Authority responsible for the area planning of the education estate and the delivery of the curriculum.

**Mrs Dobson:** I thank the Minister for his answer. I ask for his assurance that he agrees with the view of the Southern Education and Library Board official who briefed the Education Committee last week and said:

*"There is no threat to the Dickson plan in the board's proposals."*

Will the Minister give a commitment that his Department will not change or interfere with those proposals?

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am not aware of what the SELB official told the Education Committee last week.

I have not seen the transcript. If he was referring to proposals around ESA and the Dickson plan, he is absolutely right: ESA does not affect the Dickson plan in any way. However, does the Member believe that the Dickson plan serves all her constituents in Upper Bann? Has she visited and talked to pupils in the junior and senior high schools that are affected by the Dickson plan and their families and principals? Is her concern only about pupils in Lurgan College and Portadown College? I request that the Member speak to all those interested in education in the controlled sector and seeks the views of the Catholic maintained sector, which, of its own volition, is moving away from the Dickson plan and has had that position for several years. Why is it moving away from the Dickson plan? It is because the Dickson plan does not meet all the educational needs of all the young people in the Craigavon area. If the Member is defending the Dickson plan for the sake of defending the Dickson plan, I suggest respectfully that she is not defending the educational outcomes of all her constituents.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** I am afraid that I cannot let you answer that.

**Mr Anderson:** Does the Minister agree that any change to the present Dickson plan could jeopardise the attainment of academic excellence that exists? What is the justification for changing a tried and tested system that has the support of the community?

**Mr O'Dowd:** It does not have the support of the community. It certainly does not have the overall support of the community. As I said, the Catholic sector is moving away from the Dickson plan. It is doing so because, whatever rationale was behind the Dickson plan when it was introduced several decades ago, it no longer has any relevance to modern-day education. Judging whether it would have a detrimental effect on educational or academic outcomes would depend on the changes made to the Dickson plan. It is within the ability of those in the Craigavon area, as the Catholic sector has done within the maintained sector, to come forward with a proposal that would ensure that the educational outcomes of all young people in the controlled sector are looked after. My concern is that, when unionist representatives stand up in the Chamber and talk about the Dickson plan, instead of talking about all young people, what they are really talking about is two schools in the Dickson plan.

**Mr Hazzard:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas

leis an Aire. Can the Minister confirm that the new arrangements under ESA will have no impact on the day-to-day autonomy of schools?

**Mr O'Dowd:** They will not have a day-to-day impact on the employment practices of schools, which I assume is what the Member is referring to. ESA will be the employing authority for all staff in all grant-aided schools. Boards of governors, not ESA, will manage schools and will take employment decisions if they wish. A single employer will bring the benefits of better workforce planning and development and easier sharing, but I emphasise that there will be no loss of autonomy for schools under the ESA proposal.

## Preschool Admissions: Universal Credit

2. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Education how the implementation of universal credit will impact on the criteria for admission to preschool places. (AQO 2857/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** All preschool settings are required to apply admissions criteria if oversubscribed with applications. The admissions criterion specified in regulations is intended to ensure that preschool education is targeted at children who will benefit most from a year of preschool experience. Under existing arrangements, priority must be given to children in their final preschool year who are from socially disadvantaged circumstances, currently defined as being children with a parent who is in receipt of income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance.

In the review of preschool admissions arrangements published in January 2012, I announced that my Department will examine the definition of socially disadvantaged circumstances. Officials will also consider the impact of the proposed changes to welfare reform, including the introduction of universal credit, in determining a revised definition of disadvantage.

**Mr Durkan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Exactly how does the Minister see this new yardstick for measuring social disadvantage? In his opinion, will changes to the benefit system result in fewer children being eligible for free school meals?

**Mr O'Dowd:** I do not want fewer children being eligible for free school meals, and my Department is working in the Executive subcommittee that was set up to examine the

possible implications of the Welfare Reform Bill, which has not yet been agreed by the House. So, we are examining those proposals. I am on the record as saying that I want to protect families currently on free school meals and to ensure that they remain eligible under any future welfare reform. However, the Member will be aware that his party's previous education spokesperson actually spoke against having social clauses in preschool admissions. I am not sure whether the SDLP has changed its position to one of now supporting —

**Mr McDevitt:** That is nonsense and totally untrue —

**Mr O'Dowd:** I seem to have upset him.

**Mr McDevitt:** — totally untrue. Outrageously untrue.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Order. The Minister has the Floor. There should be no interruptions from a sedentary position.

**Mr McDevitt:** He is fantasising from it.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Hansard will show that on numerous occasions the previous SDLP education spokesperson —

**Mr McDevitt:** No he did not.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Will the Member let me finish? I do not know why he is afraid of what I am going to say; I am only repeating what he has told me. In numerous debates in the Chamber, the previous SDLP spokesperson criticised the social clauses in preschool settings. So, if the SDLP position has changed and it now supports social clauses, I welcome that.

## Schools: Literacy and Numeracy Assessments

3. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Education what steps are being taken to ensure that the Northern Ireland numeracy assessment and the Northern Ireland literacy assessment are suitable for use by people with hearing difficulties. (AQO 2858/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am clear that raising standards of literacy and numeracy for all our young people must be the key driver behind education policy and reform. That is why the specification for new computer-based assessment included the requirement to take account of equality of access for all pupils, including pupils with

hearing impairments. Trialling of the new assessments took place between January and May 2012. It included a number of special schools and units for pupils with special educational needs. Feedback from those trials, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) help desk and the evaluation of the previous provider, the interactive computerised assessment system (InCAS), was shared with the suppliers of NILA and NINA to inform their development of the assessments.

CCEA has scheduled a number of awareness-raising sessions about NILA and NINA during November 2012 for teachers of pupils with hearing impairments. Invitations to those events have been issued to the peripatetic services of each of the five education and library boards. CCEA has also invited the heads of those services for hearing impairment for each board, as well as other stakeholders representing this sector, to discuss the use of the assessments with pupils. CCEA has also provided a transcript to accompany the animated pupil demonstrations, which are designed to support pupils with hearing impairment as they prepare to use NILA and NINA. This is available on the curriculum website. This autumn term, CCEA will continue to gather feedback from all schools regarding the implementation of the new computer-based assessments. Within this evaluation, CCEA will seek to ensure further the manageability of the assessments for all pupils with special educational needs, including those with hearing impairments.

**Ms Boyle:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. Solutions are sometimes to be found in the classroom as well. Will the Minister assure the House that the same solutions will be available to those with visual impairments?

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Member is absolutely right: solutions are often found in the classroom and among teachers and classroom assistants who work with pupils and use the assessments. That is why CCEA will bring in teachers to talk to and learn from in implementing NINA and NILA for pupils, whether visually or hearing impaired. The Member will also be aware from my previous comments to the House that the Education and Training Inspectorate will also look at NINA and NILA early in the autumn to see how it beds down in the first year.

We are all aware of the computer glitches and the problems that some schools have had. I am glad to announce to the House that around

80% of our primary schools have now completed the assessments, which is equivalent to the number of schools that had completed InCAS at this time last year. However, I remain to be satisfied that all that could have been done in preparation for the introduction of the assessments was done, and I await the evaluation of the Education and Training Inspectorate.

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Minister for confirming what he sent to principals in a letter yesterday, which is that the Education and Training Inspectorate is being used to determine and survey NINA and NILA issues. Does the Minister agree with me and with a teacher who asked this question: if the Department is interested in standardising, why not use the standardised scores that schools currently use, such as the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), progress in maths (PiM), progress in English (PiE) and the cognitive abilities test (CAT)? Why not customise and standardise them for the Northern Ireland population and relate them to the Northern Ireland curriculum? Would that be too simple for the Department? It would certainly be a lot less expensive.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Under legislation, computer-based assessments are currently in place. We have gone through a difficult period with the introduction of the current system. However, in some of the feedback that I have been getting, there is a difference between "will not do" and "cannot do". I will support any school that has a difficulty with "cannot do". However, I cannot support the "will not do" approach. We have taken a number of initiatives to examine, at first hand, the difficulties faced by schools. Some were to do with the implementation of the system on the ground, and that was interpreted by the media as an attack on teachers. That was not the case at all. It was never portrayed by my officials or my Department as being the case. A new system in play in schools will, of course, take time to bed in. I think that we have improved our communication with schools and teachers on that matter.

CCEA and the providers have been on the ground in a number of schools looking at exactly what happens when the system freezes or other issues occur. The computer programmers tell me that there may be a glitch in the system, but it is hard to identify at this stage, and they are looking through a number of solutions to it. However, they are confident that they have now got the system to a place where pupils can sit down in front of the computers and complete the assessments, as over 80% have already done. I have informed

schools that they should return to the computer-based assessments. If the small number that have not done so have any difficulties, they should immediately contact CCEA or C2k, and support will be provided.

None of the other assessments that are in play is statutory. It is up to the schools — *[Interruption.]* I am not dismissing it; let me finish my point. None of the other systems is statutory, and it is up to the schools whether to use them. I announced that, over the next period, I wanted to —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Time, Minister.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Sorry?

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Time.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Sorry. I will return to that.

**Mr Kinahan:** On the same subject, will the Minister look at setting up some comprehensive way of listening to the teachers and parents who have received replies to find out whether the system works? The previous system did work and worked well. Maybe we should look at changing the legislation.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I thank the Member for his question, which, conveniently, follows on from Mr Storey's.

I devoted the energies of the Department to resolving the current problem. We will have the review, and I also think that we need to look at computer-based assessments and how they fit in with other programmes being used by schools. Let us put the best system in place. If we need to change or review the legislation that is in place, let us do that, but I do not want to dismiss the principle of computer-based assessment. It is important that it remains in schools. However, as we move forward, I am open to persuasion and to discussions with parents, teachers, schools etc on how it is done, what its objectives are and so on.

We also have to learn a lesson on a broader procurement issue. InCAS assessments had been in place for a number of years when the contract had to go out to open tender because that is what procurement tells us to do. The previous providers did not win the contract, and new contractors were brought on board. Schools had to learn the contractors' system, and they had to learn the schools' system. I do not want to be in that position again in three years. I want to review what we can do on the continuation of contracts or to facilitate a more

settled transfer between contracts than we experienced in recent months.

**2.45 pm**

## Schools: Careers Guidance

**4. Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education how his Department has tried to improve the careers guidance given to pupils. (AQO 2859/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** Access to high-quality careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is essential for our young people, particularly given the wide range of courses on offer under the entitlement framework. I am committed to the continuous improvement of careers education in schools through the full and continuing implementation of the joint careers strategy and action plan. Careers management forms part of the statutory curriculum. Taught, timetabled provision of careers information includes opportunities for personal planning, cross-curricular development of employability skills and planned and relevant work-related learning.

Schools have a number of tools at their disposal to support them in the development of good careers education. The Education and Training Inspectorate has developed tailored, quality standards indicators for self-evaluation, and my Department has published a map and guide to link careers across the curriculum. Schools have formalised their joint working with Department for Employment and Learning careers advisers through partnership agreements.

The role of employers is invaluable in providing careers information and advice. My officials have been engaging with business representative bodies to explore how the business community can play a greater role in careers education.

From April 2010, when the quality of CEIAG was routinely reported on by the Education and Training Inspectorate, the figures have shown a marked improvement in quality and standards since the period 2008-2010, when CEIAG was last evaluated as good or better in only 37% of post-primary schools. The recent chief inspector's report highlights that the percentage of schools inspected as good or better has almost doubled since 2010 to 68%. Although I welcome that improvement, I am not complacent in this important area, and I expect school leaders to continue to place the interests of the pupils first.

**Mr Ross:** I am sure that the Minister will agree that it is important that we move away from careers advice that is simply half an hour a week reading a university prospectus towards one that is about career paths. I am sure that the whole House will agree that it is up to individual pupils to decide what path they follow, but can the Minister give the House any guidance on specific strategies that he has in place to encourage young people to follow a course in the science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects where, of course, jobs will be created in future?

**Mr O'Dowd:** Careers advice has certainly moved on from half an hour a week or a teacher being grabbed in the corridor and asked to give a class of young people some careers advice. It is a much more informed and dedicated service than it once was, and the inspectorate report shows that its value has increased immensely over the years.

It is difficult for young people to decide their career pathway. Career pathways can change. I am sure that there have been many different career pathways in the House. After each Question Time I think about changing my career, but that is the way it goes.

On a more serious note, the Member is absolutely right: there is a greater focus on the STEM subjects in their totality, and careers advice on STEM subjects is vital. Over the past number of months I have been meeting STEM employment providers and talking to them about how we can enhance love of the STEM subjects among pupils at an early age. We need to allow pupils to think beyond the traditional academic careers, such as law, medicine, teaching or whatever, and look at the STEM subjects as a good career.

We are getting better at it, but there is more work to be done. We have to learn from the employers. It is difficult to project what the shape of the economy will look like, but any student with a number of STEM subjects under their belt will be well equipped for future career choices.

**Mr McDevitt:** I am sad to hear that the Minister is finding it tough at the moment and is thinking about a career change. I assure him that I would be quite happy for him to stay in post as long as he does not play as much party politics as he has played this afternoon.

Seriously though, what emphasis will the Minister place on economics, business and enterprise education in future careers guidance programmes?

**Mr O'Dowd:** I did not say that I was finding it tough; I said that I was thinking about a career change. It might be a more challenging career that I am looking for.

All the career options are there to be evaluated by students. The key is that students are given the right advice at an early stage about courses and examinations that relate to the apprenticeships, vocational courses or university choices that they may move on to. It is vital that students are kept informed so that, particularly when it comes to choosing a university, they follow the right examination process.

Advice on all the subjects that the Member mentioned is available. I am not saying that we have got things 100% right yet, but I believe that careers advice in our schools is much improved on any experiences that anyone in the Chamber can remember and even on what it was five years ago. There is a much improved careers service out there.

We all have a role to play, particularly parents, in talking to young people about careers. As I said, if it is academia that you are interested in, think beyond medicine, law or teaching. Think about the STEM subjects and other fields. Let us look at how the main economies around the world are developing. A delegation of Ministers is away to China. Let us look at what China, India and Brazil are developing. Let us look at nations around the world to see what direction their economies are going in. Let us take ideas from where they are going with career choices and allow career choices here to be broad and adaptive going into the future.

**Mr McCarthy:** I thank the Minister for his replies so far. What discussions, if any, has he had with his colleague the Minister for Employment and Learning about a review of careers policy?

**Mr O'Dowd:** I regularly meet the Minister for Employment and Learning to discuss a wide range of issues. One of the issues under discussion is a review of careers policy. In fact, one of the first functions that I carried out as Minister was a joint launch of the science and engineering education advisory group (SEEAG) review with Mr Farry. We have a good working relationship. Our Departments work well together on a variety of subjects. We have joined-up thinking about careers advice. Mr Farry will speak for himself, but I have no concerns about co-operation with DEL.

## Middletown Centre for Autism

**Mr McGlone:** Ceist uimhir a cúig, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Can I ask you to translate?

**Mr McGlone:** Question 5, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

5. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Education, given the budgetary restrictions in both jurisdictions, when he expects the plans will be in place to extend the services available at Middletown autism centre. (AQO 2860/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** Go raibh maith agat. The planning of the expansion of services at Middletown is at an advanced stage. The process has involved considerable consultation with officials from the Department of Education and Skills and the board of directors and staff at the Middletown centre. Departmental officials are in the process of completing an appropriate business case. It is anticipated that the expansion of services will commence shortly after the business case receives the necessary approvals. The expansion of the centre's operations should be able to be delivered with a relatively modest increase in funding and will be phased in over a two-year period as the centre builds its capacity to deliver an expanded service.

**Mr McGlone:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht na bhfreagraí sin. I thank the Minister for his response. What procedures are in place to ensure that the good practice identified in a recent inspection report is made available to autism support groups?

**Mr O'Dowd:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. The fact that the centre had a good inspection report is partly as a result of sharing good practice and working with charitable organisations and support organisations when such a request is made. The objective of the centre has always been outreach and to learn from best practice and good experience and to share that with other providers. The latest inspection report shows not only that the centre is delivering a service to the people who come to Middletown but that those experiences are being shared throughout the education sector and with support organisations and parents in the community. Despite sometimes facing political uncertainty and political questioning rather than questions

about what the service is about, the centre has shown everyone that it is a valuable service for those who have autism, their families, the broader community and education on either side of the border.

**Mr Storey:** The Minister refers to the centre broadening its provision. In answer to my question in the House this week, he said that a relatively modest increase in funding would be phased in over a two-year period. Can he give any indication of how much money there will be additional to the current budget for the Middletown centre?

**Mr O'Dowd:** The expansion is premised on additional funding of around £900,000 being made available by each Department over a two-year period, including £75,000 for the refurbishment of an existing residential block at the centre to provide staff accommodation and a model classroom. Those are the figures that I have currently. If there is any update of those figures, I will share it with the Member and the Committee.

**Mrs Overend:** My question is similar. Can the Minister provide an update on the total cost of the building integrated project to date?

**Mr O'Dowd:** I do not have those figures in front of me, but I will provide them to the Member. The cost of the service has been relatively modest when you look at the universal budget for the Department of Education in the North and the Department of Education and Skills in the South. As the recent inspection report has shown, the provision of services at the centre has been outstanding, and many trainers, professionals in autism and families have benefited from the services that are delivered at Middletown. Middletown has now been able to stamp its authority on its autism services. There is recognition that the centre, which, at the start, had difficulties to do with being caught in political crossfire, has gone ahead and delivered the service that it was designed for, which is to support young people and adults with autism and their families and education services on either side of the border.

## Schools: Inspections

6. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Education, should the Education and Training Inspectorate be given more independence under the Education and Skills Authority, how influential the Department, schools and teaching unions will be in the inspection of schools. (AQO 2861/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** The ETI reports as it finds, without fear or favour. I am determined to ensure that the inspectors are able to carry out their work without interference or any form of influence that would distract them from their key role as advocates for learners and in raising standards. The ETI is fully committed to working collaboratively with teachers, their representatives and all stakeholders to ensure that all learners get the best possible educational experience. The ETI will consult the teaching unions on any changes to the inspection process, but how the ETI inspects is not open for negotiation.

**Mr Craig:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he acknowledge that there is a feeling out there that, because of the close links between the Department and the inspectorate, the Department has influence over the inspectorate about who it inspects? With that in mind, will the Minister agree that more independence should be given to the inspectorate system so that there can be a high degree of assurance among the teaching staff out there that the inspectorate is completely independent?

**Mr O'Dowd:** It depends on whether you wish to be reassured. I have no role whatsoever in identifying schools for inspection by the ETI. I have no notion from day to day, week to week and month to month what schools will be inspected by the ETI. The first I hear of an ETI report is when it is published on the website. It is now also sent out on the Executive Information Service (EIS) Twitter service as well, to make it available to as many people as possible. That is the first that I am aware that the inspection has been carried out.

I saw the final draft of the latest inspection report, the inspector's biennial report. I did not change one word in the report, even though, quite rightly, Members this morning challenged me as Minister over the findings of the report and asked whether I as Minister and my Department were involved in the right policies to deliver change in the education system. I can assure Members who wish to be reassured that the training inspectorate is completely independent from me and that it has no political interference from my Department. If it had, I could surely have come up with a more glowing report than we received earlier this month.

**Mr Dallat:** The Minister will be aware that, for many years, the inspectorate visited schools where the conditions were appalling both for the staff and for the pupils, when it should have been screaming from the rooftops. What will change in the future that will influence his



Department when inspectors go to schools in which the fabric of the buildings is not fit for purpose?

**Mr O'Dowd:** The inspectorate reports on the fabric of the buildings if the conditions of the school are a barrier to good learning. My Department is rolling out a capital build programme and a maintenance programme, but neither budget will meet the demand. If, as is unfortunately the case, inspection reports highlight urgent requirements for health and safety measures to be carried out, they should, rightly and properly, be carried out, and the education and library boards have the responsibility to do so. The simple answer is that we do not have the budget to meet the needs of our education estate. We are working towards improvement at every angle we can, and, in the most recent Executive initiative for jobs and the economy, the Department of Education was awarded somewhere in the region of £17 million towards capital build programmes and school maintenance.

We are making our bids when necessary, and we are winning the argument around the Executive table, but it is going to be a long, hard slog to bring our schools estate up to standard.

3.00 pm

## Private Members' Business

### 2012 Paralympic Games: Legacy

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are selected to speak will have five minutes.

**Mr McMullan:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly notes the magnificent success of our athletes at the 2012 Paralympic Games in London; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and Disability Sports NI to secure the support of district councils and the relevant Departments to ensure a lasting legacy of the games and to increase the number of sporting opportunities available to people with disabilities at all levels of sport in every area.*

Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Disability Sports NI is Northern Ireland's main disability sports organisation. It was recognised by Sport NI as the key body responsible for the development of sport and physical recreation opportunities for people with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. At present, it represents over 100 groups. Since its establishment in 1997, Disability Sports NI has gradually increased the provision of sports opportunities for people with disabilities, and it currently runs a range of events, participation programmes, performance initiatives, training courses and education projects, which, last year, benefited 16,000 children and adults.

That work has been underpinned by Sport NI's disability mainstreaming policy, which led to a significant improvement in disability sports provision in Northern Ireland. That improvement in provision is most notable at a performance level. The London 2012 Paralympic Games were the most successful in history. Eight athletes from Northern Ireland qualified for the games: six in the Paralympics Ireland squad and two in the Paralympics GB squad.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Could I ask the Member to please pull the microphone closer?

**Mr McMullan:** Sorry.

Those athletes secured a total of seven medals, including five gold medals, which made Northern Ireland the most successful region of the UK or Ireland as regards gold medals secured per million of population.

That success clearly demonstrates how much the disability sports system has improved in Northern Ireland over the past 10 years as a direct result of the work of Disability Sports NI and Sport NI. However, despite those improvements, the reality is that the vast majority of people with disabilities in Northern Ireland simply do not get the opportunity to participate in sport. The most recent research carried out, the 2010 Northern Ireland sport and physical activity survey (SAPAS), found that disabled people are half as likely to participate in sport as others. Only 19% of disabled adults participate, compared with 37% of non-disabled adults.

The challenge in moving ahead is to create a genuine legacy of the games by greatly increasing the scale of the sports provision across Northern Ireland, giving people with disabilities the opportunity to lead an active and healthy lifestyle through sport, without fear of any Department interfering.

Disability Sports NI believes that that can be achieved through the development and implementation of a new, more ambitious strategic plan for the period 2013 to 2019. However, such is the scale of the task ahead that that cannot be achieved with the support of Sport NI and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) alone. It will require the support of a number of Departments and, as we move into the review of public administration (RPA), all 11 of the council groupings. Currently, Sport NI is finalising its first draft of the Northern Ireland Olympic and Paralympic Games evaluation report, the outcomes of which will also feed into the strategy.

The Minister's Department, over a four-year period, funded a very innovative education project involving the Northern primary schools: 'The 5 Star Disability Sports Challenge'. That was funded to the tune of nearly £160,000. Between March 2009 and September 2012, a total of 25,781 children from 177 primary schools completed the project. That project is now finished, but instead of sitting back and looking at it, we have been proactive and have taken it forward. Talks with the education authority are ongoing regarding possible support from the education sector to reinvigorate it.

Does the Assembly now take the issue forward? We are lucky to have teachers in our special schools who gladly give up their time to train and mentor athletes. Unfortunately, many schools have stopped because of the lack of funding. It costs an average of £400, for example, to take a pupil to Dublin to compete. We need to be concerned about those areas.

We are moving into the RPA, and there is no better time to address the problem. We must now ensure that all 11 council groupings have it on their books and look at providing more facilities for Paralympic sports. The only other group that is not aligned to Disability Sports NI is the Special Olympics. That group mainly does everything on its own. It raises funds and, as I said earlier, teachers do exemplary work. The work that is done by the teachers in Castle Tower School in Ballymena, including Mr McCaughan, is phenomenal, and I am sure that other schools and teachers do the same. However, we are failing them by not giving them proper backup. Funding is needed.

In recent correspondence, NILGA stated that the present arrangements could be improved and made more consistent as long as councils are materially involved in the strategic plan. NILGA also stated that it would be willing to meet Disability Sports NI, as long as it was agreeable and informal.

**Mr I McCrea:** The Member referred to the RPA and the importance of this being done under the new council structure. Does the Member not agree that it is important that the councils that are currently in place take the matter forward? To some extent, it could be too late when the RPA is in place, given that the next Paralympics will be even closer.

**Mr McMullan:** I thank the Member for his question. I totally agree with you. Councils need to add this into their community plans now. You are quite right that it is a priority. When the councils are grouped, some will border on the rural/urban side of things. Councils such as Newtownabbey have the facilities, and there may be some in the Member's area. However, other council groupings do not have the facilities.

I spoke to someone recently who is in charge of a youth club, and I suggested introducing boccia, but that man did not even know what that is. That is the problem: we have to take this issue out to the people and educate them. The Assembly, through the Departments and its influence, can pull all those people together. This needs to be done departmentally, and we need to involve the Special Olympics.

Departments need to set funding aside. Take the rural White Paper, for instance, in which Departments are included. What are they doing with that? We need to add money in. We saw what was done in the Paralympics.

I want to go back to one point very quickly, and I am mindful of the time. The savage cutback in welfare scares a lot of people who have children with special needs and who go into the Special Olympics. I have spoken to parents who have been told that, if their child takes part in Special Olympics and their mobility is seen to have improved, their welfare benefits could be cut. That stops a lot of parents from allowing their children to go forward. That issue does not get a lot of publicity. I think that it is time that it was made public, and I will ask the Minister to look at it. There has to be some way of safeguarding these children. Their mobility will never improve, and they compete at their own level. It is not about competing; it is about getting them out there and giving them something that makes them feel worthy.

We must not allow the success of the Olympics and the Paralympic Games to pass us by. We have a glorious opportunity to strengthen the aims of Disability Sports NI and the Special Olympics. I recognise what was said here today about Lisburn being selected as the European City of Sport. I am sure that the Olympics and the Paralympics went a long way in helping to achieve that.

Members, I ask today that we get all Departments together and that we involve Sport NI, the Special Olympics and Disability Sports and get everybody, especially the councils, together through NILGA.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close.

**Mr McMullan:** We must get the programme together to build on this year. I remind Members of a very old saying, "We should get down on our knees to thank God we are still on our feet." Go raibh maith agat.

**Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure):** As Chair of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate and support the motion.

At the outset, I place on record, again, my thanks and congratulations to everyone from Northern Ireland who took part in this summer's Olympic and Paralympic Games in London and contributed to its great success. That includes

our coaches, volunteers, schoolchildren, games makers and, of course, our athletes. Their dedication and commitment to sport has been simply outstanding.

I am sure that everyone will agree with me when I say how amazing the Paralympic Games were. Watching so many athletes succeed and triumph over their disability was truly inspirational. Regardless of whether they returned home from the games with a medal, there can be no doubt that their greatest achievement was to change other people's perceptions of and attitudes towards those involved in disability sports.

The Committee wishes to ensure that there is a genuine, lasting legacy from the 2012 Paralympic Games and that the opportunities for disabled people in sport and physical recreation become more widely available. To that end, the Committee invited Disability Sports NI to brief it on the impact that the Paralympic Games has had locally and to ascertain whether more needed to be done to build on the momentum and success of our Paralympic athletes.

The Committee received its briefing on 18 October. During that briefing, the Committee heard of the huge increase in demand among people with disabilities wishing to take part in sport, of the tremendous success of the games and of how the games had helped to transform people's attitudes. Although that is certainly a positive and welcome development, the Committee also heard that one of the major challenges still facing disability sports is that we cannot meet the needs of those who wish to participate, particularly those with high levels of impairment, who are often the hardest to reach.

The Committee heard that 37% of non-disabled adults participate in at least 30 minutes of sport a week, compared with only 19% of adults with a disability. One of the Minister's targets in the Sport Matters strategy is to deliver at least a 6% increase in participation in sport and physical recreation among people with a disability by 2019. Clearly, there is still much to do, and Disability Sports NI is in the process of developing a six-year strategic plan outlining how that can be achieved.

The responsibility does not lie solely with the Minister and Disability Sports NI, as Mr McMullan outlined in his opening statement. Other bodies, including other Departments, local government and sport governing bodies, also have a pivotal role to play. The Committee was, therefore, disappointed to learn of a lack of targeted and bespoke programmes aimed at

people with disabilities in local government and our biggest sport governing bodies. That is why the Committee wrote to the Minister, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), the Department of Education, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the IFA, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) and the GAA to ascertain what more could be done individually and collectively to continue to build on the success of the Paralympic Games for our disabled athletes.

Disability Sports NI's partnership approach with two individual councils and four district council consortia has led to the delivery of many successful projects, including participation projects, which gave over 6,000 people with disabilities the opportunity to lead a full and active lifestyle through sport. Unfortunately, those projects are not offered or delivered by other local councils. That is why, in the new year, the Committee intends to host an informal meeting with Disability Sports NI and the NILGA subgroup to discuss those issues in more detail.

### 3.15 pm

The Committee is pleased that successful programmes are delivered in football for those with cerebral palsy, visual and hearing impairment, wheelchair confinement, and mild learning disabilities, and that rugby is establishing a special needs tag rugby advisory group. However, the Committee urges sports governing bodies to deliver a co-ordinated strategy for promoting disabled sports. Further, the Committee urges the governing bodies to engage with Disability Sports NI in the design of their regional stadia at Ravenhill, Windsor and Casement, and to ensure that those parks are fully inclusive sports facilities.

The Committee acknowledges the work already undertaken by Disability Sports NI in its efforts to secure a lasting legacy from the 2012 Paralympic Games. We urge the Minister to continue to support Disability Sports NI in those efforts and to engage with sports governing bodies, local councils and others to ensure an inclusive —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close.

**Miss M McIlveen:** — sporting infrastructure designed to attract disabled people.

**Mr McGimpsey:** I support the motion and am grateful to the proposer for bringing it forward at this time, bearing in mind that the London 2012

Olympics and Paralympics are still very vivid in our memories. We witnessed that huge and successful spectacle and the part that athletes from Northern Ireland played in those Olympics.

London 2012 was first mooted at the UK Sports Cabinet, some 12 years ago, when I was Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. As part of that bid, Tessa Jowell came forward with the proposal that she wanted to get support from the four home countries to bring the Olympics to London in 2012. We were, to varying degrees, happy to support that. My only query was around what would happen to our lottery money, if we were successful. I got assurances on that. London 2012 could only have gone forward with the four home countries supporting the bid. Indeed, it proved a spectacular success. London proved to be a fabulous venue, and the Olympics and Paralympics proved to be a fabulous success. Huge achievements were made by UK athletes across the board, and huge achievements were made by athletes from Northern Ireland. Clearly, there is a legacy from the Paralympic Games, and it is so important that we seize the moment.

How do we do that? It is about increasing participation in sport among individuals suffering disabilities. In Northern Ireland, 20% of the population have either a long-term illness or a disability, and inclusion in sport is so important for their personal development. Providing that access and community support is so important. Above all, it is about equality. All citizens in Northern Ireland have exactly the same rights. Whether they suffer from a disability or are able-bodied, they have the same rights and should have exactly the same right of access to promote their quality of life.

As for the mechanisms that we can use, we have, as an example, Disability Sports Northern Ireland. That is a key body playing a key role in this area. It requires support and, indeed, is getting support from the Department and Sport Northern Ireland. As has been mentioned, councils will play an increasing role. They need to look at their statutory obligations to ensure access for the athletes that we are talking about. We also have 'Sport Matters', a key strategy document coming out of the Department that can, again, drive forward this agenda. There are other opportunities, such as the Special Olympics.

No one in the House would deny the benefits that would come forward for our society and for those individuals through promoting access to sport. It is good for individuals physically and mentally, and it is good for personal

development. It is about promoting increased participation, increased understanding, increased demand and, above all, increased access. This is about equality of opportunity. This is about the rights of individuals who have disabilities. They have the same rights as everyone else, and we require support for those individuals.

We can query the target of 6%, bearing in mind that around 20% have suffered disabilities, but we will examine that and see how we get on as we promote that. However, this is clearly something that is in the popular mind and in the popular imagination. We understand as a society that we have a focus here, and this is exactly the right time to be pushing forward.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún. I support the motion and thank the Members who tabled it.

The Olympics and the Paralympics were memorable, major events for these islands, and they will remain in our memories for many years to come. The memories retained by the athletes who were participants will be with them all the days of their lives, but, like them, I want to see the legacy of the games to be more than just a memory. I would like the spirit of the games to continue to inspire long after their conclusion: to inspire our athletes to reach greater heights in the future; to inspire young athletes to realise that the next games could be their games; to inspire us all to be more active for the sake of our health and well-being; and to inspire our Executive and local government to resource better facilities for all sportspeople, especially athletes who have to deal with a physical or learning disability.

We remember the achievement of our athletes: James Brown, Sally Brown, Eilish Byrne, Bethany Firth, Laurence McGivern, Michael McKillop, Jason Smyth, Sharon Vennard, Michael Conlon, Paddy Barnes, Alan Campbell and the Chambers brothers. They will continue to inspire us, as will Katie Taylor and all the other medal winners from these islands. It is good to see that those athletes are out and about visiting schools, youth clubs and other venues and getting the message of participation across to a wider audience.

It is interesting to examine how England is dealing with the legacy of the games. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has a programme called Places People Play, which is the legacy project of the Olympics and the Paralympics. An investment of £150 million is coming from the British

Olympic Association and from lottery funds and other funding sources. DCMS is investing in a number of iconic multisports facilities and is protecting and improving hundreds of playing fields and preserving high-quality spaces for local people to play and enjoy sport.

It is also recruiting, training and deploying 40,000 sports leaders to organise and lead grassroots sporting activities. It hopes to motivate 100,000 adults to test themselves in multiple Olympic and Paralympic sports and, in doing so, to raise millions of pounds for charity. It is giving young people the opportunity to receive six weeks of coaching to guide them into regular participation in their community. It is investing £8 million on tackling the barriers that disabled people face when they want to play sport, as well as ensuring that every element of the programme works for disabled sportspeople. That is a considerable investment in the legacy of the games, and it includes provision for people with disabilities and suitable facilities for them.

Places People Play seems to me to be quite a comprehensive response to the games. The first tranche of funding was released before the games, and further releases are due this autumn. As I said, the programme has benefited from British Olympic Association and lottery funding.

We in Northern Ireland deserve a similar type of response here. We should not be fumbling in the greasy till, trying to get a few pence here and there from various local councils. There should be a centralised and co-ordinated response to the legacy. It should be well-funded, visionary and ambitious. I call on the Minister to respond to me on that issue and to ensure that our response to the games is every bit as visionary as that of England, well-funded and well-resourced, and serves all of our people well. Go raibh míle maith agat.

**Ms Lo:** The Paralympic Games were a huge success. We must pay tribute to all of our athletes. They did us proud. Eight athletes from Northern Ireland qualified for the Paralympic Games; six on the Ireland squad and two on the GB squad. They secured seven medals, five of which were gold. That makes Northern Ireland the most successful region of the UK in terms of gold medals secured per million of population.

The games inspired many people and did much to raise the profile of disabled people. The English Federation of Disability Sport has published a legacy survey, which found that the Paralympics had a significant impact on

perceptions of disability. The survey showed that eight out of 10 non-disabled people said that they were now interested in watching disabled people play sport. Eight out of 10 disabled people considered taking part in more sport or exercise. That is very positive.

The games cost around £9 million. If all that we could show for that was six weeks of sport, it would not have been worth it. It is, therefore, imperative that we ensure the games' lasting legacy. The Paralympics demonstrated athletes' abilities ahead of their disabilities. That is testament to their hard work and dedication. We must not forget this summer of sport. The Paralympics have raised respect for the sporting ability of disabled people, celebrating what disabled people can do in their chosen fields.

Despite our great Paralympics success, the reality is that the vast majority of people with disabilities in Northern Ireland simply do not get the opportunity to participate in sport.

Research by the Northern Ireland sport and physical activity survey in 2010 found that disabled people were only half as likely to participate in sport, with only 19% of disabled adults participating in comparison with 37% of non-disabled adults, as the Chair of the Committee mentioned earlier.

We must ensure that no-one is made to feel cast out of society because of their disabilities. We must build on the achievements of the events in the summer and keep up the momentum to encourage more disabled people, through schools, sporting clubs and communities, to become interested in sport and to aim high. They must have access to sporting facilities, like any other, able-bodied athletes.

The Five Star Disability Sports Challenge, which was funded by DCAL, took athletes into schools to raise awareness through getting the children involved in Paralympic sport. Not only does that help to change perspectives among the younger generation, but it teaches tolerance — a condition that we, undoubtedly, all agree is essential for an inclusive society. I would like to know whether the Minister has any plans to reinstate that programme.

We must enable talented children and adults with disabilities to train, compete and achieve high levels of performance in sport. That has many benefits, not least of which is raising self-esteem and boosting morale. Cultural well-being gives a sense of togetherness and creativity, and stimulates the imagination.

The 2012 Olympics allowed millions of people, from different cultural backgrounds, the opportunity to participate in events linked to the celebration of the games. We as a society go to great pains to stress the importance of social inclusion, but I fear that those with disabilities are often overlooked. Let us use the momentum of the Paralympic Games to rectify that. The Paralympics is not just about talent; it is about creating aspiration, training, coaching, resources and a positive mental attitude. Sporting activity is not only valuable in its own right but increases confidence, empathy and —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close.

**Ms Lo:** — a sense of community. With co-ordination between councils and groups such as Disability Sports NI and with leadership from the Government, we can ensure a lasting legacy of the Paralympic Games. I support the motion.

**3.30 pm**

**Mr Irwin:** The success of our Paralympians in London this year is of huge importance. The eight athletes from Northern Ireland who competed won a haul of seven medals, including a magnificent five golds. That was a great result for our athletes, and they rightly deserve our highest praise. Those results are testament to the significant advances in the disability and sports systems in place in Northern Ireland and, of course, to the tireless work of Disability Sports NI and Sport Northern Ireland, both of which are to be commended.

The games were a momentous occasion for our disabled competitors, and I think that, over the entire games for able-bodied and disabled people, the interest in sport and the uptake of sports activities have increased to unprecedented levels. That is good news for everyone as more and more people get active, and that will, of course, contribute to a healthy and more vibrant country. Those findings are well documented in the work of Disability Sports Northern Ireland, which states that interest in its activities and competitions has received a huge boost. For example, a recent swimming competition attracted a 40% increase in entries compared with previous events. That shows just how much interest in disabled sports has increased.

There is a need to build on that increased awareness and ensure that we provide the necessary opportunities for disabled people to take part in sport and have easy access to

associated infrastructure. That is not fully the case at the moment. I take the research carried out by the Northern Ireland sport and physical activity participation survey 2010 as a case in point. It showed that only 19% of disabled adults participated in sport compared with 37% of all adults. So disabled people are only half as likely to take up sport as able-bodied people. That statistic obviously takes in a wide range of reasons for non-participation, but we must realise that the opportunities for disabled participation in sport need to increase, along with the increased interest following such a successful Paralympic Games. Disabled sportspeople are totally committed to their chosen sport, and, in many cases, it takes far greater physical and mental effort for them to train and compete than for able-bodied people.

As an Administration, the House must ensure that our structures, regionally at the Assembly and locally through our councils, engage with disabled sporting organisations and ensure that the opportunities for participation are in place. It is not good enough that a disabled person is dissuaded from participation in sport because their home town does not have adequate provision for them or that they have to travel significant distances to access venues, clubs or training facilities. I fully support Disability Sports NI's efforts in developing what it has described as a more ambitious strategic plan. I also support its call to action to our Departments and local councils in order to ensure that the necessary support and opportunities are available to allow disabled people the greatest opportunity to take up a sport. There is no better time than the present, following such a successful Olympic Games, and it would be wrong not to make the most of the opportunity to capture the enthusiasm that currently exists and increase our capacity to cater for disabled sports. I support the motion.

**Ms McCorley:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo inniu, a bhaineann lenár lúthchleasaithe áitiúla, a raibh an-bhua acu ag na Cluichí Parailimpeacha.

I support the motion, which is about the success of our local athletes at the Paralympic Games. We in the North of Ireland can rightly say that our athletes were fantastic competitors and ambassadors this year and that they did us all proud. However, those would be mere empty words if they were not followed up with action that provided a fitting and lasting legacy to that success. So, today we commend the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, who has been absolutely to the fore as a cheerleader for our Paralympians. We ask her to take the

necessary action to secure the support of all local councils and relevant Departments to ensure that the games will have a lasting legacy.

Tá a fhios agam, ar ndóigh, nach bhfuil deiseanna spóirt i dTuaisceart na hÉireann chomh maith agus a ba chóir dóibh a bheith. We know, of course, that sporting opportunities in the North of Ireland are not what they could or should be. Most of the local focus seems to go to the three big sports: GAA, rugby and soccer. The Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure recently asked all local sports to outline the issues that they feel are facing them so that we could have the necessary information to ensure that the right provision is in place to allow them to compete to the best of their ability. Responses were received from 22 sports, and there was general agreement among them about the kind of challenges that they face. Those include lack of funding, poor facilities, low media profile and legislative problems. So, if sporting organisations in general feel seriously challenged, how must it be for disabled athletes? Cad é mar atá cúrsaí ó thaobh lúthchleasaithe faoi mhíchumas de?

A recent edition of 'Sporting Matters' revealed that people without a disability participate more in sport than people with a disability. No surprises there, of course. However, the following statistics may be a revelation to most of us: in the North of Ireland, 21% of the adult population have some form of disability; 40% of households include at least one person with a disability; more than 47,000 people are blind or partially sighted; more than 35,000 people are wheelchair users; and 81% of people with a disability never participate in sport. Clearly, this is a problem for a large section of our population, and more needs to be done to facilitate and encourage those with disabilities to become involved in sport. Given those statistics, that will be a huge challenge, but it is one that we must rise to.

We also have a serious duty to highlight the health benefits of sport, both physical and mental. Those who engage in regular sporting activity are much more likely to adopt healthy attitudes to other areas of their life. Evidence also shows that they are much less likely to suffer from weight problems and the many mental health conditions that exist, such as depression and schizophrenia. In these worrying days of increasing incidence of obesity, mental health problems and suicide, there are good reasons why we need to proactively encourage all people to participate in sporting activity, whether they are disabled or able-bodied.

We want to say to those heroic athletes who took part in the Paralympics that we are proud of them and will continue to support them. We are determined to ensure that, following on from their example, those whom they have inspired will have the funding, resources and facilities to participate and compete in the sport of their choice in a way that is equal to that of any able-bodied person.

Molaim na buaiteoirí bonn, rannpháirtithe, agus oibrithe deonacha a tháinig arais ó Londain i mbliana, iad lán díograise agus áthais. I commend the medallists, participants and volunteers who came back from London this year full of enthusiasm and joy. People such as James Brown, Sally Brown, Eilish Byrne, Bethany Firth, Laurence McGivern, Jason Smyth, Sharon Vennard and, last but not least, Michael McKillop, who so deservedly picked up the Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award as one of two athletes who exemplified the best spirit of the Paralympic Games.

I wish to leave you with the words of double medal winner Jason Smyth, the fastest Paralympian on the planet, who is aiming to reach Rio in 2016. He said:

*"As an athlete I want to reach my potential and wherever that is I'm going to strive to do that."*

Caithfidimid a bheith cinnte go bhfuil an soláthar cuí ann. We need to ensure that we have the appropriate provision in place.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close.

**Ms McCorley:** We want to know that Jason and others like him will not be prevented from achieving their potential by our lack of action. Let that be the legacy of 2012.

**Mr Hilditch:** I support the motion, as we seek the support of district councils. I will declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council, although that will not deter me from giving it a touch if needed, as it is a stakeholder in this important area of sports development. I recognise the work of the Minister, the Department, Sport NI and Disability Sports NI to date in trying to develop and increase the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in competitive sport and, of equal importance, to take part in general physical recreation.

There are many facets to the issue. Although in the euphoria of the games we hail the

successes of the Michael McKillops and the Jason Smyths, there is also the other end of the scale, which is perhaps the weekly participation in a game of bocce, a sport that provides people with special needs with the opportunity to have social contact, develop physically and gain self-confidence, which can make all the difference to someone's weekly routine.

There is much more to do. The success of our athletes in the Paralympic Games gives us the springboard to raise the game. I welcome the monetary awards to Disability Sports NI for increased participation development and the financial support to Special Olympics Ulster for its ongoing work with people with learning difficulties. Now is the time when the Department must be prepared to dig deep if we are serious about ensuring a lasting legacy.

At central government level, the benefits are cross-departmental. Perhaps today we can begin to make a real difference by harnessing all the expertise in sport, education, health etc and establishing a legacy working group that is intent on taking sport to a new level by grasping the nettle and really bringing the Sport Matters strategy to life.

I turn to the district councils and their involvement in this area of development. They are crucial partners in the scenario as local delivery units for leisure and sport. Much work has been done by many councils that can be acknowledged and applauded, but a fresh overview in light of the motion would not go amiss. Indeed, on the negative side, a council in my constituency has suddenly put pounds before provision. It does not fully understand that leisure and sports facilities will never be money-making ventures; they will mainly incur costs to the ratepayer. A balance must be struck, even in these times of austerity, but that council and its new management appears to be solely focused on balance sheets. For example, the income from sports development programmes, instead of being reinvested in the same area of work, is now being used to offset deficiencies in other areas of its budget, thus giving a false impression. It is an opportunity missed to invest in exactly the issues that are before us today.

Facility use is another area in which councils could step up to the mark. I have a perfect example of opportunities being missed. It is a local one, where a high-spec AstroTurf floodlit facility can lie unused at times, particularly during off-peak periods. Surely, instead of chasing mainstream sports, which may be more financially lucrative, programmes and initiatives could be developed in what would be a safe



and secure surrounding. Local government needs to think outside the box. Hopefully, today's motion can change the mindset of those who have not yet got it.

If there is anything to come out of the success of the Paralympics and the successes of our individual athletes and their heroic performances, it is and should be an end to the prejudice suffered by people with disabilities in our society. All too often, when disabled people attempt to normalise their life — sport is a great vehicle to do that — they are treated appallingly. It comes from all quarters of our society, and it still exists. If we can end those prejudices and change the mindset of those who are in positions of influence and cannot acknowledge and see the benefits of disabled participation in sport, that will be a real legacy.

**Mr Swann:** A comment made by Ms McCorley has left me somewhat distracted. She said that the Minister was a cheerleader for disability sports. I am afraid that I just cannot get that image out of my head; it has put me off my train of thought. I am sure that you would make a fantastic cheerleader, Minister, if you so desired.

The motion refers to the legacy of the Paralympic Games, but it would be remiss of us not to mention the legacy of the Olympic Games participants and the games-makers who took part from Northern Ireland and across the UK. The range of aspects that we can look to for the legacy have been mentioned in great detail with regard to the development of athletes and facilities and all the rest of it. The Cultural Olympiad was another part of the Olympics that had an effect even on the House; we should not be remiss about that either. Maurice Orr's exhibition 'The Screaming Silence of the Wind' was displayed in the Great Hall. It was an art exhibition that was available to touch and had an audio-sensory aspect. That was also fully available for people with disabilities. It is those parts of the legacy of the Olympics that we have to look to to make sure that we get maximum effect in Northern Ireland. I know that Ballymena Borough Council also took the opportunity to display Maurice's artwork.

### 3.45 pm

When we look at legacy, it is not just necessary to look at buildings and facilities. A number of Members mentioned Michael McKillop, and we had a Matter of the Day to discuss the fact that he was awarded the Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award as one of two athletes who

exemplified the best spirit of the Paralympic Games. That was not just to do with Michael's achievement; it was to do with the work that he did in going around schools and promoting the Paralympics prior to the games and building up that knowledge. I know that he was also present at an event that the Minister ran in conjunction with LOCOG to highlight the games. When we look at the legacy of those events, it is important that we look at all the activities in that broad spectrum.

When Disability Sports NI was before the Committee, it indicated the real legacy of the games. It has witnessed an increased participation in sports. William Irwin mentioned the 40% increase in participation in one swimming event and the increase in expressions of interest. We hope that the legacy of the Paralympics is to enable young people with a disability to look at sportsmen or sportswomen with a disability similar to theirs and get the encouragement and self-confidence to take part and become involved in a sporting activity that they would not naturally have been involved in. They might not be medal winners of the future, but hopefully we can give them the confidence to participate in a sporting activity that is usually seen to be applicable only to able-bodied professionals rather than someone with a disability. If that is to be our legacy from the Paralympics, we will have achieved something in this place.

In its report, Disability Sports NI stated that disabled people were half as likely to participate in sports, with only 19% of adults with a disability participating compared with 37% of all adults. I know that targets have been set to increase participation by able-bodied and disabled adults, but work has to be done to increase those percentages. I am sure that the Minister is committed to doing that. If we miss this opportunity, it will be a long time before we in this place have another such fantastic event to build a legacy on. That is why we have to grasp the opportunity now. We will have the World Police and Fire Games, and there will be legacies from those games, but those legacies will not be for children and young people with a disability, who can look to their heroes and the medal winners who have been listed here by other Members.

**Mr McDevitt:** Each country that took part in the 2012 Paralympic Games will celebrate and honour its athletes. Each country will seek to create a lasting legacy in a way that reflects its culture and sporting heritage. Each country will seek to inspire future Paralympians by providing more sporting opportunities. We who

sit at the apex of two sporting nations should be no different.

The legacy of the 2012 Paralympic Games is, I hope, well under way. The headlines endure. It is a historic fact that the most successful athletes ever to emerge from this island are not two able-bodied athletes but two young men from these six counties who have had to face up to disability in their life. That is a fact that should humble us all and make us reflect on the true meaning of that beautiful word "superhuman". To find what resilience means; to understand what achievement can look like; to reduce to dust the barriers that get put up in front of young people by the state, by circumstance and by their disability; and to reduce this island and these small counties of ours in Northern Ireland humbly to tears of admiration were, I think, the true legacies of the games.

I will talk a little about Laurence McGivern, a Paralympic swimmer from Rostrevor in County Down. He found his extraordinary talent in the swimming pool because of Newry and Mourne District Council's commitment to the Disability Sports NI programme. Like others, he has gone on to inspire young athletes with disabilities. Councils around Northern Ireland deserve some credit, and Newry and Mourne is one of them. Its participation in the Disability Sports NI swimming championships rose dramatically in the aftermath of performances by Laurence and Bethany Firth at the games.

Swimming was not the only sport to receive positive exposure. I will talk a little about the runners in a second, but it is worth noting that Northern Ireland athletes excelled in cycling, tandem, archery, equestrian events and other sports.

Participation in sport is special. It builds character, it builds muscles, it builds soul, and it builds humans. It gives young people the opportunity to be old beyond their years as they face up to the challenge of competitive sport from a reasonably early age. It also gives them an opportunity to understand that, if they are in a team sport environment, the sum of the parts is always much bigger than anything that they could do as individuals in that number.

This is a real moment to seize on a fantastic sense of achievement. There is a great duty on the House to accept the fact that disabled sportspeople outperformed all our able-bodied ones, to treat them as equals, to give them the prominence that they deserve and to provide them with the backing that they have earned.

I am sure that many Members never thought that we would see a green vest hurtling down a sprinting track to take Olympic gold, not once but twice. As much as those of us of Eamonn Coghlan's generation believed that he might just have done it in Moscow, I never thought that I would see the day when two 800-metre gold medals would go to athletes in Irish vests. Those men are the inspiration to the next generation of runners from this region and this island.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close.

**Mr McDevitt:** Let us support them, and let us do so generously.

**Mr G Robinson:** This summer, we were treated to a spectacle of sport that reminded us that having a disability does not mean that you cannot take part in competitive sport. Many of us were enthralled at the high quality of sport that the Paralympics provided. I also commend the parents and teachers for the tremendous support that they gave to all our young people who participated in the games.

We have been left with a very positive picture of all those who have a disability. I wonder whether the Paralympians realise the immense good that they have done for all people who have a disability, how the public perceive a disability and the example that they have set for disabled as well as able-bodied athletes. Although we are all aware that finances are severely strained, it would be beneficial for all athletes who have a disability to have access to good facilities, which could be used by visiting teams as a training base, to ensure that athletes can achieve their personal bests and bring further success to Northern Ireland and Team GB. For the proud record of achievement to continue, we need to ensure that funding is put into disabled sport by the Minister and the Executive. I appreciate that the Minister and the Executive have a budget, but whatever money can be invested should be invested, so that people with a disability can improve their participation in their preferred sport. I also encourage all local councils that do not have disabled facilities to make sure that all their facilities cater for those who have a disability.

Limavady has its own Paralympic star in Sally Brown. Like every area that has a competitor, we are intensely proud of all our home-grown talent. Sally and others deserve to have superb training facilities so that they can achieve further success and continue to inspire their

own and younger generations. Sally is just one of the many Northern Ireland stars of whom we are all so proud. Despite my expressed concerns about funding, I urge the Minister and Executive to do the best they can in aiding our Paralympic athletes to leave the greatest legacy so that they can achieve even further success.

**Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** I thank the Members who tabled the motion and the 11 Members who have spoken in the debate so far. This has probably been one of the best debates that I have been involved in since becoming Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. That is not because I have memories of the Paralympics fresh in my head, as does everyone else, but because of the whole spectacle of the pre-games training and the lead-up. I did not anticipate anything other than cross-party support for ensuring that what the Paralympic Games had to offer leaves a legacy. I listened carefully to the debate and to the views expressed on the motion. Although there are many similarities, some issues brought to our attention need fairly careful consideration.

I want to use the opportunity again to congratulate Eilish, James, Bethany, Michael, Jason and, indeed, everyone who participated in the 2012 Paralympic Games. I thank those who participated and their families, coaches, communities and clubs. I also thank the media for the positive way in which they reported the Paralympic Games. One of the things that I will always remember is that, when I was leaving the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games and going to the airport, billboards were being posted that said, "Thanks for the warm-up, lads". For me, that summed up the spirit and our anticipation of the forthcoming Paralympic Games. Indeed, it was a warm-up. The legacy that many Members spoke about today needs to happen and to endure.

I congratulate Robin Swann on bringing the Cultural Olympiad into the debate. The whole aspect of culture is very important. In 2012, we saw the power of the spectacle that art and sport create together. I think that it was a taster, and I would like to build on that.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair)*

I congratulate every Member on the passion with which they spoke about the games. As the mover of the motion, Oliver McMullan, outlined, there is a need to ensure continued support from my Department and from across the Executive, not just for Disability Sports Northern Ireland. I am a big advocate and fan of that

organisation and always have been. It has led by example, and its work is exemplary. From 2009 to 2012, 177 primary schools have been impacted by its five-star challenge programme. I challenge anyone involved in outreach and development work, regardless of the area that it is in, to meet such a target. This needs to have further support through the Executive. The Special Olympics are different in that they receive support from four Departments. However, we need to make sure that Disability Sports Northern Ireland and its five-star challenge and any other work and needs emerging from that work have my support.

Michelle McIlveen, Chair of the Committee, recorded her congratulations. Like every other Member, she spoke about the inspiration that came not only from those who succeeded but from those who participated in the Paralympic Games. I congratulate the Committee on planning an informal meeting with Disability Sports NI to see, with regard to NILGA as well, where we go from here.

#### 4.00 pm

I think that every Member who spoke mentioned the role of local government, and I listened to David Hilditch's contribution with a lot of interest. I believe that we are in a time when we are looking at what ratepayers can get for their money. Michael McGimpsey spoke in a very elegant way about equality and rights, which I am 100% behind. There should not be an either/or; every citizen, regardless of their ability should have access and rights. There has been an imbalance around access for people with disabilities to arts, sports and many different strata of life in our communities. That is not good enough.

Questions were also raised about the three stadia. I think that it was Michelle McIlveen who urged the governing bodies to make sure that there is access to those stadia. I can say on the record now that, not only will those bodies meet their statutory obligations, they should continue to work with Disability Sports NI and others to make sure that we provide the best standard for access and not just the minimum. I recently met Audiences NI to discuss access to the arts. When big infrastructure developments are happening here, we must make sure that disability is considered upfront rather than as an afterthought. I am sure that those who have visited the MAC, the Lyric and the Titanic building recently can see where good thinking and good working relationships can have better outcomes for people with disabilities.

It is important that we see what we can learn from other people. Dominic Bradley raised the issue of the Places People Play initiative and the, I think, £100 million that the British Olympics is bringing forward with the lottery. Based on economy of scale, and there being more than 1.5 million people here, £14 million should be brought forward for our Active Communities programmes. That is fair enough. However, if I picked the Member up right, although it is a good start, we need to do more. We particularly need to look at the role of local government and, given my primary responsibility for sport, how I can get more money to spend on facilities for those with disabilities. The figures were impressive: 40,000 sports leaders; 100,000 adults who test out different aspects of sport; and six weeks of coaching. I will certainly look at that strategy and work with Disability NI to see what else we can do around that, and I will look at any other strategy that produces good outcomes for people with disabilities.

Anna Lo, William Irwin and others, including the Chair, spoke about pride and raised the issue of the minimum 6% increase. I will be looking to see that increased well above that. That 6% is the minimum that we can do in the Sport Matters strategy, but given the right support and investment, Disability Sports NI is convinced that we can increase that target, which is what we will seek to do.

Rosaleen McCorley, David Hilditch, Robin Swann and other Members spoke about the legacy that we hope to achieve. Conall McDevitt is right: for their numbers, our Paralympians yielded more medal success. Regardless of that, the sense of pride that we have in our athletes will endure until the next Olympics, and we have the Commonwealth Games next year. The one thing that all the athletes who competed in the Olympics and Paralympics have done and will continue to do is their outreach and work around schools, youth clubs and communities. They have been an inspiration.

The games-makers, volunteers and everybody involved made those games, and our memories of those games will endure. We hope to learn lessons from the experience of those games-makers and the volunteers that we can put to use in the World Police and Fire Games and in everything else. All sport, whether for the able-bodied or disabled, relies largely and heavily on volunteering. Without the support of volunteers and their families, we would not have as much success, and a much smaller percentage of people than at present would participate in or be involved with sport.

We should not forget, and George Robinson reminded us, that there are challenges on our budget. However, if I picked George up correctly, he said that, notwithstanding those challenges, we need to make sports for people with disabilities a priority.

I pay tribute again to everybody who spoke. To give reassurance, if it is needed, I am fully prepared to work with everyone, but mainly the stakeholders, to establish what we can learn and how we can best take forward the lessons that we have learnt to make sure that the legacy endures. We also need to make sure that the action plan and the approach that we have taken increase participation, because that in itself will be a legacy. We need to look at how we can put more investment into buildings and infrastructure.

I am looking forward to having discussions with NILGA, particularly about how RPA will be realised. It concerns me that there are facilities that have floodlit pitches and are well secured but are not being used. It concerns me that money generated through sport is not being reinvested in sport for people of all abilities and people who are disabled. That concerns me a lot. I understand where local government has been, but if we are to move forward through the provision of better facilities for every citizen, we need to do so and make sure that that is done well so that it is not the case that people have or do not have facilities depending on their postcode.

Dominic Bradley, Conall McDevitt and others cited Newry and Mourne District Council as an example, and there are many others. Credit to those councils where it is due, such as Belfast, Antrim and many others. Of every council area that I visited in the lead-up to the Olympics and the Paralympics, I have to say that most had done as much as they possibly could, not only around pre-games training but around promoting the Olympics and the Paralympics. I feel that the support was unprecedented compared with previous years. Even though I was a councillor for only a couple of years, it was the first time in my memory that I saw in concert across the North and, indeed, across the island as much support as possible given. It was a good start, and I do not think that we are done yet.

I hope that we can learn lessons through continued support for Disability Sports NI, which has done an absolutely marvellous job and will continue to do so. The programmes that it has put to the Executive for support will be invested in. We will carefully consider what the emerging needs are, because we cannot pay lip

service to a legacy. We cannot be talking about the legacy of 2016 if we did not take full advantage of the legacy of 2012.

I thank the Members for tabling the motion and thank every Member who spoke, and who did so with such passion and commitment to making sure that we have full access and full equality — again, the rights of every citizen — as far as is possible.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas le achan duine a ghlac páirt sa díospóireacht. I thank everybody for taking part in the debate.

As the Minister rightly acknowledged, there is a great sense of cross-party agreement on the motion. We have all acknowledged the achievements of our Olympians and Paralympians at this year's games. Since the Paralympics, James Brown, Eilish Byrne, Bethany Firth, Laurence McGivern and Sharon Vennard have all become virtually household names. I reserve a special word of congratulations for the two outstanding athletes from my neck of the woods, Sally Brown and Jason Smyth, both of whom I know. I also congratulate double gold-medal winner Michael McKillop, whom I met here at the reception. I will touch on that after a bit. He was selected for the Whang Youn Dai achievement award for his great sense of spirit throughout the games. Perhaps one of the legacies of the games is that sense of spirit, and I hope that it lives on.

As we marvelled at our athletes' achievements, there was a sneaking suspicion that we might slip yet again into the pre-Olympic ambivalence to our Paralympic athletes and disabled sports. Others, such as Seb Coe, assured us that that could not happen. As I said earlier, at the reception I met Michael McKillop, and after talking to him, I felt the same. Indeed, the words of Minister Ní Chuilín expanded on that when she said:

*"The Games may be over, but the future starts now and its opportunities are limitless."*

The motion aimed to explore those opportunities with the major deliverers of sport and leisure — our local authorities, the governing bodies of our sports, where applicable, and the other relevant Departments — to ensure a lasting legacy of the Games.

Rosie McCorley spoke about the recent Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure meeting at which we began to conduct a review of issues facing bodies other than the big three

sports. This review specifically identified the legacy aspect from the 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games and received a significant level of replies. Issues that were identified included funding, inadequate facilities, limited resources, lack of media profile and some legislative issues.

Suggestions as to how increased participation could be brought about included a joined-up approach, a 100% rates relief for sports clubs, greater schools participation, and taster and trial days and weeks for disabled and non-disabled sports.

A stakeholder event will be held on 22 November, which, no doubt, will further explore the opportunities for legacy issues. I urge the various sports development officers and recreation development officers in our local authorities, as well as senior officials from our wide gamut of sporting bodies, to attend that event.

The issues that we have discussed today will also, no doubt, contribute to the debate. Oliver McMullan said that disability sport provision was central to this year's Paralympics success. He praised the work of Sport NI and Disability Sport NI while outlining the shortcomings in the numbers of adults participating in disabled sports. He also talked about the challenges that might arise as a result of RPA and the delivery of facilities for Paralympic sports. In an intervention, Ian McCrea highlighted the need for councils to closely examine such provision. Mr McMullan went on to outline the difficulties that are experienced by parents of disabled children in relation to welfare and participation in the Special Olympics.

Michelle McIlveen, the Chair of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, paid tribute to everyone who made up the Olympic and Paralympic teams in 2012. She also outlined the significant numbers of disabled adults who are not participating in sport and related the work of the Committee with all the stakeholders in the delivery of disabled sport. She advised the House of a forthcoming meeting with NILGA and others in the new year to discuss that issue.

Michael McGimpsey concentrated on the legacy aspect of the 2012 Paralympics and the key role of Disability Sport NI and the Department's document, 'Sport Matters'. Dominic Bradley described some of the ongoing work to provide facilities and support for disabled sports from lottery funding and the Olympic association.

Anna Lo considered the change of attitudes by non-disabled people to disabled sport and the increase in respect and diversity. William Irwin urged everyone to engage with the disabled sporting organisations to establish their requirements and needs.

Rosie McCorley commended the Minister for her work and asked her to ensure the support of all the local authorities. David Hilditch outlined the participation of people in sports such as boccia, which is an important part of many people's weekly social interaction routine. He put forward the idea of a legacy development group. That deserves consideration. He challenged the input to date of some local councils, including his own.

Robin Swann mentioned the role of the Cultural Olympiad, which was part of the Olympic celebrations. He also mentioned the wonderful exhibition that we visited in Ballymena and which was also seen here, of the work of Maurice Orr.

Conall McDevitt rightly pointed out that the disabled athletes were the toast of everyone on these islands. He went on to praise the work of Newry and Mourne District Council. George Robinson outlined the need for funding for sports facilities. I hope that he will back that at tonight's meeting of Limavady Borough Council, which will be discussing that matter and the delivery thereof.

The Minister related her own Olympic experience and gave a holistic overview of the Games period. She offered her support for all the bodies that are currently involved in sport. She also congratulated the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure for its work to date. She made a telling comment at the end of her speech when she said that we cannot simply pay lip service to the legacy of the Olympic Games.

Before I finish I want to point out that there is still a general lack of awareness, which we must act on, of the difference between and the delivery of the Special Olympics and the Paralympics. There is some confusion there on which we need some clarity.

I thank Members for their contributions this afternoon. It has been a very enlightening debate. I am glad that the motion has received the support of all the Members who have spoken. I support the motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly notes the magnificent success of our athletes at the 2012 Paralympic Games in London; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and Disability Sports NI to secure the support of district councils and the relevant Departments to ensure a lasting legacy of the games and to increase the number of sporting opportunities available to people with disabilities at all levels of sport in every area.*

4.15 pm

*Motion made:*

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]*

## Adjournment

### Special Needs: Taughmonagh

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who wish to speak will have seven minutes.

**Mr Spratt:** I thank the Minister in advance for responding to today's debate. The Minister was at the official opening of Taughmonagh Primary School and knows the area reasonably well.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise this very important issue, which affects families living in Taughmonagh. I was shocked to learn that 47·5% — almost half — of the total number of children who attend the local primary school in Taughmonagh are registered as having special educational needs (SEN). That is a truly shocking statistic, and it is so important to highlight it here today. More and more children are being diagnosed as having special needs in other areas of Belfast and, indeed, throughout the Province. That must be taken into consideration when budgets are allocated to schools.

To put this in context: the Taughmonagh estate is situated in one of the most affluent parts of South Belfast, yet it houses families with very complex needs and suffers deprivation to the same degree as inner-city areas of the South Belfast constituency.

I would like to put on record the excellent work being done by the special needs co-ordinator, principal and staff at Taughmonagh Primary School. The pressure that they are under should not be underestimated in any way. As well as the statistic that I quoted earlier, the school has a speech and language unit with an additional 32 children with special needs. Those children are from not just the Taughmonagh area but all over the city of Belfast. Every teacher wants to ensure that every child reaches his or her potential, but that is incredibly difficult given the high numbers of children with special needs.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out an inspection two years ago. It

recognised that many children and families in the local area have an increasingly complex range of needs and that the quality of special needs provision is very good. It went on to state that there is a good integration of children with a wide range of additional needs. The teachers in the special needs unit have a very challenging remit, and the inspector could have gone further to acknowledge that. It is unfair to compare Taughmonagh to other schools, given the high levels of special needs amongst its pupils. It is a tribute to the staff of Taughmonagh Primary School that the children are making good progress. I am sure that that will continue to be the case.

There are a number of issues that I would like to raise given that more and more children are being diagnosed as having special needs and the budget is being reduced. The statementing process is taking too long, and there is not enough access to educational psychologists. Children are having to wait too long to see their psychologist, and, as a result, there are currently two places in the speech and language unit yet to be allocated. It is vital that class sizes are kept small as these children need one-to-one attention and each child needs his or her own schedule.

It is all too easy to say that there is simply not enough money to increase the budgets. However, the system is simply not working effectively. If we wish to place children with special needs into mainstream schools, there must be an increase in funding. If not, compared with their counterparts in special schools, those children will be at a considerable disadvantage. All the teachers in Taughmonagh Primary School are trained to level 1 and 2 in SEN. Considering the rising numbers of children who are being diagnosed, perhaps we need to ensure that all new teachers are trained to meet these children's needs.

The children in the school have joined up with Glenveagh special school to complete an art project, and they have also teamed up with Harberton school to work on a tree project. I welcome those links and hope that there can be greater collaboration between schools in the future. A sharing of services would be beneficial to the staff and pupils at Taughmonagh.

There has been much debate recently on how to address the wider issue of special needs. It is not a case of simply providing more teachers and psychologists; it is essential to improve early years provision and ensure effective early intervention. Aspirations in families need to be

raised, and I hope that the social investment fund will go some way to address that. However, special needs provision in Taughmonagh and, indeed, other primary schools must be reviewed, because many of the schools really are at breaking point. I understand that this issue must be looked at as part of a wider multiagency approach, but the responsibility for special needs provision lies with the Department of Education.

I ask the Minister to address a couple of specific issues. First, as I said, we must ensure that every child in the education system reaches his or her full potential, and we must also ensure that schools have the adequate resources to provide that opportunity. The Minister needs to look at the length of time that is taken to statement a child, and he also needs to provide more access to educational psychologists. At a time when a record number of children are being diagnosed with special needs, it is essential that financial and human resources are increased and that budgets are not cut.

Minister, I ask you to take these points on board very seriously. I know that Taughmonagh Primary School is one of many schools in the inner city that is in a similar position. I know about the issues on the budget and so forth, but we need to look at the issue very seriously, particularly as there are high numbers of children with special needs — almost 50% — in inner city areas. I know that you have been doing work on that, and I thank you for the work that has been done. I ask you to take this particular case on board when you are looking at the overall situation throughout the rest of the Province.

**Mr Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Jimmy Spratt for securing the debate on this topic. It gives all the representatives from the area an opportunity to support him in his call for some additional support and attention for the school and the overall provision for children who have either learning difficulties or special needs.

I also thank Janet Douds and her team in the school in Taughmonagh for the tremendous work that they have been involved in, notwithstanding the difficulties and challenges that they face in the school, and, indeed in the surrounding area. As Jimmy outlined, those difficulties are a result of the levels of deprivation and other social and economic challenges that that community faces. Perhaps it is even more commendable from Janet's point of view that, when I spoke to her, she was at pains to point out that, although the school has

its difficulties, so too do many other schools. So, I pay tribute to Janet for that sentiment. Of course, she also wanted to highlight the difficulties that her school and pupils face. As principal, she wanted to highlight her colleagues' ability to educate the children to the highest standards and to give them an opportunity as they go forward in life.

Michael McGimpsey will well recall the discussions that we had in 1994 and 1995 in the context of the Belfast European Partnership Board. The South Belfast constituency is on the more affluent part of the spectrum in the North. However, within it there are many "pockets of deprivation" as they are called, and, indeed, Taughmonagh would have been referred to then as an "enumeration district". It is quite a small area within a wider affluent area which requires additional support. Taughmonagh was high on the list of enumeration districts. We have pointed out, for some considerable time, that it is a pocket of deprivation in a more affluent constituency which needs additional support and resources.

I thank Jimmy for securing the debate this afternoon. I do not want to rehearse all the arguments. However, this particular school has 150 pupils, and there are perhaps 70-odd children in the nursery school; and it is quite alarming to hear that in every class there are two or three children with some form of learning difficulty or special-needs requirement. Some 47% — I thought it was 49% — of the children have some level of learning difficulty. I was given the figure of 12% of children who may well be diagnosed within the autistic spectrum. This is, obviously, a very serious cause for concern, and I know that the Minister will respond to these arguments later.

It is also important that the children have access to an educational psychologist so that they can be assessed through statementing or whatever. There is a need to identify the extent of the problem. That is the first base from which we can work out what support the school, and its children, need.

The following arguments have been put forward so far. Taughmonagh School is in an area of high need, which faces many social and economic challenges. Children going to the school are part of that community. The school itself will provide the best education that it can, and as I said earlier, I commend the team in the school for that. However, the children require additional support, and all the area representatives present will want to give that support to the school and support the Department in its ability to continue to divert



resources to areas and schools such as this. For me, this underlines the need for us to look deeper into the education system. We must make sure that we give every child the best opportunity that we can, no matter what area or community he comes from.

On that basis, I support Jimmy in bringing the debate to the House today, and I commend the school for all its efforts, notwithstanding the challenges that it faces locally.

**Mr McGimpsey:** I thank Jimmy Spratt for securing this debate, concerning special needs within Taughmonagh Primary School. As Alex Maskey said, Taughmonagh is surrounded by the affluent Malone and Upper Malone areas, but is an area of strong social and economic disadvantage. Therefore, it needs proper support.

I was at the opening of the new primary school a couple of months ago. I was pleased that the Minister also attended that event, when Dame Mary Peters opened the school. It is a beautiful school with good facilities, led by a very committed headmistress and a team of teachers and support workers and delivering to the very best of their abilities for the local community and its children. They do those children proud. The new school is the result of many years of campaigning. Taughmonagh is a very committed community, and I was proud, over the years, to give it what support I could to deliver a new school.

We have the new school in place. However, it does not stop there. We have to provide an education system that is specially tailored to the mixed talents and abilities of our children, and we also have to bear in mind the needs of those children. In fact, as indicated, around 49% of pupils in the school have special needs. They have a variety of special needs, and that includes the 12% who are on the autistic spectrum.

#### 4.30 pm

Early detection and early intervention are key. After that, the appropriate support for each child, as an individual, must be provided. It seems to me that the situation is a bit like health: you assess the need and then you address that need. It is not about saying that our budgets are curtailed and that we will curtail them to save money. If we do that, and if we ignore or do not fully provide, the effect on special needs children of their not getting the support that they need is highly detrimental to them personally, and can be detrimental to the

class and to the wider community. It is important that money follow need, and there is a clear, identifiable need here.

There is a huge challenge for the teaching staff, and Janet and her team are up for that. However, they must get the support that is required. As has been mentioned, classes in Taughmonagh are small; therefore, the percentage of the pupils with special needs is commensurately higher. It may be that the teacher has one classroom assistant only for a class that has a number of special needs children, and that creates great challenges and pressures for that teacher.

There is also a particular concern around funding for early-years special needs, and early intervention is key. Early intervention and early detection equals a better outcome.

Another issue that could be mentioned is that when the inspectorate comes into the school, it is made fully aware of the situation in the school. It is not, perhaps, like another primary school in South Belfast, where the percentage of children with special needs would be much lower. For example, I am on the board of governors of Stranmillis Primary School in Knightsbridge Park, and its special needs pupils account for about 6%, which is very much lower. Therefore, the inspectors need to be aware of the challenges that the staff face, the different environment that the teachers operate in and the different situation that they face.

The Minister was present at the opening of the school, and the local community was very pleased to see him and grateful that he took the time to come along. Therefore, I appeal to the Minister that, having provided the brand new facility of a beautiful new school, the next step is to ensure that the needs of the children in that school and the needs of the local community are fully met in one of the key areas for government in Northern Ireland. If we look at our key areas, this is obviously one. The sooner we can provide the support that is required, the better. Early intervention and early appropriate support are everything for those children as they grow up and develop.

**Dr McDonnell:** Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise for the fact that I was tied up earlier and was a few minutes late for the debate. However, I hope that you will forgive me, and I hope that Mr Spratt will forgive me for my late entry.

I want to make some brief comments. Taughmonagh is a new school, supported by a very dedicated team, including Janet and her

team of teachers, who work extremely hard to ensure that the children get the best attention possible.

The school consists of a primary school, a two-classroom nursery and the special speech and language group. However, as Members have said, the problem is that this is not a normal school like others in South Belfast.

About half the children have special needs. I think that it is 49% — a figure that has been quoted already by others. However, that is compounded by the fact that a substantial number of children are on the autistic spectrum. It is about 12%, which is quarter of the 49% who have special needs. That figure is six times higher than the Belfast average. That means that while a teacher in an average school might expect to have a child on the autistic spectrum of needs in every second class, there are three or four in Taughmonagh. In fact, I think that there are four children with autistic special needs in one class. That is a tremendous demand on the teachers, because those children almost need one-to-one teaching and, at worst, one-to-two teaching. If you have a teacher who is trying to look after a class and trying to look after four children who are on the autistic spectrum, there is work there for three people, not one. That really needs to be looked at. In such a case, the autistic children suffer, because it is impossible for the teacher to give them the special attention they need to meet their individual, personal and educational needs. Those children are high demand because of their particular condition.

There are also a large number of children with special needs other than autism, and they find themselves being overlooked, for no malevolent reason, as the teacher is pulled to look after the children with autism. So, there are children with special needs being neglected a little.

The remaining pupils in the class, particularly the average pupils, are being neglected, again because of the high demands of the children with heavy demand. As I see it, that whole dynamic puts immense pressure on the very committed teachers in the school.

Like Michael and others, I was involved when pressure was being generated during a previous Assembly mandate to get the school built, and I visited the school on a number of occasions. They are very grateful, but we are at risk now of having a good school and a very good team of people but burnout taking place.

There is a special needs co-ordinator based in the school who can request help for children,

but that help is not always available. They have access to a psychologist, but only for a limited number of hours. As I understand it, there are 75 children in the school in need of psychological support, and there is provision for five. So they have to have a lottery to find out which five are going to get attention and which 70 are going to be left at a loose end. That is also very stressful and demanding on teachers. The school is left to run that lottery and to make the decisions on that lottery, and it is not fair that the teachers or the principal, Janet Douds, have to make that decision. Those things are pressures. Yes, there is help coming in from Harberton Special School. If it has spare capacity, it dedicates some of its staff to assist in Taughmonagh. Last year, one teacher was able to come across twice a week and work with eight of the children with learning disabilities. That support is welcome, but it is not nearly enough.

Inspection reports have been very good. In 2010 and 2012, the reports stated that Taughmonagh was doing a tremendous job under very difficult circumstances. There is, arguably, a very strong case for increased provision, and I think we are all agreed on that, because the teaching staff at Taughmonagh are already stretched. The difficulty we have is that when the Department is making its assessments, or whatever, it looks at the school, but it does not dig down or drill down into it to see the children who are there. There is an overload of special needs.

There is six times the average level of autism spectrum illness in this school. That means that there are sometimes up to four such children in a class. That is an impossible demand for a teacher to meet. Seventy-five children need psychological support, but only five get it. Statistically, the Department tends to pay little or no attention at times to that, because it has a view that the special needs are spread out. Special needs are highly concentrated in the school. The school is doing an outstanding job, and I would not want anything that I or my colleagues might say to cast aspersions on that. Those people are doing an outstanding job in almost impossible circumstances. I urge the Minister to find some way of coming up with a strategy to support those vulnerable children and their teachers, who are overloaded and at serious risk of burnout.

**Ms Lo:** I thank Mr Spratt for securing the debate. As other Members said, the inspectorate's report shows that almost half of the children attending the school are in need of additional learning support, with 6% of them

having been stated. That is a much higher than average proportion of children with special educational needs than in any of the mainstream schools in Northern Ireland. The school has a small number of children for whom English is not their first language.

All those difficulties pose huge challenges for Taughmonagh Primary School. However, the inspectorate's report that was published in November 2010 was, overall, very positive about the quality of teaching in the school. I commend the school for its more than satisfactory performance over the years. I thank the teachers, classroom assistants and administration staff for their commitment and good work on behalf of the children.

The report praised, in particular, the response from the special educational needs co-ordinator, who provides effective support to pupils in the school. The report highlights another of the school's strengths, which is to identify children who are underachieving. Those children are then given short-term intensive support in booster groups, which appears to have a very positive influence in helping children to make good progress in areas of need.

It is important that problems are identified early. That means that they can be addressed faster, children are not left behind for too long, and shorter interventions are required. For many years, I worked with immigrant children. If such children get intensive help, within a year or two, miracles happen. They progress in leaps and bounds. It is important that they are given that priority attention in booster groups.

Another important measure is the school linking up with other areas of expertise. Taughmonagh certainly seems to work very well with a number of outside agencies, including a neighbouring special school and support from the Belfast Education and Library Board. A multidisciplinary approach provides a more comprehensive response to meet the differing needs of the children in the school.

Although I support the call from every Member who spoke for more SEN provision, smaller classes and greater access to educational psychologists, there is also a need to look at the wider issues facing the Taughmonagh community. We learn from the report that almost half of the children at the school get free meals, which is a clear indication of deprivation in the community. There is a need to look at a more holistic approach to help the community. An interdepartmental approach is needed and a

concerted effort to tackle poverty, unemployment and training needs in the area.

The school must work with parents to involve them in their children's educational and developmental progress. Early years education programmes such as Sure Start should be put in place to give children a head start. Parenting programmes are also beneficial to parents and enhance them in helping their children's early development. All in all, tackling special needs alone is not enough for the Taughmonagh community, which faces the full spectrum of disadvantage.

#### 4.45 pm

**Mr McDevitt:** I join Mr Spratt and colleagues in supporting the call for special attention to be paid to Taughmonagh Primary School.

As colleagues noted, and as the Minister knows well because he was present for the opening, the new school really is a beautiful facility. It is a really nice space and a lovely learning environment. Those of us who are privileged enough to do this job and have the opportunity to visit all the schools in our area know that this school community is very warm and welcoming. I know that Mrs Douds puts huge emphasis on keeping that warm, friendly, family environment in her school, and it is very obvious that that environment, despite the challenges that many of the kids who go to the school face, is never, ever compromised.

Colleagues have covered the vast majority of what I would have wanted to say at this stage, but there are a couple of points of context that might be worth putting on the record. The shifting demographics of our constituency and the acute socio-economic divisions in South Belfast, on which every Member who has spoken so far has reflected, mean that a small number of our schools end up, through circumstance, I guess, having to cope with a disproportionately large number of children and young people with particularly special requirements. It is a hidden problem inside what is otherwise a very affluent place.

Indeed, Taughmonagh is a very beautiful place. It is a leafy place, and it is a community that has spent a huge amount of time in the past couple of decades investing in itself, and, when you walk around there, you know it. It feels like a community that is on the turn, but, still and all, because of the divisions and inequalities that exist in South Belfast today — ironically, they are not necessarily to do with community inequality but to do with financial inequality and

inequality of means — the school bears a disproportionate burden.

My colleagues have said that they are very fortunate to have Harberton Special School close by. There have been good inter-school partnerships, and specialist teachers have been able to offer up some time. However, it is an opportunity for the Minister to explore very specific and targeted support programmes. Taughmonagh would not pop up in the wider map of social or economic need because it is ironed out by the affluence around it. Yet and all, the school has particularly special requirements.

The great thing about Taughmonagh is that all of us have absolute confidence in the school team. We know that, if resources were directed towards it, they would be used really well and stretched as far as they possibly could, and the outputs would be brilliant. As proof of that, it is worth noting that the nursery in Taughmonagh is one of the most oversubscribed in our constituency. Indeed, many of the families who live in the very large houses in immediate proximity to Taughmonagh, on both sides of the community divide, are very keen that their kids are able to attend that nursery. That is proof of the culture and positive atmosphere that exists around the primary school.

Without detaining the House any more, I urge the Minister to reflect on what has been said to him by every one of us who has the privilege of representing our little part of Belfast. I assure him, in the full certainty that he will find it within his means to make some investment in this school and acknowledge its special circumstances, that we have absolute confidence that that investment will pay dividends — and good dividends at that.

**Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Spratt for securing the debate, and I thank Members for the tone of the debate. It has been informative and useful in raising a number of issues with the special educational requirements of pupils attending Taughmonagh Primary School.

Indeed, once again, it emphasised, as all Members did, that we are dealing with a very good school, namely Taughmonagh Primary School. In recent years, it has seen investment in the fabric of the school, and I was delighted to be invited to the school's opening. I found it a very enjoyable event, with the community, parents and pupils all taking part and presenting a very good and happy school to all those who attended. It is a credit to them.

The investment in the fabric of the school is, in itself, a statement to the community of Taughmonagh that the Executive, the Department and the education board have not forgotten about them and that they want to make a difference to people's lives. However, it was not a final statement; we have to continue to make provision to change young people's lives in that area.

The Belfast Education and Library Board and my Department are aware of the social anomaly that exists around the school being set in a rather affluent area but suffering from social deprivation and the challenges faced by the school. The board endeavours to ensure that the school benefits from all the initiatives that are available. The school has been in the Achieving Belfast programme since the project started and has benefited from additional support and resources as a result of its participation. Those have included an additional allocation of teaching support, statistical analysis of pupil data and target setting, and enhanced psychology — though I take on board the comments that were made by Mr Spratt on that matter.

This is not a defence; it is just a statement: funding for special educational needs has been ring-fenced. It has not been subject to the cuts that have been made to budgets elsewhere. However, I accept that even that ring-fenced budget is not enough. We need to continue to seek investment for that budget. I have assured special educational needs providers that that budget has been ring-fenced. It will not face the cuts that other areas have faced. However, a challenge still exists there.

The Belfast Education and Library Board would say that the impact of the measures that it has taken has been positive. In the past, Taughmonagh Primary School has also been supported through parenting programmes. The school has made very positive links with the communities, as local representatives are aware.

There are three special speech and language units in the school. That skews the number of pupils who are recorded as having special educational needs. Children from throughout Belfast attend Taughmonagh Primary School. It is recognition of how good a school it is that parents are prepared to travel across the city to have their children attend the school. In the 2011-12 year, there were in the school around 32 pupils from the Taughmonagh estate with special educational needs.

Special educational needs covers a very wide range of issues that a child may face. Those issues may be lifelong or a challenge to the child at that moment in time. They may be physical or psychological. They may be as a result of bereavement or something that has happened in the family at that time, and the child will require special interventions, such as reading or language support. A lot of that support can be, and is, delivered by the classroom teacher. In other circumstances, in which children have statements, etc, a classroom assistant or further support may be provided. In general, a lot of that support is provided through the school.

I have never ever said that the Education budget is sufficient for all of the challenges that we face. To the credit of schools like Taughmonagh, they continue to battle forward to provide a good education — excellent education in many instances — to young people and those with SEN. However, I accept that we should not take them for granted.

I will take on board the comments that were made by Members on a number of issues, such as the availability of child psychologists. I will follow that up further with the board. Over the years, we have run a number of initiatives to recruit child psychologists. The Department co-funds courses at Queen's University. In the past, we have had difficulty recruiting. I am not saying that that is the problem now. However, we have had difficulty recruiting board psychologists in the past. I will follow up that matter with the school, as requested by Mr Spratt and others.

As regard the broader SEN programme and how we deliver support to children with special educational needs, we are dealing with a system that has been place for around 25 years. It is slow, cumbersome and difficult to access.

As I am sure Members are aware from their constituency clinics, when children are in the system, it can be very frustrating for parents and, indeed, for schools. It is one of the reasons why my predecessor brought forward the SEN review. It attracted around 3,500 responses. It has taken us time to work our way through those responses and to come to an agreed format.

I have been in detailed discussions with the Committee for Education. Those discussions have proved fruitful. We have brought to the Executive a policy memorandum, on which we have received approval. We will bring legislation to the House next year that will

speed up the assessment process, put in place a more rigorous programme of work around the special educational needs of young people and empower schools more. As part of the preparation for that, we have been running a number of pilot schemes, in which Taughmonagh has been involved. The evaluation of the schemes will continue. I think that it is important that a school such as Taughmonagh was involved in a pilot scheme, because it is at the coalface of changes to existing SEN policy. We want it to be able to help shape future SEN policy and how we deliver special educational needs provision to our young people.

I cannot emphasise enough how well Taughmonagh Primary School is doing. As I emphasised, I am not taking it for granted. I will look at and follow up all the concerns raised by Members today.

It is worth putting on the record again that the percentage of SEN pupils leaving school with five or more GCSEs at grades A to C and with two or more A levels at grades A to E has more than doubled over the past five years. It is the foundation stage provided at primary school that has allowed us to do that.

At Taughmonagh Primary School, the percentage of pupils assessed as achieving level 2 or above in Key Stage 2 English has risen from 33.3% in 2008 to 68.2% in 2010-11. That is an amazing improvement and statistic, and it is a credit to the school. The equivalent figures for maths show an increase from 46.7% to 63.6%. Again, that is a credit to the school. Members referred to the chief inspector's report, which also highlights the improving nature of Taughmonagh.

I will end by saying this: I assure Members that my Department and the Belfast Board will contact Taughmonagh school; reassess the programmes of work taking place there; familiarise it with the programmes of change coming through for SEN; and identify any specific issues that we may be able to assist it with. I am not suggesting that we have an open chequebook, but if there are specific issues that we have not properly identified or resourced, I think that there is a duty on us to look at them again and see whether we can assist the school further than we have done in previous years. As all Members said, Taughmonagh Primary School is doing an excellent job under very difficult circumstances.

*Adjourned at 4.57 pm.*







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