

The Highland Council

Education, Children and Adult Services – 12 November 2014

Agenda Item	4.
Report No	ECAS 43/14

Audit Scotland Report

Report by Director of Care and Learning

Summary

This report provides a brief summary to introduce the Audit Scotland Report on School Education, and identifies key strategies for how the recommendations of the report might be taken forward in Highland.

1. Background

- 1.1 Education is fundamental in shaping a child's life. Getting a good education improves the likelihood of earning a higher income, enjoying better health and living longer. An effective school education system is an important factor in supporting the Scottish Government's strategic objectives to be a 'Smarter Scotland' and a 'Wealthier and Fairer Scotland'. Better educational outcomes are a strong predictor of economic growth, and success in a global economy means that Scotland needs to keep pace with the best countries in the world.
- 1.2 In 2013, there were 665,499 primary and secondary pupils in Scotland being taught by 47,770 teachers in 2,418 council-run schools. Education is compulsory between the ages of five and 16. Children spend seven years in primary school (P1-P7) and at least four years in secondary school (S1-S4). Pupils can then leave school at 16 or stay on for one or two more years (S5 and S6). Pupils undertake a range of qualifications between S4 and S6. These are delivered not only in schools but also through colleges and third sector organisations. Pupil numbers have been declining since the mid-nineties, but started to increase in 2013 and are projected to continue increasing.
- 1.3 The main organisations involved in the Scottish education system are:
 - The Scottish Government, develops national policy and sets the overall direction of education policy.
 - Councils are responsible under the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000 for providing school education for every child of school age. This includes developing local education policy, and planning and managing resources to improve the quality of school education.
 - Education Scotland, works to improve the quality of education, for example by inspecting schools and by developing the curriculum.
 - The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), accredits and awards qualifications at both secondary and college level.
 - The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, manages the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. This sets out the level and type

of qualifications that are available.

- The General Teaching Council Scotland is the independent professional body that regulates all teachers in Scotland.

1.4 In 2002, the then Scottish Executive set up a 'National Debate on Education' to develop its long-term education policy. A year later, it established a Curriculum Review Group to identify the purposes of education for the 3-18 age range and to determine key principles for curriculum design. The group published its report, *A Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)* in 2004, setting out the aims of education and the principles that should underpin the modern curriculum.

1.5 Exam performance (attainment) is an integral part of the system, but CfE also aims to ensure pupils develop a range of skills for living and working in the wider world (wider achievement). Pupils receive a broad general education from early years through to the end of S3 and take formal qualifications in the senior phase. CfE was formally implemented in schools in 2010.

2. About this Report

2.1 School education accounts for a significant proportion of local government spending, and a number of important education policy developments have taken place in recent years, such as the introduction of CfE. However, there has been no independent evaluation of how much councils spend on education and what this delivers in terms of improved attainment and wider achievement for pupils. 2014 is the first year in which pupils are sitting new qualifications introduced as part of CfE. Comparisons with previous years will not be possible for some time. This audit is therefore timely as it provides an assessment of attainment over the last decade and identifies how effectively councils made improvements during this time.

2.2 The audit assessed how efficiently and effectively councils are using their resources to maximise pupil achievement in schools. It examined:

- how much councils spend on school education and what they spend it on
- how effectively councils are driving forward improvements in pupil achievement
- how efficiently councils are using their resources to maximise pupil achievement.

2.3 The audit focused on primary and secondary school education in Scotland. It did not examine early years, pre-school, or special school education; independent schools; or further and higher education establishments. It also did not look at progress in implementing CfE or the quality of teaching in Scotland. It reviewed how councils deliver education, but did not examine the role of the Scottish Government, Education Scotland or other stakeholders such as the SQA.

2.4 There is a range of attainment measures used within Scottish education. The audit identified ten of these, to examine performance across the entire senior phase, S4-S6. The selected measures are closely aligned to the measures that councils report to their own education committees.

2.5 This report has three parts:

- Part 1 examines how much councils spend on education and how this has changed
- Part 2 assesses exam performance over the last decade for S4-S6 and examines what wider achievement activities are available for pupils to prepare

them for life and work

- Part 3 comments on what councils have been doing to improve attainment and wider achievement and how they are targeting their resources to seek improvement.

2.6 The report is available at http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2014/nr_140619_school_education.pdf and there will be a presentation by Audit Scotland at the Committee.

3. Key Messages of the Report

3.1 In 2012/13, councils spent £4.8 billion on education services, of which £3.8 billion was spent on primary and secondary education. Around two-thirds of this expenditure (68 per cent) was on staff costs. Councils' spending on education fell by five per cent in real terms between 2010/11 and 2012/13, largely as a result of employing fewer staff. Councils' education services are likely to continue to face budgetary pressures, and they need to be alert to the potential impact of increased workloads on remaining staff.

3.2 Performance has improved against all ten of the attainment measures examined over the last decade. However, there is significant variation in attainment between individual councils, schools, and groups of pupils; and there is a considerable gap between Scotland and the top performing countries. Current measures at both national and council level focus on the attainment of secondary pupils at S4-S6 level. There are no comparable measures available at a council and national level on wider achievement, or the performance of pupils from P1-S3.

3.3 Levels of deprivation have a large influence on attainment. Some schools have achieved better attainment results than their levels of deprivation would indicate, suggesting that the gap between the lowest and highest performing schools cannot be wholly attributed to different levels of deprivation. Closing the gap in performance between schools is likely to be critical to improving overall attainment levels.

3.4 Councils that have made the most improvements have focused on areas such as developing leadership skills, and improving both teacher quality and systems for monitoring and tracking pupil data. There are also increasing opportunities for pupils to develop a wide range of skills for living and working in the wider world. Councils are starting to target resources to improve both attainment and wider achievement, but there is scope to improve strategic planning and strengthen the role of elected members in holding education services to account.

4. Recommendations of the Report

4.1 The Curriculum for Excellence represents a significant shift in the way education is delivered in our schools. This has important implications for the economic wellbeing of Scotland, and the future prospects of young people. The recommendations are intended to support further progress and will involve councils working with key stakeholders.

4.2 Councils should:

- ensure they fully understand why levels of attainment vary between their schools and different groups of pupils.

- develop and implement strategies to reduce the gaps in performance between the highest and lowest performing schools.
- continue to work with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to develop a suite of agreed performance measures which would provide an overall picture of educational attainment and achievement across Scotland.
- review the sufficiency of information provided to education committees on attainment at S4-S6, pupil performance between P1-S3 and wider achievement. They should also ensure committees have the time and support to adequately challenge and hold to account education services.
- develop more coordinated approaches to gathering and recording information on the range of wider achievement activities offered in schools, including the levels of pupil participation and the outcomes they achieve. This will help councils to scrutinise performance and ensure resources are being used as efficiently as possible.
- ensure education strategic documents contain clear priorities and actions that set out what is to be achieved in the short, medium and long term. Performance management arrangements should monitor outcomes and report regularly on delivery against strategic objectives, such as raising attainment among the lowest performing pupils.
- consistently use the Scottish Local Government Benchmarking Framework to compare their performance against other councils, and share good practice to improve educational attainment and wider achievement.
- fully assess the potential long-term impact on attainment and wider achievement of budget reductions.
- monitor and act on the impact of revised working practices and staff reductions across all affected groups (e.g., teachers, administrative staff, classroom assistants) on staff wellbeing by, for example, monitoring sickness absence levels, and through specific questions in staff surveys.

5. A Highland Strategy

5.1 It is intended that the following actions will be carried out as part of the Highland response to this report:

- Detailed analysis of the report by the Quality Improvement Team.
- Key improvement outcomes identified.
- Collect examples of good practice from across Scotland's highest performing Authorities.
- Match key improvement outcomes against existing schools improvement plan.
- Establish a '**Closing the Gap**' working group which will focus on closing the attainment gap between our highest performing students.
- Establish a number of work streams which will deliver our key outcomes.
- Identify resources required to deliver the key outcomes.
- Establish a review process which will keep members aware of progress being made.

6. Implications

- 6.1 This report is fundamental to the delivery of education across our schools, as part of mainstream resources and any additional funding for initiatives.
- 6.2 There are no Legal; Equalities; Climate Change/Carbon Clever; Risk, Gaelic and Rural implications.

7. Recommendation

Members asked to note and comment on the contents of the report and to agree to endorse the measures recommended as part of a Highland strategy.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

Date: 4 November 2014

Author: Jim Steven Head of Education

Background Papers: Audit Scotland Report

http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2014/nr_140619_school_education.pdf