

**Inspection of the learning community
surrounding Oban High School
Argyll and Bute Council
28 October 2014**

1. Context

Community learning and development (CLD) partners within the area of Oban High School were inspected by Education Scotland during September 2014. During the visit Education Scotland staff talked to children, young people and adults. We worked closely with local CLD managers, CLD providers, partners, paid staff and volunteers. We wanted to find out how well partners are improving the life chances of people living in the community through learning, building stronger more resilient communities and improving the quality of services and provision. We also looked at how well, paid staff and volunteers are developing their own practices and how well partners, including schools are working together. We looked at some particular aspects of recent work which were identified by partners including:

- opportunities that are inclusive and contribute to health and wellbeing;
- progress towards employment; and
- engagement with community organisations to support their development.

2. How well are partners improving learning, increasing life chances, promoting and securing wellbeing?

Partners are delivering a wide range of learning opportunities which are improving wellbeing and contributing to increasing life chances. Almost all learners are positive about their learning experiences. Local organisations and social enterprises make a very strong contribution to providing social and educational opportunities in the community.

Children, young people and adults who are at risk of isolation or exclusion benefit from partners providing well targeted activities which enable them to participate in their community. Young carers at North Argyll Carers improve their confidence, make new friends, and feel less isolated through taking part in group and individual activities. Adult carers, along with other members of the community, become less isolated and learn new skills through participation in creative activities. Young people with additional support needs gain confidence through working in new environments. They develop their skills through an intergenerational project run at the Shed workshop building, by the school, the CLD service and Argyll Voluntary Action volunteers. Adult learners with additional needs achieve and progress through their involvement with Argyll College Failte Group and Oban Library Readers Group. Adults facing difficulties including substance misuse, mental illness and homelessness improve their wellbeing through accessing the services at the social enterprise Hope Kitchen. Hope Kitchen clients are less socially isolated, have improved self esteem and nutrition through getting access to meals, advice and support.

Partners work well together to increase employability for young people and adults and address the needs of those affected by welfare changes. Almost all young people progress to positive and sustainable destinations. Increasing numbers of young people now take up Modern apprenticeships. Thirty participants on Driving Theory sessions achieved passes in the last year which contributed to increased employment opportunities for many of them. Partners in the Strategic Welfare

Reform Group are running digital literacy activities which successfully improve adults' information and communications technology (ICT) skills and confidence about dealing with benefits online and using Universal Job Match.

Several partners use high quality outdoor learning to enable children, young people and adults to gain confidence and increase their sense of wellbeing. The social enterprise Stramash effectively raises children's awareness of their environment and their capacity to manage risks. Adult learners increase their self esteem and improve their literacy and numeracy skills through a range of problem solving tasks by taking part in the *WoodWord* outdoor learning initiative.

Community organisations address community issues and meet identified needs very effectively. Young people in North Argyll Youth Forum actively work to improve their community. They are establishing a Youthbank and campaigning for a local alcohol tax to promote healthier lifestyles and raise funds to support local youth work activity. Confident, skilled and active volunteers run the *Loch Awe Loch Watch* project to prevent further accidents on the loch and ensure that the loch is safer to use and live by. Oban and District Disability Forum and Access continue to improve awareness of disability and ensure accessibility across the Oban area. The group operates effectively across a range of partnerships and contributes significantly to ensuring that disability issues are on the agenda at all levels.

Volunteers enhance cultural life across the area. The Highlands and Islands Music and Dance Festival is a four-day event organised and run by volunteers attracting 1100 participants and 3000-4000 visitors. Volunteers at Dunollie Preservation Trust engage effectively with local schools linking local heritage and history to the curriculum. Social enterprises make a significant contribution to the learning community as providers of services which meet many wellbeing, social and educational community needs. Phoenix Cinema social enterprise runs a comprehensive film programme and is developing the facilities as a multi-use area. More than 100 volunteers are involved in all aspects of the cinema and are effectively supported to develop their skills. Social Enterprise partners are at the forefront in using data to inform improvements and in setting clear, measurable targets. Hope Kitchen track client participation and use this to inform future action. The Atlantis Leisure Board regularly monitors performance against targets and to analyse social impact. Working together to systematically gather, share and analyse performance data would enable partners to gain an overall picture of the needs of the community. This would enhance their ability to prioritise and to set joint targets which would improve the total learning offer.

Whilst partners support some learners to gain recognition for their achievements through local and national awards there is further scope to increase the numbers of learners of all ages achieving accreditation. Children and young people would benefit from partners planning together to increase continuity and impact across learning opportunities. This would support learners to identify skills gained in one learning opportunity and apply them in another. In some cases it would also open up opportunities for accreditation. Progression routes from adult learning into further learning, training, volunteering, community activism and enterprise are not clear. Providing more effective guidance to adult learners on the options open to them would enable them to build on the skills and confidence they have developed. The

community would benefit from partners building on the positive work with youth forums to strengthen youth voice across the partnership. Involving children and young people in leadership opportunities wherever possible will also build in long term continuity for many community groups.

3. How well are partners working together and improving the quality of services and provision?

Strong informal networks between a wide range of partners in the learning community enable partners to regularly share information and have a good knowledge of each other's provision. Partners are in the early stages of developing more formal, local structures through which they aim to support the systematic improvement of the quality of services and provision.

Thematic partnerships are improving the quality of services and provision. Partners work together effectively to identify barriers to employment and intervene at an early stage. Through sharing intelligence about the local job market and developing joint responses they deliver well-judged services which address local needs including a work club, job fair and ICT learning provision. Partners in the Strategic Welfare Reform Group carried out a scoping study in 2013 to better understand the learning needs arising from welfare reform and have planned additional provision, including the *Support and Connect* project for rural areas, as a result.

Partners effectively use a wide range of methods to gather feedback from participants and other stakeholders. A few partners including Argyll Voluntary Action and Atlantis Leisure successfully use social media to provide information to and to gather feedback from participants. Community Development Workers effectively support community groups and councils to use a range of community engagement resources to gather information and consult communities. Nearly all partners are committed to exploring ways to strengthen their understanding of and capacity to undertake self-evaluation. Local people would benefit from partners undertaking shared self-evaluation to improve learning outcomes across the whole community. There is a need for partners to capture and analyse the impact of provision as well as participation rates in order to set clear, shared priorities and deliver services which address changing needs. Developing consistent joint planning and monitoring of learning opportunities across partners would increase learning impacts and support the efficient use of resources.

Partners now have the opportunity to build on existing good training and development opportunities by using the wide range of skills available across services, social enterprises and voluntary organisations in the community to learn from each other. Enhancing the coordination and marketing of training opportunities across the partnership would enable more staff and volunteers to access training which meets their needs.

This inspection of learning and development in the learning community surrounding Oban High School found the following key strengths.

- Vibrant community with wide range of effective community organisations.
- Learning programmes and community activities which meet the needs of many people at risk of exclusion.
- Positive culture of networking.

We discussed with partners how they might continue to improve their work. This is what we agreed with them.

- Identify priorities for the Oban High School learning community based on shared evaluations and data analysis.
- Work together to improve progression routes and accreditation opportunities for learners.
- Jointly plan and evaluate to improve outcomes.

4. What happens at the end of the inspection?

There are some improvements needed, but because partners have a good understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement, and communities are achieving well, we have ended the inspection process at this stage. We will monitor progress through our regular contact with the local authority. Our Area Lead Officers along with Argyll and Bute will discuss the most appropriate support in order to build capacity for improvement and will maintain contact to monitor progress.

Alona Murray
HM Inspector
28 October 2014

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for this learning community can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/othersectors/communitylearninganddevelopment/ObanHighSchoolLCArgyll.asp> .

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