

The Highland Council
Education, Children and Adult Services
26 January 2017

Agenda Item	13.
Report No	ECAS 09/17

Closing the Attainment Gap

Report by Director of Care and Learning

Summary

The report summarises progress on the “Scottish Attainment Challenge” in designated Highland Council schools, in the context of the wider Highland strategic plan.

1. Background

- 1.1 In Highland, 1537 Primary and 1006 Secondary School children live in the most deprived data zones - Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Deciles 1 and 2. Approximately 55% of these pupils attend the five Primary and four Secondary Schools supported directly by the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) funding.
- 1.2 In Highland and across Scotland, those children and young people living in the most deprived data zones have a poorer school experience. They have poorer attendance, are less likely to achieve qualifications, are more likely to be excluded from school, are less likely to enter Higher Education, and are more likely to be unemployed after leaving school. The Scottish Attainment Challenge is aimed at addressing these gaps in outcomes. The impact of interventions will take time to affect these inequities, as the children and young people benefiting from additional funding move through the education system.
- 1.3 The five Primary Schools, now in Year 2 of the programme are: Bishop Eden Primary (Inverness), Coulhill Primary (Alness), Merkinch Primary (Inverness), Milton Primary (Milton) and Newton Park Primary (Wick).
- 1.4 The four Secondary Schools, still in Year 1, are all associated with the Primaries mentioned above: Alness Academy, Invergordon Academy, Inverness High School and Wick High School.
- 1.5 In each case the Head Teacher - in consultation with an Education Scotland Attainment Adviser, Highland Council’s Strategic Quality Improvement Manager, and the relevant Quality Improvement Officer - submitted a bid for resources incorporating a plan detailing how the allocated funding would be spent.

2. Funding Allocation

- 2.1 In the Primary Schools mentioned above, funding has been granted as follows (pending final approval of all details):
 - Bishop Eden Primary – Year 1: £14,018, Year 2: £53,688
 - Coulhill Primary – Year 1: £50,460, Year 2: £63,356
 - Merkinch Primary – Year 1: £16,703, Year 2: £74,272

- Milton Primary – Year 1: £12,800, Year 2: £44,764
- Newton Park Primary – Year 1: £27,400, Year 2: £46,705

2.2 In the Secondary Schools mentioned above, funding has been granted as follows (pending final approval of all details):

- Alness Academy – Year 1 only: £73,731
- Invergordon Academy – Year 1 only: £71,576
- Inverness High School – Year 1 only: £80,035
- Wick High School – Year 1 only: £86,102

2.3 In session 2016/17, a proportion of the above Primary school funding, totalling £187,256, has been allocated to Highland Council for recruitment of staff to support the projects being undertaken in the Primary Schools (further details below), since Head Teachers cannot recruit these posts directly. This allocation was intended to move the pace of the development of the project forward, as Primary Head Teachers had been unable to appoint staff identified in their Year 1 plans.

3. Improvement Activities

3.1 A number of over-arching engagements are underway. A coherent, progressive Primary School reading programme has been devised and shared with all of the SAC Primaries. The newly appointed Literacy Development Officer has started to monitor the use and embedding of this in four primaries, and will work on evaluating its effectiveness. Initial observations of improved motivation and enthusiasm for reading are positive.

3.2 Baseline assessments have been completed in all five Primaries. There is a focus on developing Emerging Literacy strategies, principally phonological awareness.

3.3 Partnership involvement from the Educational Psychology and Speech & Language Therapy Services is growing, as are established links through High Life Highland, who promote and develop opportunities through culture and health & wellbeing initiatives. A SAC Strategy group is in the process of being established with representation from these partners. This strategy group will work to ensure that future improvement work designed to close the attainment gap reflects integrated working, is sustainable, is founded on research-based interventions and is carefully monitored in terms of impact.

3.4 Work to embed the use of the Risk Matrix (which collates data on absence, SIMD, Additional Support Needs, Looked After Children, Free School Meals entitlement and Young Carers and other key markers) and the creation of an exemplar Assessment of Pupil Progress Tracker in the SAC Primary Schools, is raising awareness and improving the analysis and use of data to target at-risk pupils. Schools are building their own progress trackers to ensure that pupils at risk of under-attaining (for whatever reason) are identified quickly, and interventions are put in place.

3.5 A 0.2 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Educational Psychologist is co-ordinating support within the service across the nine SAC schools. Training packages are being created to support Nurturing Schools, Social Psychology and Core Relationships, Persistent Difficulties with Literacy and Building Mathematical Resilience Through

Parental Involvement.

- 3.6 A 1.0 FTE Literacy Development Officer is expanding the literacy plan in four of the SAC primary schools by developing reading programmes, auditing reading resources and embedding the phonological awareness strand of Emerging Literacy. Work with the Emerging Literacy Team to develop Oral Language across Early Level is continuing. This work will be important in closing the equity gap, especially when support is targeted on pupils with the greatest needs. The Speech & Language Therapy Service is currently recruiting SLT Assistants to support language development work in schools. Therapist expertise is influencing the continuing development of Emerging Literacy (in the SAC schools and across Highland schools). The Speech & Language Therapy Service is also committed to using some of the SAC funding to research ongoing literacy interventions.
- 3.7 Primary school staff have worked very hard to implement Emerging Literacy Phonological Awareness strategies, appoint and train their own Pupil Support Assistants, and use data to help them identify target groups and individual pupils. Reading has been a focus in all five SAC Primaries, with a new reading programme based on the Oxford Criterion Scale being shared and adapted accordingly. Enthusiasm and increased engagement in reading has been observed in all five schools.
- 3.8 Teacher Learning Communities aimed at the SAC schools are developing, following ongoing Tapestry Partnership sessions on “Great Teaching Great Learning”. Teachers participating in this training are taking on leadership roles in disseminating good practice within their schools.
- 3.9 Work in Secondary schools is moving forward where staffing allows (see below). The engagement of specialists to deliver courses in learning and teaching and to assist with the analysis of data can be expensive, but this is accelerating the pace and expected success of implementation. Head Teachers have clear, measurable short and medium term targets. They have already established that Year 1 plans will continue on into Year 2 without much change.
- 3.10 In brief, work in the SAC Secondary Schools includes the following:
- **Alness Academy** is introducing a “Building Learning Power” project, which is designed to improve the way that young people engage with their education, and will also be developing the way in which young people at risk of under-attaining are mentored by school staff. There will also be focused work on literacy and numeracy, especially in the Broad General Education phase of the school, where there will be increased emphasis on young people and their families having high expectations of success.
 - **Invergordon Academy** will be focusing on literacy development and cross-ASG working, building on involvement with the Tapestry Partnership project. In addition, there will be family link working, supported by partner agencies, to improve attendance, behaviour, attitudes to school and parental engagement. The aim is to develop family learning programmes, for example around healthy eating.
 - **Inverness High School** will be working on supporting pupils experiencing challenging circumstances with additional health and wellbeing coaching, family link work and Educational Psychology input. There will also be some family working to improve literacy for pupils at risk of under-attaining.
 - **Wick High School** will be developing nurture based approaches and

programmes to increase social, emotional and behavioural competencies of young people at the school. In line with the National Improvement Framework, the emphasis will be on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, as well as on the school staff's capacity to lead and implement improvement.

3.11 Fuller details of the improvement activities in each of the SAC schools are held in the detailed action plans that are overseen by the Head Teachers, the Attainment Adviser and the Quality Improvement Team. Preparation of these plans has required a substantial amount of work for the schools involved, especially the Head Teachers. The ongoing monitoring of progress will also require significant investment of time.

4. Recruitment and Funding issues

4.1 The implementation of the Primary and Secondary School plans has been more challenging than expected because of difficulties with recruitment of staff to support the school projects.

4.2 Without the appointment of key staff, the sustainability, reach and educational benefits of SAC in Highland will have reduced impact. However, there is the potential for this to impact on the staffing of other schools and services across the authority, and there are particular challenges when the Council is likely to be reducing its overall workforce.

4.3 The 'draw down' process for accessing Government funding is also presenting difficulty, as reserves are required to pay staff and resources purchased before the Authority claims these back.

5. Innovation Funding

5.1 In addition to the funding described above, a further thirteen schools or Associated Schools Groups are working on Innovative Funding projects, directly funded by the Scottish Government. Schools were invited to bid for funding to develop projects designed to target pupils at risk of disadvantage. Projects underway (built into school-based improvement plans) are as follows:

- Hilton Primary – Developing Oral Language
- Dornoch Academy – Windmills Cafe
- Kinlochleven High School – Mindfulness – Mental Health First Aid, Counselling, Senior Mentors
- Wick High School – Improve quality of writing in S1 English and Social Subjects
- Portree High School – Leadership: Outward Bound/Columba 1400
- Nairn Academy – Big Writing Programme
- Grantown Grammar – Health and wellbeing: purchase of Mountain bikes and creation of mountain bike skills course
- Eigg Primary School – Build Outdoor classroom
- Lybster Primary School – Learn through play: Obstacle course, imaginative play zones and outdoor classroom
- Dunbeath Primary School – Better play, Better learning: Scrapstore playpod
- Inverness High School ASG – Numeracy strategies: a consistent approach from Primary into Secondary
- Kingussie ASG – TV Literacy and Numeracy resources/Creation of Reading

spaces

- Golspie High School ASG – Maths Mastery Programme

5.2 Further funding to develop “Teens and Toddlers” mentoring projects at Charleston Academy, Kinmylies Primary, Dingwall Academy, Dingwall Primary, Inverness High School and Hilton Primary has been overseen by Highland Council.

6. Strategic Planning and Implementation

6.1 The Scottish Attainment Challenge project for Highland schools forms part of the ‘Closing the attainment gap’ agenda in Highland. The national priorities of achieving excellence and equity are being integrated into all training events, to promote a clearer understanding of aims and outcomes.

6.2 Effective use of data to identify and address the attainment gap should be incorporated into school planning this session, as stated in the authority improvement plan. To support this agenda, there have been several data training days for managers, with more planned this term. These events focus on best practise in tracking, monitoring and assessment, in the context of equity and excellence, with effective use of the new Risk Matrix data pack to facilitate this.

6.3 Constructing and using effective key assessment tasks is fundamental to assessing children’s progress, to inform next steps to meet individual need. Highland Council has also been allocated Innovation Funding, which is being used to fund training for teachers across Highland delivered by the Tapestry Partnership. This work is focused on developing effective use of summative assessment in enabling pupils to understand the next steps in their learning: research shows that this is of critical importance in developing the learning of children and young people who are at risk of under-attainment.

6.4 As part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge strategy in Highland, key development staff have been employed to work across some of the schools (on literacy and nurture). The strategic aim of these appointments is to promote sharing of good practice, as well as comparing strategies in different contexts, which will help inform the roll out in other Highland schools.

7. Future work

7.1 As all of the projects mentioned above develop, careful monitoring of the impact will be essential. Such monitoring is complicated by the fact that these developments are not happening in isolation; instead, they form part of a range of improvement activities and interventions being implemented at school level, funded through the Attainment Challenge monies, through DSM budgets or indeed in some cases with no specific funding. It will not, therefore, be straightforward to map impact against funding and interventions.

7.2 However, the gathering of data will help us to establish what appears to work in terms of closing the attainment gap, and will allow us to share successful approaches with other schools (and interventions in schools are already based on research evidence from elsewhere in Scotland and from other educational systems). Intensive work with the nine SAC schools will continue.

7.3 As evidence of the impact of the various interventions becomes available, this will

be shared further with the Committee.

- 7.4 The Scottish Government has also now announced the Pupil Equity Fund from 2017/18, which will be used to allocate funding directly to schools on the basis of children's and young people's free school meal entitlement - with £1,200 being allocated to the school for each eligible pupil. Almost all of Highland's schools will receive money from the Pupil Equity Fund, and considerable work will be required to support Head Teachers as they develop plans on how to target specific pupils with their financial allocation. Further information on the Pupil Equity Fund will be provided by the Scottish Government early in 2017.

8. Implications

- 8.1 **Resources** - There are no additional resource implications in terms of a financial commitment from the Council. However there is challenge in being able to provide adequate backfill to support secondments to these additional temporary posts. Also, resourcing the initial output of costs prior to being reimbursed has proven challenging. The detailed arrangements for the future pupil equity funding across all schools has yet to be determined but this will also potentially present further challenges in terms of the administration, facilitating and reporting processes.
- 8.2 There are no **legal, equalities, climate change/carbon clever, risk, Gaelic or rural** implications arising from this report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 The Committee is asked to scrutinise and note this report on progress in the "Scottish Attainment Challenge" programme.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

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