



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY 21 APRIL 2015
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar (Convener)
Councillor D Berry
Provost L Broun-Lindsay
Councillor A Forrest
Councillor D Grant
Councillor J Gillies (Items 1 – 3)
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor W Innes (Items 1 – 3)
Councillor M Libberton
Councillor P MacKenzie
Councillor F McAllister
Councillor P McLennan (Items 1 – 3)
Councillor J McNeil
Councillor M Veitch (Items 1 – 3)
Councillor J Williamson
Mrs M Goldsmith
Mr M McHugh

Council Officials Present:

Mr D Nightingale, Head of Education
Ms J McCabe, Senior Solicitor
Mr R Parker, Service Manager – Education (Strat & Ops)
Ms A Mitchell, Service Manager – Education (ASN & Early Years)
Ms A Hood, Team Leader - Employability
Ms P Smith, Principal Officer (Information & Research)
Ms J Ogden-Smith, Communications Officer
Mr P Reynolds, Head Teacher – Ross High School
Ms L Rodger, Head Teacher - North Berwick High School
Ms Y Binks, Depute Head Teacher – Preston Lodge High School

Clerk:

Ms F Currie, Committees Assistant

Apologies:

Councillor S Brown
Councillor J Caldwell
Councillor S Currie
Mr S Bunyan

Ms G Gillan

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY 2014-2016

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources & People Services) to update the Committee on the Accessibility Strategy 2014-2016.

The Service Manager – Education (ASN & Early Years), Alison Mitchell, presented the report advising Members that the draft Strategy had been approved by the Committee in September 2014, pending consultation with relevant stakeholders. The consultation ran from January to February 2015 and despite promotion there were no responses. Ms Mitchell now sought the Committee's approval of the finalised Strategy.

Responding to questions from Members, Ms Mitchell advised that the Strategy applied to all children with additional support needs and would ensure that they had access to all areas of the school curriculum and extra-curricular activities, such as sports. The Head of Education, Darrin Nightingale, indicated that the Sport Advisory Group was looking at the issue of access for all pupils and would shortly be meeting with representatives of Scottish Rugby Union. He welcomed Councillor McLennan's offer of contact details for the Scottish Football Association.

The Convenor commended the Education Accessibility Strategy as an important step in promoting positive attitudes to disability.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) approve the Accessibility Strategy 2014-2016 and authorise the distribution of the Strategy to all educational establishments in East Lothian;
- (ii) authorise the implementation of the Action Plan resulting from the Accessibility Strategy 2014-2016; and
- (iii) authorise a review of consultation procedures and consultation on an annual basis.

2. HEAD TEACHER APPOINTMENTS

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources & People Services) to inform the Committee of the Head Teacher appointments made by the Appointments Sub Committee.

Mr Nightingale presented the report inviting Members to note the appointment of four new Head Teachers, who were all now in post.

The Convenor welcomed the report and thanked officers and those volunteers involved in the recruitment process.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the report.

3. REPORTING ON THE NATIONAL BENCHMARKING MEASURES (SENIOR PHASE) TO 2014 AND THE NEW NATIONAL BENCHMARKING TOOL, “INSIGHT”

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources & People Services) to inform the Committee of:

- (i) the release of the new Scottish Government senior phase (S4 to S6) national benchmarking tool, “Insight”, across Scotland;
- (ii) the changes to reporting on attainment and achievement of pupils in the senior phase in East Lothian, using information from ‘Insight’; and
- (iii) the trends in attainment and achievement in the senior phase, including Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) performance, in East Lothian for academic session 2013/14, using the national benchmarking measures from Insight.

Mr Nightingale introduced the report providing a brief overview of the qualifications available to pupils in S1 to S6. He indicated that this report would focus on achievements within the Senior Phase (S4 to S6) and he invited Paul Reynolds, Head Teacher of Ross High School, to provide a summary of the new benchmarking tool, ‘Insight’, and the ‘virtual comparator’.

Mr Reynolds advised Members that the new online Senior Phase benchmarking tool, ‘Insight’, had been developed to replace the “Standard Tables and Charts” (STACs) publication and was made live in September 2014. He explained that it focused on four nationally agreed “National Benchmarking Measures” and compared pupils at different schools across Scotland based on a range of background characteristics. This ‘virtual comparator’ provided ten comparable results for each pupil and enabled schools in East Lothian to build a detailed picture of how their pupils’ attainment levels compared to pupils with similar backgrounds across the rest of the country.

In response to questions from Members, Mr Reynolds stated that ‘Insight’ included non-academic qualifications such as the John Muir Award and the Duke of Edinburgh Award and it encouraged schools to provide details of any qualifications not already included in its database. He confirmed that it covered all schools in Scotland and provided its assessment at pupil rather than school level thus offering a much fairer comparison. It did not, however, apply to non-state schools.

Mr Nightingale then moved on to the second part of the report which focussed the analysis of attainment levels throughout East Lothian during the past five years. Lauren Rodger, Head Teacher of North Berwick High School, provided a summary of the figures. She advised that East Lothian’s percentage performance had shown an improvement over the past five years with its highest performance to date in 2014. However, this was still lower than both the ‘virtual comparator’ and the national average. She then explained how this information was used by teaching staff and gave examples of the work being undertaken to continually improve attainment levels across secondary schools in East Lothian.

Ms Rodger concluded that the ‘virtual comparator’ provided far more specific information than ever before allowing staff to identify the actions and supports required to improve attainment for individual pupils.

Mr Nightingale and Ms Rodger responded a number of questions from Members regarding the figures contained within the report and how improvements might be made to current practice to improve future results.

Councillor Berry commented that while statistics were useful he would have preferred a briefer, more focused report which reached some conclusions about the way forward. He acknowledged that there was a variance in levels of attainment between secondary schools but felt that the report did not address the fact that some schools appeared not to have improved at all over the past five years.

Councillor MacKenzie thanked officers for their diligence and looked forward to seeing a continuing improvement next year.

The Convenor welcomed the report which highlighted the picture at both school and cluster level. She said that it was important to have an explanation of the figures and how they would be used to improve and drive forward standards across the county.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note:

- (i) the change to the benchmarking tool used to analyse SQA attainment data in the senior phase from Standard Tables and Charts (STACs) to Insight;
- (ii) the change in the way we analyse and evaluate levels of attainment and achievement in the senior phase in our secondary schools using Insight and the new local and national benchmarking measures;
- (iii) that the data contained within the report is based on the four national benchmarking measures, focusing on the performance of Leavers cohorts over the five years to 2014;
- (iv) that the four new national benchmarking measures reported by the Scottish Government Insight tool in February 2015 show that attainment and post school participation in East Lothian has improved over the five years to 2014;
- (v) that further improvements still need to be made in Literacy and Numeracy at SCQF Levels 5 and 6 or better and overall in the Middle 60% attaining grouping to bring East Lothian's performance more in line with the Virtual Comparator; and
- (vi) the results contained within the report and that the examination results inform and guide actions in each of the six secondary schools' School Improvement Plans.

4. POSITIVE SCHOOL LEAVER DESTINATIONS AND MORE CHOICES MORE CHANCES (MCMC)

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources & People Services) to update the Committee regarding positive school leaver destinations highlighting the recent School Leaver Destination Report (SLDR) and employability activity in East Lothian.

The Team Leader – Employability, Alison Hood, presented the report indicating that Skills Development Scotland provided information about leaver destinations on an annual basis to assist local authorities and schools in targeting resources effectively. She advised Members that East Lothian had continued to achieve increases with their positive destinations, most recently moving from 89.9% to 92.2% of young people leaving school and moving into employment, training and further education.

She explained that the results had been achieved through a multi agency approach offering a range of opportunities and support mechanisms for pupils to assist their transition into positive destinations.

In response to questions from Members, Ms Hood confirmed that the team attended careers fairs and recruitment events across the county to promote their agenda and that they had recently entered into partnership with Fort Kinnaird recruitment centre. In addition, their prevocational programme included activity agreements, careers coaches and aftercare for those young people who were yet to achieve a positive destination. She acknowledged that continued funding was an issue and that they were pursuing alternative options to replace 'Yes' funding which had ended in December 2014.

Councillor McAllister said that the Council should not lose sight of the most basic skills of literacy and numeracy and in the importance of developing pupils' social skills. However, he commended the innovative nature of the projects and the continuing improvement in results.

Councillor Berry commented that this was a very important element of the services provided by the Council and offered a lifeline to many school leavers. Councillor Goodfellow expressed his disappointment that 'Yes' funding was no longer available.

The Convenor thanked Ms Hood for her report and for the excellent work undertaken by her team.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) note the contents of this report;
- (ii) recognise the wide range of activities being undertaken to improve positive leaver destinations in East Lothian, in particular the work being undertaken to engage with the hardest to reach young people; and
- (iii) note the significant increase in the positive destinations which has moved from 89.9% to 92.2% of young people leaving school and moving into employment, training and further education.

Signed

Councillor Shamin Akhtar
Convener of the Education Committee