

INSPECTION OF THE EDUCATION FUNCTIONS OF ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL (INEA)

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The main purpose of this report is to advise Community Services Committee of the outcome of the further inspection of the Education functions of Argyll and Bute Council and to confirm the progress made by the Authority in addressing the main points for action contained within the initial inspection report of 21 March 2017.
- 1.2 Section 9 of the 'Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000' charges Education Scotland (formerly HM Inspectorate of Education) on behalf of the Scottish Ministers, to provide an external evaluation of the effectiveness of the local authority in its quality assurance of educational provision within the Council and of its support to schools in improving the quality of Education.
- 1.3 Education Scotland notified the Chief Executive of the Council that HM Inspectors would undertake a further strategic level inspection of the Education functions of Argyll and Bute Council during the period Tuesday 26 September to Friday 29 September 2017.
- 1.4 The further inspection was indicated at the conclusion of the initial inspection, conducted in September 2016 and outlined within the formal inspection report published by Education Scotland on 21 March 2017. Specifically the report noted that *“Education Scotland will provide support and monitor the council’s progress towards improvement. Education Scotland will carry out a further inspection visit within three months of the publication of this report to monitor progress. We will also carry out a further visit within six months and we will then publish a further report that outlines progress that has been made”*.
- 1.5 The further inspection focussed on the progress that has been made in addressing the main points for action identified in the original inspection. Education Scotland published their findings from the further inspection in a formal report on 7th December, noting the overall progress made by Council and Education Services in responding to the main points for action.

- 1.6 The report notes that overall, the Authority has made sound progress in improving the quality of leadership and now had considerably greater capacity for further improvement.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:

- (a) Note the further inspection of the Education Functions of Argyll and Bute Council which commenced on 26 September 2017;
- (b) Note the timetable and programme associated with the inspection;
- (c) Consider the inspection report published by Education Scotland on 7 December 2017;
- (d) Note the progress made by Education Services and the Council in responding to the main points for action contained within the initial published inspection report of 21 March 2017, and
- (e) Request the Executive Director of Community Service brings a further progress report to a future meeting of the Community Services Committee.

INSPECTION OF THE EDUCATION FUNCTIONS OF ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL (INEA)

3.0 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 The main purpose of this report is to advise the Community Services Committee of the outcome of the further inspection of the Education functions of the Council.
- 3.2 HM Inspectors returned to the Council in June 2017 to carry out a further visit to monitor progress. A report of this visit was published in August 2017. In this report, Education Scotland identified some early areas of progress which had been made since the original inspection. They also indicated that a further inspection of the Education Functions of the Council would be carried out in September 2017.
- 3.3 Education Scotland notified the Chief Executive of the Council that HM Inspectors would be undertaking a further strategic level inspection of the Education functions of Argyll and Bute Council during the period Tuesday 26 September to Friday 29 September 2017.
- 3.4 The *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* places a duty on Education Authority's to provide children and young people with school education and (in terms of raising standards) requires authorities to endeavor to secure improvement in the quality of that school education. The Act also places a duty on HM Inspectors to provide external evaluation of the effectiveness and performance of Education Authorities in relation to their Education functions.
- 3.5 The further inspection was indicated at the conclusion of the initial inspection, conducted in September 2016 and outlined within the formal inspection report published by Education Scotland on 21 March 2017. Specifically the report noted that *"Education Scotland will provide support and monitor the Council's progress towards improvement. Education Scotland will carry out a further inspection visit within three months of the publication of this report to monitor progress. We will also carry out a further visit within six months and we will then publish a further report that outlines progress that has been made"*.
- 3.6 The main points for action identified in the initial inspection report noted that the Authority should:

1. Significantly improve young people's attainment across the Authority;
2. Improve the use of data, ensuring greater rigour;
3. Continue to improve the quality of educational provision with consistently higher levels of support and challenge from central officers and elected members;
4. Improve relationships and communication, promoting a more positive ethos amongst all stakeholders; and
5. Improve the quality of strategic leadership and direction at all levels within the Education Authority.

The further inspection focused on the progress that has been made by the Education Authority and Education Services in addressing these main points for action, with the published report identifying the overall level of progress. The report does not include evaluations based on the six-point scale.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:

- (a) Note the further inspection of the Education Functions of Argyll and Bute Council which commenced on 26 September 2017;
- (b) Note the timetable and programme associated with the inspection;
- (c) Consider the further inspection report published by Education Scotland on 7 December 2017;
- (d) Note the progress made by Education Services and the Council in responding to the main points for action contained within the initial published inspection report of 21 March 2017, and
- (e) Request the Executive Director of Community Service brings a further progress report to a future meeting of the Community Services Committee.

5.0 DETAIL

- 5.1 Education Scotland allocated a team of four Inspectors to undertake the further inspection. The inspection team was led by Mr. Alastair Brown, Managing Inspector.
- 5.2 The Managing Inspector, supported by a member of the inspection team and the Area Lead Officer (ALO) met to discuss the plan for the inspection with the Acting Executive Director of Community Services and Acting Head of Education.
- 5.3 The planned inspection footprint took place over the course of four days: 26th - 29th September and during the course of the inspection week each of the four inspectors engaged in a range of inspection activities including:
 - Individual interviews with the Chief Executive, Council Leader, the Policy Lead for Education, Elected Members, the Acting Executive Director, Community Services and the Acting Head of Education;

- Focus groups of Elected Members, staff, partners, parents and learners, and
- A review of inspection evidence.

5.4 A range of preparatory work was undertaken by Education Services to support the inspection including:

- The preparation of the self-evaluation position statement, in conjunction with Head Teacher representatives, approved by Community Services Committee at the meeting held on 14th September 2017 and submitted thereafter to Education Scotland on 15th September 2017;
- Identification of relevant supporting evidence;
- Preparation of various communications, e.g. Committee reports, notification and advice for Head Teachers, Teachers/Staff, Members, Partners, Parent Council Chairs;
- Preparation of the inspection timetable, including co-ordination of meetings, focus groups, visits, and
- Scheduling diary arrangements for Chief Officers and Elected Members.

5.5 The inspection timetable included:

- Pre inspection notification from Education Scotland 7th August 2017;
- Planning meeting with members of the inspection team, Acting Executive Director and Acting Head of Education held on 15th August 2017;
- Issue of Education Scotland inspection questionnaires by Education Services w/c 21st August 2017;
- Submission of self-evaluation summary by Education Services to Education Scotland – 15th September 2017;
- Inspection 26th – 29rd September 2017;
- Professional discussion with the Council's Chief Executive, Acting Executive Director and Acting Head of Education, 4th October 2017;
- Draft inspection report issued to Argyll & Bute (Chief Executive) November 2017. Comments from the Council to Education Scotland within seven days of issue draft report, and
- Inspection report publication date 7 December 2018.

6.0 SELF-EVALUATION PROFILE

6.1 Education Services provided a summary self-evaluation report outlining the progress made by the Education Authority in responding to the inspection main points for action prepared in conjunction with representatives of the Head Teacher Advisory Group which was submitted to Education Scotland on 15th September, as required.

7.0 INSPECTION OUTCOME

Following the conclusion of the further inspection, Education Scotland published a report highlighting the progress made by Council and Education

Services in responding to the main points for action. The following paragraphs provide a summary of the content of the report:

7.1 Main point for action 1: Significantly improve young people's attainment across the authority.

- Children's progress in early learning and childcare centres has been sustained, with most children achieving their expected developmental milestones;
- In 2017, data provided by the Council demonstrates improvements in children's progress across important stages of the broad general education. Most children at P1, P4 and P7 are making good progress in literacy and numeracy and achieve in line with national expectations. By the end of S3, the authority data indicates that almost all young people achieve in line with national expectations;
- At the secondary stages, young people's attainment across the senior phase in National Qualifications improved considerably in a number of key measures. The improving trend in the number of young people gaining one Higher has been sustained and is now above that of young people across the country who have similar needs and backgrounds and the national average;
- A few schools are now demonstrating that they are beginning to close the poverty related attainment gap by improving the attainment of young people achieving a positive, sustained destination;
- On leaving school, almost all young people continue to move on to a positive destination. Where they have identified the need, Central Officers have worked well with individual schools to ensure that they monitor more carefully the destinations of young people after they leave school, and
- Overall, in the past 12 months, the authority has made some important improvements in achieving positive outcomes for its children and young people. Across the authority, staff recognise that they need to continue to work together effectively to ensure that these improvements are sustained.

Areas for continued development

- The Authority recognises the ongoing need to ensure robust moderation of teachers' judgements;
- Whilst attainment in the senior phase across Argyll and Bute is improving, the Authority recognises that there remains scope for further sustained improvement. The Authority recognises and is monitoring more closely young people's attainment by the time they leave school in terms of tariff scores. There is a continuing need to improve outcomes for specific groups of children and young people who are at greater risk of underachievement, for example, those who are Looked After and Accommodated by the Local Authority.

7.2 Main point for action 2: Improve the use of data, ensuring greater rigour.

- The Authority has significantly improved the collection, storage and

analysis of performance data. Over the last 12 months, Central Officers have reviewed data sources, developed clearer methods to measure performance and present data in more appropriate formats and provided appropriate training for staff;

- Commendably, a performance report prepared for elected members has been enhanced with an early analysis of National Qualifications data;
- New approaches to the use of data collection and analysis are helping Central Officers to challenge schools more confidently about their performance;
- Valuable training provided for Officers and Head Teachers is now leading to more effective analyses of data and to better targeted support;
- There is an increasing confidence in the use of assessment and moderation to ensure that data, particularly across the broad general education, is valid and reliable;
- There are now strong peer support networks for staff to develop further their understanding of data analysis;
- The Authority is increasingly expecting all staff to use data to understand individual pupil progress and to identify cohorts of children and young people who require additional support to make further progress, and
- Overall, the gathering and use of data is beginning to underpin almost all improvement conversations across the Authority.

Areas for continued development:

- Whilst the Authority is increasing its use and understanding of data, it recognises the need to build evidence over time to support analysis of important trends. Further development is required to track and monitor Curriculum for Excellence levels effectively and use this data to monitor and understand trends and key priorities for schools, and
- It will be important to continue to analyse performance data and to develop approaches for monitoring the quality of learners' experiences across the Authority and identify priorities for improvement.

7.3 Main point for action 3: Continue to improve the quality of educational provision with consistently higher levels of support and challenge from central officers and elected members.

- Across the Authority, Central Officers provide a wide range of support and professional development activities for school staff. There is now an increased range of curriculum development programmes and activities;
- The authority now provides a clearer strategic direction for developing its approaches to delivering important aspects of the curriculum, including, literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing;
- Central Officers themselves now benefit from a wider range of opportunities to develop and enhance their own professional skills, for example, in developing their approaches to understanding and using data more consistently. The extent of this professional learning has enabled officers to provide stronger support for schools and to develop more consistent and rigorous approaches to evaluative activities;

- Central Officers now engage much more effectively, and with greater consistency, with schools. The recently implemented Authority-wide school visit programme ensures that all schools benefit from regular and well-planned visits from Officers. Visits now have an agreed purpose, ensuring that key local and national priorities are considered. As a result of the programmes of school visits and reviews, most Head Teachers now feel more confident that officers maintain effective contact with their schools and that they now have a better knowledge of their schools;
- Senior Officers have identified appropriate key areas requiring further improvement. These include continuing to ensure that all central officers receive appropriate training and skills' development to enable them to support and challenge schools effectively;
- Elected Members now benefit from improved opportunities to access appropriate education-related training and development opportunities. A programme of training sessions for Elected Members is now in place and this helps to support Members, including those recently elected, to engage more confidently and insightfully in their scrutiny role, and
- Overall, most Elected Members are now very appreciative of the efforts made by Officers to keep them well informed and involved. Several have expressed higher levels of confidence that there is now a more positive culture and commitment to work together more effectively for Argyll and Bute's children and young people.

Areas for continued development:

- The positive approach to planning for improvement and reporting on successes now needs to be implemented consistently across all schools to ensure that all plans and reports are of a consistently high quality;
- Senior Officers with support from other Central Officers provide Elected Members with regular and helpful performance reports, including about the attainment of children and young people at various stages. It will be important to ensure that time spent by officers in preparing these reports does not detract from other important aspects of their work, including supporting school staff, and
- It is important for all Elected Members now to ensure that any political differences do not detract from that commitment to improving young people's educational experiences and outcomes.

7.4 Main point for action 4: Improve relationships and communication, promoting a more positive ethos amongst all stakeholders.

- The publication of the Council's vision and strategy paper, *Our Children, Their Future* (OCTF) is providing staff across the Council with a helpful shared language and common purpose to help them to prioritise their work. Almost all staff who met with HM Inspectors feel that OCTF is now an important driver for their work;
- A strengthened central team, established to support the implementation of OCTF, is helping officers to develop a stronger sense of identity and shared purpose. The central team continues to increase its direct engagement with schools to provide support and challenge. The

team's work is now more clearly focused on outcomes for children and young people;

- The recently-established Head Teachers' Advisory Group is beginning to promote more effective communication links between school staff, clusters, the central team and senior leaders. The Group's work plan includes, targets focused on improving communication, promoting an increasingly positive ethos and strengthening strategic leadership. Appropriate arrangements are in place to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the group;
- Senior Officers have now put in place appropriate arrangements to improve the range of communication channels and the quality of communication with stakeholders. Routine use of newsletters, bulletins, blogs and electronic messaging is helping to improve stakeholders' awareness of the Authority's work, its vision and direction of travel. These approaches are promoting a stronger shared ownership of the improvement agenda and a better understanding of roles and responsibilities;
- Almost all young people who met with HM Inspectors spoke positively about their participation in Youth Forums. They value the opportunities which the forums provide to influence council policy, for example, in writing OCTF in a youth-friendly format;
- The Youth Voice Action Plan (2016-2018) led by Youth Services outlines clearly a number of steps that the Council is now taking to strengthen young people's participation in the work of Education Services, and
- Increased professional learning opportunities are promoting professional confidence and successful collaborative projects across schools and clusters. An increased number of professional networks are now in place leading to a stronger sense of an Argyll and Bute identity and increased opportunities for educational leadership.

Areas for continued development:

- The Authority has correctly identified the need to update and implement its Parental Involvement Strategy further to reflect national guidance and to develop its partnership with the Chairpersons of Parent Councils, and
- Whilst the Authority has made some positive early progress in improving relationships and communication and promoting a more positive ethos amongst all stakeholders, continued effort is needed to ensure that current improvements are fully embedded and sustained.

7.5 Main point for action 5: Improve the quality of strategic leadership and direction at all levels within the Education Authority.

- Overall, there has been sound progress across a number of key aspects of leadership, including, establishing a coherent vision and setting a clearer direction for the Education functions of the Council;
- There are now a number of strengths in the leadership and direction of the Education functions of the Council. Senior leaders are now

more visible and accessible and this has been welcomed by central officers and school-based staff. The acting Executive Director has a key role in corporate planning, and has identified appropriate, specific priorities within Education as drivers for change. Individually and collectively, the Chief Education Officer and other central officers are committed to taking forward the priorities of OCTF, and are providing more robust levels of support and challenge for schools;

- Senior Officers have disseminated effectively their vision for Argyll and Bute in the education strategy document, OCTF. The vision and its six related objectives are now understood better by education staff;
- Across staff groups, there is now greater ownership and commitment to the vision. Senior Officers have used a wide range of strategies, including social media, to reinforce the key messages outlined in the vision. It has created a clarity of focus for Education and provides a consistency of expectation for education staff across the Council;
- The Central Education Team, under the leadership of the Chief Education Officer, has been successful in strengthening the consistency and quality of central Officers' links with schools and other establishments. This has the potential to make a positive impact on school improvement;
- Central Officers have built on their early work on leadership development and are now taking positive steps to strengthen leadership capacity across schools and other establishments;
- Staff now have a wide range of good opportunities to develop leadership skills formally and informally, for example, through mentoring and cluster arrangements, and
- Most Head Teachers now believe that the Authority is making a positive difference to improving the quality of learning and teaching across Argyll and Bute.

Areas for continued development:

- There are early signs that the implementation of OCTF is beginning to gain the momentum necessary to impact more positively on the lives of young people and their families. Senior officers recognise that further sustained leadership activity is required to embed the new initiatives in practice at all levels of the education community to maximise the impact of OCTF;
- While Head Teachers demonstrate their commitment to the vision, senior leaders acknowledge that it is not yet fully embedded across all establishment staff groups. The Authority is aware of the need, for example, to engage further with teachers, learners and parents in order to make greatest impact. Senior Officers are aware of the need to capitalise on good practice within clusters and share this more widely across the council, and
- Senior Officers recognise that further work is required in strengthening the leadership capacity of children and young people across the council, building on existing positive approaches.

7.6 What is the Education Authority's Capacity for Improvement?

- In the 12 months since the initial inspection, the Authority has made positive progress in each of the main points for action;
- At the secondary stages, young people's attainment in National Qualifications has improved considerably in a number of key measures;
- The Authority has significantly improved how it collects and analyses performance data. Central officers and school-based staff have good opportunities to develop their skills in making more confident use of data;
- The engagement of Central Officers with schools has improved considerably over the last 12 months;
- Central Officers now work to provide support and challenge to schools with increased levels of quality and consistency. Schools benefit from a wider range of well-planned visits and communication with Central Officers, including Senior Officers;
- Most Head Teachers now have higher levels of confidence that central officers know their schools well and value their contributions;
- Elected members, including new members, now benefit from education-related training opportunities and from regular briefings;
- The Authority has made some positive progress in improving relationships and communication since the original inspection. Senior Officers have established an appropriate range of communication channels and this is helping stakeholders to develop a better awareness of the Authority's vision and work. The recently established Head Teachers' Advisory Group has the potential to promote more effective communication links between schools and Central Officers;
- There is now a more positive ethos across the Authority, and
- Overall, the Authority has made sound progress in improving the quality of leadership. There is now a clear vision for Education, as outlined in the Council's strategy document, OCTF. This vision takes good account of local priorities, including those in the Council's Corporate Plan, and also key national priorities. Senior Officers are more visible and central staff now have much stronger links with schools across the authority.

8.0 Next Steps

- 8.1 Education Scotland, in the conclusion of their inspection report, notes that the Authority has made sound progress in improving the quality of leadership and now has considerably greater capacity for further improvement. The report further acknowledges the commitment of central officers and school-based staff in working together to bring about a wide range of improvements, and that staff have identified accurately areas in which further improvements are needed, acknowledging areas which are improving but which have not yet had time to impact fully on outcomes for children and young people.
- 8.2 Education Scotland will carry out further inspection activity by the end of 2018 to

monitor and report on the continued progress made by the Council in addressing the main points for action contained within the report published in December 2017.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Education Scotland carried out a further inspection of the Education functions of the Council week beginning 26th September 2017. To support the inspection Education Services prepared and submitted a self-evaluation summary of progress against the main points for action for submission to Education Scotland on 15th September 2017.
- 9.2 Education Scotland published their inspection report on 7th December 2017. The report notes the progress made by the Authority in addressing the main points for action published in the initial inspection report. Specifically Education Scotland has noted that in the 12 months since the initial inspection, the Authority has made positive progress in each of the main points for action.
- 9.3 A further update on the inspection will be provided at a future Community Services Committee meeting.

10.0 IMPLICATIONS

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| 10.1 | Policy | The <i>Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000</i> places a duty on Education Authorities to provide children and young people with school education and (in terms of raising standards) requires Authorities to endeavor to secure improvement in the quality of that school education. |
| 10.2 | Financial | None. |
| 10.3 | Legal | None. |
| 10.4 | HR | Resourcing of the planned inspection presents additional, short term resource implications for the Council. |
| 10.5 | Equalities | None. |
| 10.6 | Risk | The outcome of the further inspection of the Education functions of Argyll and Bute Council may significantly enhance or detract from the Council's reputation and attractiveness as an area to work and live in. |
| 10.7 | Customer Service | This report provides Elected Members with an overview of the inspection of the Education Functions of the Authority. |

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Appendices: *Appendix 1 – Education Scotland Further Strategic Inspection of the
Education Functions of Local Authorities
Argyll and Bute Council: December 2017*