



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

**TUESDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2019
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar (Convener)
Councillor F Dugdale
Councillor J Findlay
Councillor A Forrest
Councillor N Gilbert
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor J Henderson
Councillor C Hoy
Councillor W Innes
Councillor S Kempson
Councillor P McLennan
Councillor J Williamson
Rev. G Sheridan
Ms Elizabeth Malcolm

Council Officials Present:

Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services)
Ms F Robertson, Head of Education
Mr R Parker, Service Manager – Education
Ms L Brown, Chief Operating Officer – Education
Ms P Smith, Principal Officer (Information & Research)
Mr N Trussler, Quality Improvement Officer
Ms J Allen, Communications Adviser
Ms B Crichton, Committees Officer
Mr J Revell, Head Teacher, Macmerry Primary School
Ms F Macartney, Head Teacher, Whitecraig Primary School

Others Present:

Mr S Gilmour-Jack, EIS Representative

Clerk:

Ms F Currie, Committees Officer

Apologies:

Ms G Gillan, EIS Representative

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON 11 JUNE 2019 FOR APPROVAL

The minutes of the Education Committee meeting on 11 June 2019 were approved.

2. EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES LOCAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2019-2020

The Convener began by making a presentation to Fiona Robertson in thanks for her work as Head of Education at East Lothian Council before she moved onto a new post.

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to seek the Committee's approval of the Education & Children's Service Local Improvement Plan 2019-2020.

Fiona Robertson, Head of Education and Children's Services, presented the report outlining specific areas for improvement in Education and in Children's Services. She noted that this was the first joint Local Improvement Plan between Education and Children's Services, and provided examples of ways in which the services worked collaboratively.

In response to questions from Councillors Forrest and Dugdale, Ms Robertson explained that the local authority would consider what needed to be put in place to enable a child to thrive in their own family; Children's Services staff focused on early intervention and family support to ensure children could stay in the community. She advised that Education and Children's Services were now identifying priorities from available data to take to partners to inform the Children's Strategic Partnership Plan, which would be scrutinised at a future committee meeting.

Councillor Gilbert requested information on improvements to be made to school buildings that had not been rated *good* or *satisfactory*, and questioned what would constitute a poor school building. Ms Robertson raised that Council had recently approved a move forward in the Learning Estate Review, the results of which would be brought back to Council; this would detail capital investment required to make improvements. She gave examples such as the need to replace windows, or repairs to a roof or heating system; the condition (fabric of the building), suitability (whether the building supported the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence), and sufficiency (capacity) would all be taken into account.

Councillor Goodfellow asked about the Scottish Government's plans for putting support staff in every secondary school area. Ms Robertson advised that the Scottish Government had now decided that, given the range of support already available in schools and communities, this would no longer be going forward; she advised that the local authority had submitted responses to raise that East Lothian families would have greatly benefitted from such support, and noted that schools identified as Scottish Attainment Challenge schools may well have spent Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) money on home-school link workers.

Responding to questions from Councillor Findlay, Ms Robertson advised that Curriculum for Excellence levels were still considered experimental data for key performance measures for achievement, and therefore should not be compared; the Education service would reflect on the data, but would remain aware of its experimental nature. On the subject of staff absence rates, she advised that schools were focused on staff wellbeing, and an afternoon had been built into the working time agreement.

She advised that sickness absence was being monitored across schools; although it was high, figures were improving. She stated that officers would continue to track and monitor the underlying reasons for absence to look after the wellbeing of staff.

Councillor Henderson questioned how close services were to meeting targets, given the time of year Committee were seeing the plan. Ms Robertson advised the process of self-evaluation began in May/June, with school improvement plans submitted in July, and key priority areas planned over the summer. She advised that at this stage, services sought to seek Councillors' agreement, and to allow them to scrutinise anything that may have been missed in terms of priority.

Councillor Hoy questioned the attainability of improvements in nursery provision in terms of the introduction of 1140 hours. Ms Robertson commented that quality was always a key area of focus in nursery provision, and unannounced Care Inspectorate visits took place to monitor this. Partners in the private sector also received support from the local authority, who made expectations clear in terms of provision and staffing. She noted that a new career progression route had been developed since the introduction of 1140 hours, and East Lothian had not seen problems with staffing rural nurseries.

Councillor Forrest welcomed the report and the work put in by the services; he noted that support was still needed from the Scottish Government, and even more could have been achieved had there been the provision of home-school link workers.

The Convener welcomed the report, which set out a vision for collaborative working with partners and clear targets aimed to increase opportunities and outcomes for East Lothian's young people. She noted that the local authority were continually lobbying the Scottish Government to access support afforded to Scottish Attainment Challenge schools.

Decision

The Committee approved the Education & Children's Service Local Improvement Plan 2019-2020.

3. EDUCATION SERVICE STANDARDS AND QUALITY REPORT 2018-2019

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to seek the Committee's approval of the Education Service Standards and Quality Report 2018-2019 and provide a summary of the quality of education provision and standards of attainment and achievement across schools in East Lothian.

Lesley Brown, Chief Operating Officer – Education, presented the report outlining key successes and progress made by the Education Service, as well as key challenges and opportunities facing the service for 2019-20 and beyond. She highlighted closing the poverty-related attainment gap as being a key priority for Education Services, as well as delivering on the Scottish Government's Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy, and reviewing how money was spent to support children and young people with additional support needs (ASN).

In response to a question from Councillor Williamson, Ms Brown confirmed that all of the estimated population of 3-4 year old children in East Lothian had accessed a funded early learning and childcare place in 2018/19.

Councillor Akhtar asked how East Lothian would ensure that play was promoted. Ms Brown stated that East Lothian continued to implement its play strategy, and noted that East Lothian had been the first local authority in Scotland to look at how to incorporate the benefits of play; some schools were beginning to become accredited as 'play-friendly schools'.

Councillor Goodfellow reiterated comments made at previous Education Committee meetings. He highlighted the Council's good use of PEF monies, but noted that it was approximately half of the amount that would have been received had Scottish Attainment Challenge funding been shared with greater equity.

Councillor Williamson highlighted the good work of ASN and outdoor education staff at Ross High School and Musselburgh Grammar, and thanked them for the difference they were making in the lives of young people.

The Convener commented that the improving trends noted in the report were the culmination of the hard work of staff. She remarked that there was much to learn from schools who had received positive inspections. She also highlighted the positive destinations achieved by school leavers and the favourable comparison to be made with other local authorities. She wished for the message to be passed on that the Committee appreciated the hard work of staff.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) note the positive progress made by the Education Service in delivery on the Council's Plan and the priorities within the National Improvement Framework;
- (ii) approve the Standards and Quality Report 2018-2019 and agree the improvements contained in the Standards and Quality Reports; and
- (iii) note that the draft Standards and Quality Report would be submitted to the Scottish Government in line with the Local Authority's statutory duty pending Committee approval.

4. EDUCATION SCOTLAND INSPECTION OF MACMERRY PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY CLASS

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to report to Committee on the outcomes of the Education Scotland inspection of Macmerry Primary School and Nursery Class.

Lesley Brown, Chief Operating Officer – Education, presented the report outlining the inspection findings and work being undertaken to improve outcomes at Macmerry Primary School, and gave information on the inspection process.

Ms Brown and Mr Jonathan Revell, head teacher at Macmerry Primary School, answered questions from Members.

Councillor Gilbert questioned whether the result of the inspection could have been predicted based on the knowledge East Lothian Council held of its schools. Ms

Robertson outlined evaluation procedures of the local authority and stated that the outcome had been predicted accurately by Education Services; although not proud of the inspection result itself, she voiced her pride in the staff taking forward work to improve the situation at Macmerry Primary School. She confirmed that work to improve standards was already being undertaken at the school prior to the inspection.

Referring to the leadership of change being evaluated as *weak* in the inspection report, Councillor Findlay questioned whether the nursery was ready to deliver 1140 hours. Mr Revell stated that the nursery had made a good start to the term and had a clear improvement plan; he was very confident that the nursery would be in a stronger position by the following year.

Responding to a question from the Convener, Mr Revell advised that additional help had been provided by the local authority, which was both needed and appreciated. He commented on the high proportion of the school population with additional support needs, particularly Autism Spectrum Disorder, and also noted that improvements were being made and a calmer learning environment had been established in the school.

Councillor Goodfellow commented that Mr Revell had created a caring environment within the school, which had been reflected in parental responses. He stated that staff knew children and families well, and PEF money had been used effectively by the school.

The Convener remarked that the school was the heart of the community in Macmerry, and commented on the importance of reporting to Committee on the school's progress.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) note the content of the Education Scotland letter;
- (ii) note the content of the Summary of Inspection Findings for the Primary School and Nursery Class (SIF);
- (iii) note the content of the Summary of Inspection Findings for the Nursery Class (SIF);
- (iv) note the change in Head Teacher and the significant steps taken by the Education Service and the school to implement planned improvements since the beginning of the academic session; and
- (v) note that Education Scotland would carry out a further inspection of the school within one year of the publication of the letter.

5. EDUCATION SCOTLAND INSPECTION OF WHITECRAIG PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY CLASS

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to report to Committee on the outcomes of the Education Scotland inspection of Whitecraig Primary School and Nursery Class.

Nick Trussler, Quality Improvement Officer, presented the report outlining the inspection reporting arrangements and inspection findings. He advised Members that Ms Fiona Macartney had taken on the role of interim head teacher as part of a whole-school strategy to improve consistency at Whitecraig Primary School.

Mr Trussler, Ms Macartney, Ms Robertson, and Ms Brown answered questions from members. On the subject of pace of change, Ms Macartney advised that excellent support had been provided by the local authority. She reported that staff remained committed to new approaches, as they were able to see the rationale and the impact; she passed on staff comments that the school was quite different now to when it was inspected. Mr Trussler added that the school had seen a change in culture under the leadership of Ms Macartney. Ms Robertson also provided Members with information about different inspection models used.

In response to a question from Councillor Williamson, Ms Brown advised that Ms Macartney would return to her substantive post as head teacher of Stoneyhill Primary School at the end of the school session and a recruitment campaign would be run to appoint a new head teacher. Ms Macartney advised that staff at Whitecraig had been able to plan and team teach alongside staff from Stoneyhill Primary School; staff had been upset by the inspection report and were taking opportunities to improve outcomes for pupils. Ms Robertson explained that comment was not provided around safeguarding and a general statement was used due to sensitivities around the subject; further discussion took place with the local authority.

Councillor Dugdale welcomed the pace of progress and the work being done to improve outcomes for pupils at Whitecraig Primary School Primary School, and requested that Members be kept updated of progress. Ms Robertson committed to taking forward the continuation of meetings to make Members aware of information held on schools within their wards.

The Convener asked Ms Macartney to pass on the Committee's thanks to staff for their hard work in ensuring better outcomes for pupils at Whitecraig Primary School, and welcomed further updates and reports on progress being made.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) note the content of the Education Scotland letter;
- (ii) note the content of the Summary of Inspection Findings for the Primary School and Nursery Class (SIF);
- (iii) note the content of the Summary of Inspection Findings for the Nursery Class (SIF);
- (iv) note the change in Head Teacher and the significant steps taken by the Education Service and the school to implement planned improvements since the beginning of the academic session; and
- (v) note that Education Scotland commended the accuracy of the East Lothian school review carried out in February 2019 and as a result indicated they would carry out a joint return visit with East Lothian Council within one year of the publication of the letter.

6. ATTENDANCE, ABSENCE AND EXCLUSIONS TO 2018/2019

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) informing the Committee of trends in school attendance and exclusion rates and to outline strategies and next steps to improve attendance and reduce absence and exclusions from schools in East Lothian.

Lesley Brown, Chief Operating Officer – Education, presented the report outlining trends in pupil attendance, absence and exclusion rates in East Lothian Schools. She highlighted that East Lothian had used Scottish Government funding to fund a Virtual Head Teacher for care-experienced young people. She also highlighted the work of the exclusion and attendance monitoring group; particular focus was being placed on children and young people with ASN, including care-experienced young people.

Responding to a question from Councillor Goodfellow, Ms Brown confirmed that East Lothian's definition of care-experienced young people matched that which the Scottish Government had set out, and all therefore qualified for the benefits afforded to care-experienced young people.

Councillor Gilbert questioned the consistency of authorising absence for family holidays across the county. Ms Robertson advised that the local authority's guidance to schools was to follow procedure, although extended periods of absence would come to the Head of Education for consideration of exceptional circumstances.

Councillor McLennan requested that data from individual schools be sent to ward members. Ms Robertson confirmed this would be possible.

In response to a question from Councillor Forrest, Ms Brown stated that young people needed to be in school to be able to achieve and attain; she noted that creative solutions had been seen to engage young people, and best practice would be shared.

The Convener thanked officers for the report. She remarked that a key message was that young people had to attend to achieve, and advised that more work was being done with the East Lothian Association of Parent Councils regarding attendance.

Decision

The Committee agreed to consider and note the reduction in exclusions and school days lost through exclusion.

7. SUMMARY OF ASN DATA IN EAST LoTHIAN

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to inform the Committee of trends in data relating to children and young people with additional support needs in mainstream schools in East Lothian schools.

Fiona Robertson, Head of Education and Children's Services, presented the report. She highlighted the increase in number of children who received a 27-30 month child health review, but decrease in the percentage of children being reviewed with no concerns. She noted that the highest rates of recorded ASNs were for children with social, emotional, and behavioural concerns. She also advised that work was

underway in a number of areas, including a GIRFEC refresh, a review of specialist provision for children with ASN, and engagement with stakeholders.

Responding to a question from Councillor Findlay regarding the differences in dyslexia figures between primary and secondary pupils, Ms Robertson advised that quality assurance, an audit, and a staff survey were about to take place for ASN to establish how well-equipped staff felt to support children with ASN.

Councillor McLennan questioned parental and wider engagement and whether information could be provided on a ward-to-ward basis. Ms Robertson advised that activities were underway to obtain the views of parents, children, and young people to review the delivery of support. She advised that workforce development was taking place to support the needs of learners. Councillor McLennan also questioned whether there would be additional demand for funding; he urged Education Services to ask for additional funding required to support children and young people with ASN. Ms Robertson advised that a number of actions were ongoing, such as professional development for staff and ensuring that all schools had access to support for learning teachers. She advised that although the service would not turn down additional funding, financial modelling had indicated that some aspects of the plans were likely to be relatively cost-neutral.

Councillor Dugdale questioned what work and interventions were being carried out to improve speech when this was an area of concern, particularly amongst boys, being identified at the 27-30 month child health review. Ms Robertson advised that the Getting it Right for Babies group was established with partners to help with the concerns being picked up at 27-30 month child health reviews, and work was being done with partners in health to put in place early intervention and prevention. She stated that the service would look at a strategic approach to ensure engagement with the most vulnerable.

Responding to a question from Councillor Henderson, Ms Smith advised that the table referred to discrete characteristics, but 3633 was the total number of pupils for whom there was at least one reason they required additional support.

Councillor Gilbert questioned how the condition of the school estate impacted on learners with ASN. Ms Robertson confirmed that all schools were assessed to ensure they were DDA-compliant in terms of accessibility, and advised that funding was in place to improve facilities at The Cove at Dunbar Primary School.

The Convener thanked officers for the report and highlighted the importance of early intervention with partners, and the development of a school equity profile dashboard.

Decision

The Committee agreed to consider and note the content of the report.

8. HEAD TEACHER APPOINTMENTS

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

The Convener offered her congratulations to the successful candidates.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the Head Teacher appointments.

Signed

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Councillor Shamin Akhtar
Convener of the Education Committee