



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
EDUCATION & CHILDRENS SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY 18 MARCH, 10:00am
VIA HYBRID SYSTEM**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor Dugdale – Convener
Councillor Findlay (remote)
Councillor Gilbert (remote)
Councillor Hampshire
Councillor McFarlane
Councillor McIntosh (remote) – left after item 3
Councillor Ritchie (remote)
Councillor Yorkston
Mr S Gilmour-Jack
Reverend Sheridan (remote)

Council Officials Present:

Ms L Brown - Executive Director of Education and Children's Services (remote)
Ms N McDowell - Head of Education
Ms H Barnett – Head of Corporate Support
Ms J Boyle – Quality Improvement Manager for Equity and Inclusion
Ms A Cameron – Service Manager – Early Years and Childcare (remote)
Ms B Skirrow - Principal Officer (Education Service) (remote)
Ms J Allen - Communications Adviser (remote)
Mr N Trussler – Quality Improvement Officer, Education
Ms A Harrison – Principal Educational Psychologist
Ms L Byrne – Head of Children's Services
Ms K Haspolat – Quality Improvement Officer, Education
Ms L Ayton – Principal Officer, Equity & Inclusion
Mr A Stewart – Quality Improvement Officer
Mr B Moffat – Service Manager, Transport & Waste
Ms D Murray – Transport Officer

Teachers Present:

Mr G Clark – Head Teacher, Preston Lodge High School
Ms Z Diggle – Head Teacher, Wallyford Primary School

Clerk:

Ms M Scott
Ms E Barclay

Other Elected Members present:

N/A

Apologies:

Councillor Menzies

Councillor Trotter
Councillor Bennett
Mr R Lesso

Declarations of Interest:

None

Prior to the commencement of business, the Clerk advised that the meeting was being held using the Council's hybrid system and that the meeting would be recorded and live streamed; and that it would be made available via the Council's website as a webcast, in order to allow public access to the democratic process in East Lothian. She stated that the Council is the data controller under the Data Protection Act 2018; that data collected as part of the recording would be retained in accordance with the Council's policy on record retention; and that the webcast of the meeting would be publicly available for up to six months from the date of the meeting.

The Clerk recorded attendance of committee members by roll call.

Councillor Dugdale welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee, particularly welcoming Head Teachers Gavin Clark – Preston Lodge High School and Zena Diggle – Wallyford Primary School. Councillor Dugdale commented on the sad passing of former Head Teacher of Dunbar Primary School, Helen Gillanders who was much loved and appreciated by everyone in the community and gave her thoughts to her family and everyone in the Dunbar community who had been affected by the sad loss.

Councillor Dugdale granted a request from Lindsey Byrne to move agenda item 6 (Fostering in East Lothian) to item 2 on the agenda to allow her to leave the meeting early as she was needed for other commitments.

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON 19 NOVEMBER 2024

The minutes of the Education Committee meeting of 19 November 2024 were approved as an accurate record. Councillor Ritchie asked for her attendance to be added to the minute. Councillor Dugdale had brought this to the clerk's attention prior to the meeting and this had already been amended.

2. FOSTERING IN EAST Lothian

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to provide an update to Committee about fostering in East Lothian.

Ms Lindsey Byrne, Head of Children's Services reported East Lothian's commitment to keeping The Promise and their strategic priority continued to be keeping children and young people within their families wherever possible. She highlighted there was a consistent trend of fewer children requiring care out with their family and staff continued to prioritise working alongside families to build supportive networks and plans to build resilience and safety but when it was not safe for children to remain at home the department were committed to exploring all family options and have seen an increase in the number of kinship care arrangements. Ms Byrne noted when no family options are available the hope is children can live with one of East Lothian's skilled and committed foster carers for as long as they need to but as Members

would see in the report foster carer numbers had been decreasing over the last five years due to people retiring and receiving fewer inquiries.

She reported it had been one year since Cabinet approved the uplift to foster carer fees and while it was too early to see the full impact of this, she was cautiously optimistic about an increase in inquiries and foster carers had really welcomed the increase in fee and due to word of mouth within the community there had been foster carers seeking to move their registration to East Lothian which is great news for local children and indeed the Council.

Ms Byrne highlighted the two key areas from the report; the need to attract more carers who want to care for teenagers and young people who are seeking asylum in East Lothian. She noted this type of care required a particular skill set and the team would like to hear from those who would like to explore what they could offer. She also drew Members attention to the key priorities for the year which included broadening the social media presence to improve the involvement from foster carers and care experienced young people in all recruitment processes.

Ms Byrne shared her gratitude to the fostering community and thanked them for all they do for the children and young people within East Lothian to give them the best childhoods, often in challenging circumstances.

Councillor Hampshire asked if it would be possible to produce a video detailing successful fostering stories from current foster carers and young people to give others the confidence to also become carers. Ms Byrne confirmed they have used a video for recruitment before, but it is need of updating so she will feed back to the coms team about making a new video.

Responding to a question from Councillor Findlay, Ms Byrne stated since the fee increase East Lothian now compared favourably to other local authorities, but it was a moving feast, and other local authorities would continue to look at the market and increase their rates accordingly. She added that as East Lothian does not have the same budget as larger local authorities to market fostering however it holds its own in a busy market due to local people wanting to foster in the area due to the reputation and support, they receive.

Councillor McIntosh asked how much work was being done around what the impact is of house prices, both to buy and rent, on foster carers and how that was affecting their availability to foster. Ms Byrne explained the team do receive enquiries from people who do not have sufficient space within their home, as the minimum requirement would be one extra bedroom. She added that the Children's Services department are not able to help families move to larger properties.

Responding to questions from Councillor Dugdale, Ms Byrne stated to be a successful foster carer you really have to love children, have patience, kindness and tolerance and be ready to take each day at a time. She added foster carers have a generosity of spirit and a really special quality which allows for the most amazing stories of success. Ms Byrne encouraged anyone who is interested in fostering to call the team for more information. She also asked Members to share any posts on social media regarding recruitment of foster carers and to speak with people in the community if they get the opportunity.

Councillor Hampshire welcomed the report and the work being done to promote fostering in East Lothian. He suggested the use of community centres with actual foster carers talking about their experiences to the public as opposed to a

professional and noted he was really pleased with where things were going within East Lothian.

Councillor McIntosh thanked the entire social work team and all foster cares for their hard work. She highlighted the positive use of language and attention to detail from The Promise within the report.

Councillor Dugdale echoed the comments of other Members adding she could see the challenge the team faced but was hopeful to get new fosters carers within East Lothian to enable young people to stay within their communities.

Decision

The agreed to:

- i) Note the current position in relation to recruitment and the early indications of increased enquiries.
- ii) Note the action Elected Members can take to support foster care recruitment in East Lothian.

3. ATTENDANCE REPORT

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to update the Committee on work to support the school attendance of children and young people and progress towards closing gaps in attendance figures for vulnerable learners.

Ms Jennifer Boyle, Quality Improvement Manager for Equity and Inclusion reported the aspiration was for all children and young people to benefit from a high-quality education which recognises and develops their unique talents and provides them with the foundations required for a happy adult life. She explained at national level and particularly since the pandemic there had been concern about reduced levels of school attendance, particularly from vulnerable groups of children such as having additional support needs, being impacted by poverty or with care experience. Ms Boyle provided Members with information on how effective use of data, education support officers, the Raising Attainment Strategy and the educational psychology team all linked together to focus on the barriers to attendance. She highlighted that reduced school attendance was recognised as an additional support need and this had been reflected in the revised approach to ASN funding which was approved by Committee in November and now the Child Planning Framework Locality Teams were now fully embedded to provide schools with solutions orientated multi-agency forums to refer children and young people with unmet wellbeing needs so creative supports can be identified as well as referrals to the newly established Equity and Inclusion Education Outreach Service. Ms Boyle drew Members attention to the comparable data which included an increase in attendance for all learners and an increase of 2.8 percentage points for those with additional support needs, 2.7 percentage points for those entitled to free school meals, 1.1 percentage points for those living in quintile 1 and 4.8 percentage points for those with care experience and highlighted the percentage of persistent absentees was below the national average. She provided an update on the impact of the Education Outreach Service to date which showed the service had supported 79 national qualifications to be achieved for young people and concluded by making Members aware the national context of challenges to school attendance were mirrored in East Lothian and the department were attuned to this and the reasons for data informed approaches and partnership working together with a tenacity to improve outcomes for all had resulted in a range of impactful interventions to support attendance and educational outcomes for children and young people.

Councillor Hampshire asked for further information about the data used to improve attendance. Ms Boyle explained every month an equity and inclusion tracker was prepared by the team which provides live school data about their overall attendance and hones in on particular groups of young people so schools can easily identify those children with vulnerabilities so they can look at how their percentages compare with other schools in their ASG to think about how those percentages become numbers of children and then how those numbers become individuals and we start to talk about individuals. She added those conversations were supported by the Link Education Support Officer who has a key role in meeting with schools on a regular basis.

Councillor McFarlane asked how approaches to GIRFEC supported attendance. Ms Boyle explained low school attendance can be a symptom of an unmet need therefore the attendance policy is used to help support approaches to GIRFEC that gives a consistent approach to tracking and monitoring so if an individual child or young person's attendance has fallen below a certain level, there are various interventions that could be put in place to help them. She added that Child Plans had been revised to have attendance front and centre so schools can reflect on attendance and look at what barriers that child may be facing.

Responding to a question from Councillor Gilbert, Ms Boyle confirmed that schools work closely with the SEEMIS team to record all different absence cases then the Education Support Officers can look at this data to find out the best way to support pupils. She stated work was also being done on the use of precise codes to record attendance.

Councillor Ritchie asked how the impact of the Outreach Service would be tracked and fed back so we can evaluate how impactful it is. Ms Boyle explained the new Outreach Service was funded through the Scottish Attainment Challenge which is given to all local authorities therefore we want to be tracking the efficacy of that service. She was very clear that the Outreach Service was not a school but instead works in partnership with schools, with all young people referred into the service being given a smart target so the service can support that and that framework would then be used to evaluate the impact of that support by seeing if the smart target had been achieved at the end of that period. Ms Boyle stated the service had been running for around six months and was therefore still in development, but data would start being gathered shortly to inform and develop the service as it continues.

Responding to questions from Councillor McIntosh, Ms Boyle confirmed the codes used to record attendance were provided by the Scottish Government and the guidance currently provided is children who are unable to attend school due to anxiety should be marked as sickness with educational provision. She explained there were concerns regarding the language used by the Scottish Government which has now been amended from "refusal to attend" to "adaptable timetable flexible" to mirror the fact that if children are suffering from anxiety something more bespoke needs to be done for them. Ms Boyle confirmed that although the Scottish Government provide the codes to be used, it is down to the school to allocate the codes to individual children. She was also happy to provide a breakdown of the number of children being allocated a code 9 and the effect that was having on attendance figures.

Councillor McIntosh also asked what educational provision was being given to the 0.6% of persistent absentees as opposed to the focus being on getting them back to school and were schools maximising the use of eSgoil and iSgoil platforms for these learners. Ms Boyle explained the range of supports provided to young people was

huge and through the new locality teams additional tracking would be done on the range of supports that are on offer. She added that as children's lives and needs are dynamic so the planning to support them also must be dynamic and individual to each child. Ms Boyle confirmed the online Scottish Government platforms were routinely promoted within schools but agreed more could be done to promote these further within child planning teams and from locality teams.

Responding to a question from Councillor Findlay, Ms Boyle confirmed she was able to break down the table on page 21 to be ward and school specific and provide this to Members.

Councillor Dugdale asked how the Education Outreach Service was funded and the sustainability of this service. Ms Boyle stated the service was funded through the Scottish Attainment Challenge, in particular the funding stream that comes through that is the Strategic Equity Fund which gives local authorities an increasing amount of funding which ends in 2026. She added the Education Outreach Service provides a Depute Head Teacher and ten newly created Education Outreach Officers.

Councillor Hampshire stated there are many reasons why schools face issues regarding attendance, including Covid and the effect it had on children in many different ways as well as medical reasons for children not being able to attend. He added there is however an attitude towards attendance from the child themselves or parents thinking attendance at school every day was not important, and this is something that needs to continually be highlighted to them. Councillor Hampshire was pleased with the work being done to analyse the different reasons why children are not attending school and was hopeful attendance figures could be increased through this hard work being completed by staff.

Councillor Yorkston thanked staff for their hard work and was pleased to see figures increasing across all identified areas. He noted that even children attending school for 90% of the time were still missing a significant amount of time and we should be striving for a higher attendance percentage. Councillor Yorkston added he found the children who are entitled to free school meals who are not attending school particularly worrying as they are not receiving this. He also highlighted the work of the Pennypit in Prestonpans who try and make sure those children are receiving a meal during the summer holidays.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms Boyle for the report and highlighted the different reasons for attendance being affected such as the pandemic, anxiety and poverty and stated within the report how many approaches have been developed to help children and young people attend and achieve in school. She also made Members aware that the attendance policy had been commended by Education Scotland and felt reassured by the range of work and the effort and impact it was having on attendance across East Lothian.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. Note the initiatives in place to support children and young people to attend school and the impact of this work.

4. EDUCATION SCOTLAND INSPECTION OF PRESTON LODGE HIGH SCHOOL

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to report to Committee on the outcomes of the Education Scotland inspection of Preston Lodge High School.

Ms Karen Haspolat, Quality Improvement Officer for Education noted the inspection team used the How Good Is Our School 4? (HGIOS4?) quality indicators for primary inspections to evaluate the quality of provision at Preston Lodge High School.

At the end of the inspection process, the outcomes were published in a short letter to parents and carers outlining the key strengths and areas for improvement. The letter provided a statement of the confidence the inspectors have in the school's capacity to improve the quality of its own work which is published along with the summary of inspection findings (SIF). The SIF is a professional report and summarises the findings from all the evidence gathered during the inspection. This document is intended to be used by staff in progressing school improvement. As a result of inspection findings the inspectors agreed that the school needs additional support and more time to make necessary improvements which means inspectors would return to carry out a further inspection of the school within one year of the publication of the letter.

Ms Haspolat reported the summary of inspection findings could be found within the report and highlighted Preston Lodge High School secured gradings of 3 or satisfactory for quality indicators Learning, Teaching and Assessment and Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion and secured gradings of 2 or weak for quality indicators Leadership of Change and Raising Attainment and Achievement.

Ms Haspolat confirmed she would continue to work closely with the Head Teacher and staff to provide professional advice and support and challenge in the areas for improvement.

Councillor Yorkston asked if someone could specify what areas of attainment the inspectors focused on and how confident they are that the school will make necessary improvements in this specific strand of the attainment for the return visit by Education Scotland. Mr Gavin Clark, Head Teacher – Preston Lodge High School reported he was very confident on the school's ability to achieve this as progress had already been made. He provided an update on work that had been undertaken with S1-3 pupils and the senior school pupils to improve attainment and he would expect significant progress to be made by 2026.

Responding to a second question from Councillor Yorkston, Mr Clark explained the school was working closely with Education Scotland and East Lothian Council to develop homerooms after the initial inception following the RAAC issues within the school. He added early on in the process significant benefits were noted in terms of the wellbeing of young people, benefits to attendance and attainment therefore after careful consultation the decision to strategically maintain homerooms with the school currently evaluating the first year of their use. Mr Clark stated the school were about to consult parents and students on making adjustments to homerooms which he thinks will be a positive way forward and in line with education reform agendas in Scotland in terms of project-based learning.

Councillor Gilbert asked for more information on what the leadership of change involves and the plan to improve this going forward. Mr Clark stated that quality indicator related to the leadership within the school as a whole, but he took full responsibility for the grade given as it was down to him to ensure things were running smoothly. He added he believes he had shown strong leadership over the

operational issues of RAAC but there were aspects of the school's approach meriting improvement which had been identified prior to inspection that will continue to be worked on. Mr Clark thanked the Education team for their support and challenge since the inspection and highlighted he was now more aligned with regular conversations with the Education team to work on specific improvements as well as a brand new improvement plan which has been approved and addresses all areas for improvement.

Responding to questions from Councillor Ritchie, Mr Clark provided Members with some of the key changes that had been made to the school improvement plan and how they would be assessed and reported back to the wider school community as well as to the Council.

Councillor Dugdale asked for more information about young people receiving entitlements and progress within the school to ensure this. Mr Clark explained homerooms were a profound change in the setup of the S1 curriculum and staff have worked hard in the strategic implementation of them for this academic session. He added that the curriculum model brought in for this year provides more literacy and numeracy and to demonstrate how this is covered in all curricular areas the homeroom Principal Teacher had been working closely with subject Principal Teachers to map this out in a clearer fashion. Mr Clark made Members aware that S1-3 pupils do receive their entitlements but there is more the school can do to demonstrate how this is done.

Councillor Yorkston noted his close connection to the school and highlighted some of the positives from the inspection report. He stated in the recent past Preston Lodge had always been innovative in its outlook to work with other agencies and educationalists and the school itself had significant support within the community, including Friends of Preston Lodge and the parent council. Councillor Yorkston added this support will be crucial for all staff in the school as they move forward for the future success of the school, and he was very optimistic on how things would develop at Preston Lodge in the coming months and years whilst being supported by the Council officers.

Councillor Ritchie stated Preston Lodge was a special school that is really important in its community, and she was confident the areas of improvement would be taken seriously as she knew how seriously the school takes the education of young people in their area that they cover. She highlighted the parts of the report that should be celebrated, particularly around relationships between staff and pupils and the culture of the school. Councillor Ritchie felt assured the school would get to where it needs to be and acknowledged the work that goes on every day within Preston Lodge to meet the needs of its young people.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms Haspolat for her report, and she felt confident after questions and answers today that a lot of work was already underway within the school to make improvements, and she hoped that would be recognised in the follow up inspection. She also thanked Mr Clark for attending the Committee today and to Ms Haspolat for her ongoing support and challenge to the school.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. Note the content of the Education Scotland letter (Appendix 1).
- ii. Note the content of the Summary of Inspection Findings for the School (SIF) (Appendix 2).

- iii. Note that as a result of the inspection findings, Education Scotland will make a follow-up visit in connection with this inspection within 12 months of publication of the inspection report to allow more time for the school to make necessary improvements.
- iv. Note the key strengths identified by the Inspection Team and progress made since the inspection.

5. EDUCATION SCOTLAND INSPECTION REPORT OF YESTER PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY CLASS

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to report to Committee on the outcomes of the Education Scotland inspection of Yester Primary School and Nursery Class.

Mr Nick Trussler, Quality Improvement Officer for Education noted the inspection team used the How Good Is Our School 4? (HGIOS? 4) quality indicators for primary inspections and How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare (HGIOELC?) quality indicators for nursery class inspections to evaluate the quality of provision at Yester Primary School and Nursery.

At the end of the inspection process, the outcomes were published in a short letter to parents and carers outlining the key strengths and areas for improvement. The letter provided a statement of the main findings of the inspection team and a summary of the schools capacity to improve the quality of its own work which meant inspectors would not return to Yester Primary School as a result of the inspection.

Mr Trussler reported the summary of inspection findings could be found within the report and highlighted Yester Primary School and Nursery secured gradings of satisfactory for the quality of Learning, Teaching and Assessment with Attainment and Achievement being evaluated as good. Mr Trussler highlighted the key strengths and areas for improvement found during the inspection.

Mr Trussler confirmed he would continue to work closely with the Head Teacher and staff to provide professional advice and support and challenge in the areas for improvement. He was delighted that the hard work of senior leaders both past and present, staff and the children of Yester primary school have been recognised within the report.

Councillor Hampshire asked what progress has been made to deliver consistent high quality learning, teaching and assessment for children across the school and nursery. Mr Trussler reported all teachers across primary 2 to 7 were being trained as part of the National Improvement Writing Programme which would be completed by the end of this session. He added this would empower teachers to use assessment and quality improvement methodology to plan the teaching and learning of learners writing experiences and to evaluate learners progress in writing.

Responding to a question from Councillor Dugdale, Mr Trussler stated the National Improvement Writing Programme provided frequent opportunities for staff to discuss, share and compare evidence from their own pupils with staff across a range of East Lothian schools who are also participating in the programme. He explained those opportunities were being used to reflect on pupil progress against national writing benchmarks and had provided an opportunity for staff to reflect both on teaching, learning and assessment approaches whilst also supporting the development of their professional judgment against these national standards.

Councillor Hampshire welcomed the report and the work being done at Yester Primary School and felt confident the school would be able to improve their current satisfactory gradings up to good.

Councillor Dugdale echoed Councillor Hampshire's comments and thanked Mr Trussler for his helpful answers to questions.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i) Note the content of the Education Scotland letter (Appendix 1).
- ii) Note the content of the Summary of Inspection Findings for the Primary School (SIF) (Appendix 2).
- iii) Note the content of the Summary of Inspection Findings for the Nursery Class (SIF) (Appendix 3).
- iv) Note that because of the inspection findings, Education Scotland will not make a follow-up visit in connection with this inspection.
- v) Note the key strengths identified by the Inspection Team and progress made since the inspection.

6. EDUCATION SCOTLAND INSPECTION OF WALLYFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY CLASS

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to report to Committee on the outcomes of the Education Scotland revisit inspection of Wallyford Primary School and Nursery Class.

Mr Nick Trussler, Quality Improvement Officer for Education noted the inspection team used the How Good Is Our School 4? (HGIOS? 4) quality indicators for primary inspections and How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare (HGIOELC?) quality indicators for nursery class inspections to evaluate the quality of provision at Campie Primary School and Nursery Class.

At the end of the inspection process, the outcomes were published in a short letter to parents and carers summarising the quality and impact of the school's work in addressing the key areas for improvement identified in the initial inspection. The letter provided a statement of the confidence the inspectors have in the school's capacity to continue to improve the quality of its own work.

Mr Trussler reported the summary of inspection findings could be found within the report and highlighted the key strengths and areas for improvement found during the inspection.

Mr Trussler concluded by saying he would continue to work with the head teacher and staff to provide professional advice, support and challenge to ensure the continued impact of improvements upon learners' experiences and outcomes. He added he was delighted that the hard work of senior leaders, staff and the children of Wallyford Primary School has been recognised in this report.

Councillor McFarlane asked what steps had been taken to ensure that pupil attainment in literacy and numeracy was continuing to improve and that all learners had the opportunity to achieve their potential. Mr Trussler stated the school continued to receive support from the Pedagogy Team to build teacher capacity in the delivery of

learning and as the Quality Improvement Officer for the school he would continue to track pupil progress regularly with the head teacher to measure the impact of interventions and supports on improving overall attainment and closing the attainment gaps identified. Ms Zena Diggle, Head Teacher – Wallyford Primary School provided Members with specific examples of how the school was working to improve attainment in literacy and numeracy which included new approaches to early learning and literacy, implementation of diagnostic assessments in numeracy with the Pedagogy Team and looking at the wellbeing and capacity of learners to learn in a safe environment.

Councillor Yorkston congratulated Ms Diggle and her staff on the progress made since the first inspection. He asked how well sustained improvements in teacher pedagogy were leading to better outcomes for all learners. Ms Diggle said the staff within Wallyford Primary were incredibly energetic and enthusiastic about improving pedagogy for all learners through a twofold approach; one around cooperative learning and the other on inclusion work and differentiation to ensure no child is missing out or being left behind. She made Members aware of the shared classroom experiences whereby the teachers would plan together, teach together, and evaluate together, which had been exceptional so that would be developing further over the next couple of years.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Mr Trussler for the report and Ms Diggle for attending the committee today. She was really pleased to see the amazing progress that had been made and the key strengths noted within the report. Councillor Dugdale offered her congratulations to Ms Diggle and her staff for the important work and improvements they had made.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) Note the content of the Education Scotland letter (Appendix 1).
- (ii) Note that because of the improvements noted in the summary of inspection findings, Education Scotland will make not make any further visits in connection with this inspection.
- (iii) Congratulate the Head Teacher and staff on the key strengths identified by the Inspection Team.

7. HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

A report was submitted by the Executive Director – Education and Children's Services to seek the Committee's approval to adopt the refreshed Home to School Transport Policy, noting the legislative context (Appendix 1).

Ms Leanne Ayton, Principal Officer – Equity and Inclusion reported the aim of the policy was to ensure safe, efficient and equitable transportation for all eligible children and young people, supporting access to education across the local authority. She added there was a duty on local authorities to make such arrangements as they consider necessary for the provision of conveyance without charge for the whole or part of the journey between home and their catchment school for children and young people who live more than walking distance. Ms Ayton explained within East Lothian, the Child and Young Persons Planning Framework was used to identify, assess and plan for the provision of support that is required and asked Members to note that since the policy was last reviewed a number of relevant changes had taken place, such as the introduction of Scottish Government funded young persons under 22's free bus travel and this policy was dependent on the continuation of that funded scheme. She stated the number of children and young people with additional support needs had also increased and the refreshed policy clarified our position on applications for transport

assistance from those who required it. Ms Ayton explained the policy had been refreshed so it was now clearer for stakeholders to understand, for officers to apply and had been updated with consideration to today's family dynamics. She concluded by making Members aware the policy would be reviewed annually, and staff would continue to work with schools, parents and transport colleagues as required over that period and she was happy to be contacted after the meeting from any Members wishing to discuss their individual areas.

Councillor McFarlane asked how people would know whether they were eligible for home to school transport. Ms Ayton explained if the policy was approved today then the Council website would be updated with full details including eligibility criteria and details on how to apply.

Responding to a question from Councillor Dugdale, Ms Ayton stated if the policy was approved today then it would be implemented from August 2025 in time for the new school year and no one who was already receiving home to school transport would lose out as no current provisions would be removed.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms Ayton for her report and found the updates to the policy helpful, making it easier to understand. She thanked Ms Ayton for her work on the updated policy, along with colleagues in Roads.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i) Approve and adopt the refreshed Home to School Transport Policy, noting the legislative context (Appendix 1).

A roll vote was carried out and Members unanimously agreed to approve and adopt the refreshed Home to School Transport Policy.

8. RESERVING PLACES IN SCHOOLS FOR CATCHMENT PUPILS WHO MOVE INTO THE CATCHMENT AREA DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2025/26

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to report to Committee to obtain approval for reserving place for incoming catchment pupils at the primary and secondary schools detailed in 2.1 for session 2025/26.

Ms Leanne Ayton, Principal Officer – Equity and Inclusion asked Members to note that the reserving of places was in accordance with the Education Scotland Act 1996 placing requests which allows education authorities to reserve places for incoming pupils into catchment areas of schools which helped authorities to manage their schools and prevent them from being at capacity at commencement of an academic year and enabling them to accommodate incoming catchment pupils. She outlined the key points and purpose of the report and explained the factors that were taken into account when determining the number of places.

Councillor Ritchie asked what was involved in deciding the number of reserve places for new schools such as Blindwells Primary where the catchment homes were not yet finished being built. Ms Ayton explained Blindwells and Craighall are small schools which initially operate with a small number of classes and increase each year as the school role grows. She was confident the number of reserve places requesting to be held was sufficient for pupils in the catchment area.

Responding to a further question from Councillor Ritchie, Ms Ayton confirmed it would only be pupils out with the catchment area of Blindwells who could potentially be refused a place as they would be in reserve for families moving into the area.

Councillor Gilbert asked for confirmation that there would not be a circumstance where a pupil moved into an area and could not get a place within their catchment school. Ms Ayton felt the question would maybe be better placed under the next agenda item but explained in terms of reserved places, they were specifically for catchment pupils. She added if there were three reserved places available and seven children moved into the area there would be a place for the extra four at their local school. Ms McDowell, Head of Education stated at Blindwells and Craighall specifically, the department had to look at the individual situation in terms of the number of families moving but there were roll projections based on knowing when housing developments would be released for sale which informs decisions being made in terms of reserve places and roll capping. She explained that within new schools there is the capacity to increase the number of children and classes but other schools on the list may not have that capacity.

Responding to a question from Councillor Yorkston, Ms Ayton said the most demand for catchment places within secondary schools was within S1 and S2 rather than S3 and S4 as by then pupils are settled and made their course choices. She added that the demand for catchment places within North Berwick and Knox Academy was higher than other secondary schools due to migration into the area, especially around Letham.

Reverend Sheridan asked if the changes made to Midlothian Council's catchment areas would have an impact on schools within East Lothian, especially to pupils from Loretto looking to attend St David's. Ms Ayton confirmed staff had been working closely with Midlothian and no issues were anticipated.

Councillor Hampshire stated the process of reserving places had been really difficult over the last 10 to 15 years due to the growth in East Lothian and commended the officers for their fantastic work on ensuring there is just the right number of reserved places for pupils within schools.

Councillor Dugdale echoed the comments of Councillor Hampshire and thanked Ms Ayton and all officers for their work on reserving places and their report.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i) Hold in reserve places for incoming catchment pupils for session 2025/26 in the named Primary Schools
- ii) Hold in reserve places for incoming catchment pupils for session 2025/26 in the named Secondary Schools S1 and S2
- iii) Hold in reserve places for incoming catchment pupils for session 2025/26 in the named Secondary Schools S3 and S4
- iv) Delegate any changes to the number of places held in reserve to the Head of Education in consultation with the Education Convener, should the number of pupils requiring a place at school significantly increase or decrease

A roll call vote was carried out and Members unanimously agreed to hold in reserve places for the named Primary and Secondary Schools and delegate any changes to the number of places held in reserve to the Head of Education in consultation with the Education Convener, should the number of pupils requiring a place at school significantly increase or decrease.

9. ROLL CAPPING IN EAST LOTHIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS SESSION 2025/26

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to ask the Committee to approve the S1-S4 intake levels for East Lothian secondary schools for session 2025/26.

Ms Leanne Ayton, Principal Officer – Equity and Inclusion summarised her report highlighting the main principles for managing secondary school roles within East Lothian are to; provide high quality education at local schools for local pupils, ensure quality of resources throughout East Lothian and commit to a real choice of education inside our schools and not between our schools. Ms Ayton noted that practical classes, such as science subjects, are set in multiples of 20 and non-practical classes are set in multiples of 30.

Councillor Yorkston asked if the set number of pupils for each class could be adjusted if there were more children wishing to take a specific subject. Ms Ayton stated classrooms were only furnished for either 20 or 30 pupils depending on the subject and to do there had not been any issues with maximum numbers within schools but if there was then a full consultation would be held by the head teacher.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms Ayton for the very important paper as it prevents any detrimental impact on children's education and allows head teachers to timetable and appropriately recruit a suitable number of teachers.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i) Approve a maximum intake level in S1-S4 for session 2025/26 in the schools listed within the report
- ii) delegate any changes to the maximum intake level in S1 – S4 to the Head of Education in consultation with the Education Convener, should the number of pupils requiring a place at the school significantly increase or decrease

A roll call vote was carried out and Members unanimously agreed to approve the maximum intake level in S1-S4 for session 2025/26 for the schools listed within the report and delegate any changes to the maximum intake level in S1-S4 to the Head of Education in consultation with the Education Convener, should the number of pupils requiring a place at the school significantly increase or decrease.

10. HEAD TEACHER APPOINTMENTS

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to inform the Committee of the Head Teacher made by the Appointments Sub-Committee.

Ms Nicola McDowell, Head of Education reported the appointment of Ms Gemma-Rose Lansdown as the Head Teacher of Blindwells Primary School, who was currently the Head Teacher at Leith Walk Primary School. She added Ms Lansdown would take on her post in East Lothian after the Easter break and would be based in Cockenzie Primary School with the hosted Blindwells pupils until the school was completed in August. Ms McDowell also congratulated Mr Jamie Wilson as the chosen candidate for Head Teacher at Craighall Primary School, who was currently the Head Teacher at Morebattle and Yetholm Primary Schools. Mr Wilson would take on his new role in May, based within Stoneybank Primary School with the hosted Craighall pupils.

Ms McDowell stated once Ms Lansdown and Mr Wilson were in post they would be responsible for the establishment of their respective school communities, recruiting their staff teams and developing their curricular ethos, vision and values and building relationships with children and families who will be joining the schools from August.

Councillor Hampshire asked if both schools were expected to be completed by August. Ms McDowell confirmed she was very confident about that, and regular meetings had been held with builders at both projects to assure us they would be ready by August.

Councillor Ritchie congratulated both new Head Teachers on their appointed posts and looked forward to working with them both in the future.

Councillor Dugdale also welcomed the two newest Head Teachers to the two newest schools in East Lothian. She also thanked all the staff, parents and pupils who were involved in the recruitment process.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the Head Teacher appointment.

Signed

Councillor Fiona Dugdale
Convener of the Education Committee