

**MINUTE**  
**of**  
**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**Minute of virtual meeting held at 10.00am on 20 August 2020.**

**Present:**

Councillor Paul O’Kane (Chair)	Councillor Gordon Wallace
Councillor Colm Merrick (Vice Chair)	Dr Frank Angell
Councillor Caroline Bamforth	Ms Dorothy Graham
Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)	Ms Mary McIntyre
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Mr Des Morris
Councillor Alan Lafferty	

Councillor O’Kane in the Chair

**Attending:**

Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources); Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); Graeme Hay, Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change); Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager; Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer; and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

**Apology:**

Councillor Jim McLean.

**Also attending:**

Rosemary Crossan, Head Teacher, St John’s Primary School.

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**1328.** There were no declarations of interest intimated.

**SQA RESULTS 2020**

**1329.** Councillor O’Kane invited Dr Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance), to give a brief overview of attainment in East Renfrewshire schools in the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) results 2020.

Dr Ratter explained that following the decision to close all schools from 20 March 2020, the Deputy First Minister had announced that for the first time in history there would be no

examination diet. The SQA had been asked to put in place an alternative certification model based on teachers providing refined estimated bands and rankings for each learner entered for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. Schools had submitted estimates by 29 May.

Subsequently the SQA had carried out a process of moderation designed to ensure consistency across schools and colleges and with results from previous years. This was based on the average attainment over the previous 4 years in each school and subject. No account was taken of prior attainment at an individual pupil level.

A strong set of results had again been achieved across East Renfrewshire schools with S4 attainment very similar to the previous year and performance in S5 and S6 being the highest to date.

Referring to the report considered by the committee at its previous meeting in June, (Minutes Page 1179, Item 1264 refers), Dr Ratter explained that the Education Department had anticipated very strong attainment in S5 and S6 based on the results in 2019 and that the S5 projections made by the EMIS Unit in September 2019 had been very close to the authority results published at this stage by the SQA.

However, he pointed out that major concerns had been expressed nationally that the SQA moderation process had disproportionately affected particular schools or groups of learners. Nationally 26% of entries had been adjusted with 7% of these adjusted up and 93% adjusted down. Overall in East Renfrewshire, 77% of estimates had been accepted compared to the national average of 74%.

As a result of the Ministerial direction announced on 11 August, the SQA had indicated that candidate results would now be awarded based solely on the estimates provided by schools and that the results of learners who had been awarded a higher grade during the moderation process would be maintained. The SQA had also agreed to ensure that schools would receive their revised results by 21 August and that any candidate whose grade had changed as a result of this process would receive a new certificate.

Based on the estimate data that was submitted by schools and taking account of the learners who had been awarded a higher grade during the moderation process, the Education Department had carried out some initial high-level analysis. More detailed analysis would be carried out, including a focused look at equity, when the updated SQA data had been received. As a result of the changes that had been made the SQA had also updated its appeals process. Details of the revised process were outlined.

At this point Dr Ratter highlighted a number of key points from the original results including that at National 5 in S4, 81% of the cohort achieved 5 or more awards, up from 78% in 2019; 95% of S4 pupils achieved 5 or more qualifications at National 4 or better, similar to the result the previous year; Barrhead, Eastwood, Mearns Castle, St Ninian's, and Woodfarm High Schools all achieved outstanding best ever S4 results.

As anticipated, the Higher results for S5 pupils were very strong across all measures with 87% of the original roll achieving 1 or more Highers and 72% attaining 3 or more Highers. In both measures there had been an increase of around 6%. The proportion of the S4 roll that achieved 5 or more Highers was 49%, up from 44% and the highest result to date. All East Renfrewshire schools had some strong results at S5, notably Barrhead, Eastwood and Woodfarm High Schools which had their best ever results for all 3 measures.

At Advanced Higher in S6, the performance across the authority was also very strong with 45% of the original S4 cohort achieving 1 or more Advanced Higher awards, up from 40% the previous year with Eastwood, Mearns Castle, Williamwood and Woodfarm High Schools all having their best ever results for this measure.

Dr Ratter went on to advise the committee that Scottish Ministers had established an independent review of the awarding process in 2020; expanded the scope of the review of Curriculum for Excellence being undertaken by the OECD to include recommendations on how to transform Scotland's approach to assessment and qualifications; and that the Council would contribute to both of these reviews through the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES).

In addition, the SQA was currently engaging with partners on plans for 2020-21, including the timing of the examination diet and the assessment arrangements for National 5, Highers and Advanced Highers. The department would contribute to these consultations and had encouraged schools to take part as the feedback would be important in ensuring that appropriate modifications were put in place to courses and the timing of examinations next year that provided clarity and reassurance for staff, pupils and parents and carers.

He concluded by explaining that this statement on examination results had been unlike any that had previously been made and reflected the unique way in which the 2020 results had been arrived at. The closure of schools in March and the subsequent cancellation of the examination diet had resulted in a great deal of uncertainty and, in many cases, worry for young people.

The estimates process had been hugely demanding for staff in all schools and Dr Ratter took the opportunity to acknowledge this and thank them for all their work in this regard. He expressed his confidence that throughout the process East Renfrewshire schools had done their utmost to ensure that the hard work of all young people was rightly and fairly recognised.

The successes that had been highlighted at S4, S5 and S6 were a tribute to the hard work and dedication of pupils across East Renfrewshire, exceptionally well supported by staff and parents and carers. All involved were to be congratulated and the achievements of all East Renfrewshire's young people recognised and celebrated.

In response to Councillor Wallace who sought further information regarding the 23% of learners whose results had been amended by the moderation process, Dr Ratter explained that schools had recently received the revised awards; had shared these with the relevant students; and that the outcome was that, as mandated by the Ministerial direction, all those whose results had been downgraded by the moderation process had subsequently had their awards uplifted to the teacher estimated grades.

A number of members expressed their appreciation for the considerable volume of work undertaken by teachers in the preparation of the grade estimates submitted to the SQA which had resulted in young people receiving the results which their efforts had deserved. It was also noted that the analysis provided appeared to show a greater improvement in schools which traditionally had produced lower levels of success and this further narrowing of the attainment gap was commended.

Councillor Buchanan added his thanks to the teaching staff who had worked diligently to produce the grade estimates sent to the SQA and to all school staff and pupils for their efforts throughout an extremely difficult academic year. He also commended the department for the work done during the lockdown to understand the lessons to be learned; for moving forward in spite of the public health situation; and for continuing to do the very best on behalf of all of East Renfrewshire's young people.

The Director explained that the analysis of awards locally had not highlighted any increased correlation between grades and levels of poverty but that further work in this regard was required. She reiterated that 77% of teacher estimates had been accepted compared to the national average of 74% and this, coupled with the dramatic drop in the number of appeals

now anticipated, indicated that parents, carers and pupils had trust in the ability of teachers to objectively assess pupils' work and efforts. She also reiterated that the department would continue to support pupils through presenting them on suitable courses and at the appropriate level. She concluded by adding her thanks to all teachers for their considerable efforts in submitting appropriate evidence-based grade estimates for all of their pupils during what had been a very worrying time for all concerned and especially for the young people themselves.

Having heard Councillor O'Kane add his congratulations to all of the young people for their hard work which had resulted in the awards made by the SQA and their forbearance in helping to force the Scottish Government to withdraw the original SQA grades and accept in full the teacher estimated grades, the committee noted the report and that further, more detailed analysis of the revised awards would be carried out by the department.

### **EDUCATION SCOTLAND REPORT ON ST. JOHN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**1330.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members of the report produced by Education Scotland following their inspection of St. John's Primary School.

Education Scotland evaluated four quality indicators and provided a short report which detailed the strengths and areas for improvement. The report had been published in June 2020 and was appended. It had been issued to staff, parents, local elected members and the Convener for Education and Equalities.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that in assessing the indicators of quality in the school Education Scotland had found three aspects of the work to be good, i.e. leadership of change; learning, teaching and assessment; and raising attainment and achievement; and one aspect, ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion had been judged to be very good.

Key strengths were highlighted, including the very positive, caring ethos across the school based on Catholic values; effective leadership of the head teacher; strong relationships across the school community including with parents, a range of agencies, services and charities; an enthusiastic and collaborative approach by staff to professional learning; and effective approaches to digital learning.

It was noted that this was a good report on an East Renfrewshire school, with the evaluations made by Education Scotland reflecting the increased expectations nationally and the department's evaluation of the quality of provision. The department was pleased that the leadership of the head teacher had been noted in the letter to parents and carers as one of the key strengths of the school.

The inspection team had agreed two areas for improvement with the school and the department. An action plan to address these areas had been prepared by the school and was also appended. The areas for improvement were particularly important in the context of pupils returning to the school post COVID-19 and the school had incorporated these into the recovery plan

Education Scotland would make no further reports in connection with the inspection of St John's Primary School. However, the Quality Improvement Service would revisit the school within 2 years of the date of publication to review the impact of the school's improvement plan in addressing the agreed areas for improvement and to provide a progress report to parents and carers.

Councillor Wallace contrasted the mention of excellent assessment and monitoring processes in secondary schools contained in the statement on this year's Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) results earlier in the meeting with one of the areas for improvement that had been agreed between the department and the inspection team and which related to the need to continue to improve the monitoring and tracking of children's progress to ensure a clear focus on raising attainment across all curriculum areas. In reply, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance), supported by the Director, explained that Education Scotland looked holistically at schools; that monitoring and tracking was already being carried out within St. John's Primary School; that the improvement action was to continue to improve the monitoring and tracking of children; and that the aim was to embed a shared understanding across all staff and to apply best practice.

Mrs Crossan, Head Teacher, thanked the committee for the opportunity to address the meeting and explained that she was very happy with the report and was particularly pleased that the school's strong, nurturing ethos based on Catholic values had been recognised by the inspection team. She was also pleased that the school's creative approach to digital learning, which had proved to be invaluable in recent months, had been recognised as well as the use made of a variety of indoor and outdoor learning environments. The report had been achieved through the hard work and commitment of the entire school community and she thanked all of her staff, a number of partners including the Catholic Church, the Quality Improvement Team, parents and carers, and the Directorate for their support. She especially expressed her thanks to all of the school's pupils for their efforts and enthusiasm.

Having heard Councillor O'Kane, supported by Councillor Buchanan, express the thanks of the committee to the head teacher and her senior management team for a very good report, the committee agreed to:

- a) note the contents of the Education Scotland report on St John's Primary School; and,
- b) approve the school's action plan to address the agreed areas for improvement.

## **COVID-19 EDUCATION RECOVERY UPDATE**

**1331.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education updating members on the Education Department's recovery planning and the reopening of all schools across East Renfrewshire in line with the Scottish Government's Guidance on Preparing for the Start of the New School Term in August 2020.

The Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change), Graeme Hay, explained that at its meeting in June 2020 the committee had endorsed the department's Local Delivery Phasing Plan (LDPP), setting out the principles and approach to recovery planning across the authority (Minutes Page 1177, Item 1263 refers). This plan was based on guidance published by the Scottish Government on 29 May 2020. The LDPP set out a plan for a blended learning approach to education for the beginning of school session 2020/2021, with pupils attending school on a part-time basis, along with out of school learning. The plan also outlined the department's proposed phases for recovery, gradually increasing the amount of time pupils would spend in school and moving towards resumption of a full time offer.

Following endorsement by the Education Committee, the LDPP had been submitted to Education Scotland for review on 24 June 2020, as required by the Scottish Government. At that time the LDPP was also shared with individual head teachers, in addition to an action plan template, to support the development of their own bespoke recovery plans. Throughout this period the department had continued to work closely with trade union partners in consulting on future plans.

HM Inspectors of Education had carried out a desktop review of the department's LDPP and considered it against the guidance issued by the Scottish Government. The overwhelmingly positive feedback provided specifically noted that the LDPP demonstrated the presence of strategic processes to support recovery with clear governance arrangements; a phased approach to planning enabling establishments to create their own context-specific approaches; and a clear focus on the safety and wellbeing of all staff and pupils. Importantly, the feedback also acknowledged the collaborative way in which the LDPP had been prepared.

On 23 June 2020, the Scottish Government announced its aim to have all schools return on a full time basis from the beginning of school session in August 2020 and subsequently detailed guidance had been published to support all local authorities and schools with the return to full time provision from August. Individual establishments had continued to maintain their own bespoke recovery plans based on the department's LDPP. These plans, which would be kept under review, would act as a contingency plan for each establishment and be able to be implemented should there be a requirement for any further restrictions or lockdowns to be imposed.

Given the relatively short period between the final decision being announced on 30 July and the reopening of establishments, a hugely significant effort had been made by senior leadership teams and facilities management staff to ensure that all buildings had been prepared to welcome back children, young people and staff safely. In addition, the department and individual establishments had been supported by colleagues from across the Council, especially colleagues in the Corporate Health and Safety Unit (CHSU), in ensuring that learners were able to return and the appropriate safety measures had been put in place.

Following the publication of the national guidance, the department had prepared a template action plan outlining the key safety measures which schools would be required to take into account when preparing for reopening. This wide ranging document included a number of sections each with detailed action points. In addition to the individual school recovery plans, the department continued to work closely with the CHSU to review all individual building risk assessments and ensure that they reflected all updated guidance. These official building risk assessments had been supplemented by individual establishment risk assessments, with a focus on education-specific elements and individual risk assessments for children, young people and staff where this is required. Role-based risk assessments had also been developed for certain posts and curriculum subject areas had specific professional guidance referenced in risk assessments which was being followed.

A detailed guidance note was issued to all schools and early learning centres on the process for responding to any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19. All head teachers were familiar with the process and had communicated this with the relevant staff in their own establishment. The department continued to work closely with colleagues in Environmental Health and the local Health Protection Team to ensure that a robust response procedure was in place should there be any localised school cases in the weeks and months ahead.

In following the guidance from the Scottish Government, there was a requirement for an enhanced cleaning regime to be in place across all schools and early years settings, including a focus on regular day cleaning. It was explained that in recent months the department had recruited additional day cleaning staff for establishments across the authority complemented by the introduction of new systems. There was also a significant increase in the amount of cleaning and hygiene supplies required, with regular wiping down of surfaces before and after use and regular hand sanitising being required. It was unclear how long these additional measures would be required for, but costs had been projected to the end of the financial year.

As part of the Scottish Government's national approach to recovery, additional resources had been made available to local authorities to support the recovery of learning loss through the allocation of funding for additional teaching staff. A total of £1.1m had been confirmed for the current school session, with further allocations, expected to be in the region of £0.6m, pending, and the department was working with head teachers on the opportunities that this additional funding provided.

This additional resource would be used by individual schools to supplement their existing budgets, including Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) and Lowest 20% resource allocations. Head teachers had the discretion to make decisions about how they would spend these resources and in doing so would consider collaboration and pooling of resources in clusters or local geographical areas where there was of benefit to their learners.

Mr Morris commended the support and effort of all school staff in implementing the Scottish Government's 2 main priorities of preparing schools to be able to operate safely and in addressing the issue of the recovery from learning loss resulting from the closedown. This had been achieved in a relatively short time following the confirmation that schools would reopen fully from 11 August and had involved considerable effort from school staff and staff from numerous Council departments and partner agencies.

In response to Councillor Bamforth who, whilst commending the effort of all staff in supporting young people during the period of closedown and in preparing schools for reopening, sought clarification on the amount of Scottish Government financial support the Council had received, the Director advised that to date £415,000 had been received towards the cost of logistics including enhanced cleaning measures and that it was still open to the Council to submit spend accrued for a share of the £30m fund established by the Scottish Government to offset the other additional costs associated with the return to full-time education.

Mr Hay, also in response to an enquiry from Councillor Bamforth, confirmed that concern had been raised regarding the number of parents and carers congregating outside schools to pick up children and who were clearly not complying with the appropriate national guidance on physical distancing and the use of face coverings in crowded places. He explained that there was no "one size fits all" solution in light of the differing layouts of individual schools and that head teachers had been encouraged to communicate directly with parents and carers with a view to establishing local solutions which complied with the guidance. He also confirmed that a reduction in the number of staff members who had been unable to work due to the previous guidance on shielding which had recently been lifted, had had a welcome positive impact on staffing levels.

Councillor Wallace, referring to discussion at the June meeting of the committee with regard to the provision of blended learning, expressed the view that what had been delivered to pupils during the period of lockdown was not blended but digital learning and sought clarification on what progress, if any, had been made in this regard.

In response, the Director agreed that what had been delivered had not been, in the main, blended learning but remote learning. However, many of the skills developed during this period would stand the department, schools and pupils in good stead as it sought to address the issue of learning loss and making up for lost teaching time. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the department was working hard to ensure that the digital skills learned by teachers and pupils were embedded in its recovery plans. The department was working closely with the West Partnership to develop and roll out digital lessons as well as digital resources that could be used in the event of a subject teacher being unavailable for any reason or where learners and staff need to self-isolate. It was also making effective use of the Google Classroom app as part of the digital learning process.

Councillor Merrick commended the Director on an excellent report and paid tribute to the quality of leadership within the department which had been a major contributory factor in getting schools back safely and in a very short timescale. Returning to the issue of parents and carers entering school grounds to pick up children, he sought clarification on whether there was a blanket ban on entering playgrounds or if it was for the management team at individual schools to decide. In response, Mr Hay explained that there was a general presumption against parents and carers entering school playgrounds or other outdoor areas. However, some schools were able to make use of separate, controlled areas of the school grounds and management teams were working closely with the Council's health and safety team to implement individual solutions for each school where this was possible whilst prioritising the safety of children, young people and staff.

Councillor Buchanan added his thanks to all concerned in producing the report and for the efforts of all staff and partners on getting schools ready for opening safely within a short period of time. He referred to the report as a living document which would continue to evolve as the situation developed and the relevant guidance changed. He also warned that local outbreaks were a strong possibility and that every precaution must continue to be taken to mitigate against any potential risk.

The Director concluded the discussions by reporting that all teaching staff who had been absent from work as a result of self-isolation or shielding had now returned and only 7 local government staff within the department were currently absent. She also reiterated that the department would continue to learn appropriate lessons from outbreaks elsewhere and stressed that the evidence suggested that no current outbreaks involved transmission within schools although a small number were linked to schools and that it was realistic to expect that there would at some point be an outbreak associated with an East Renfrewshire school. She ended by saying that schools had done an excellent job in getting pupils back to full-time education within a very short timescale and that staff were delighted to be back at work.

Having heard Councillor O'Kane express his appreciation to all staff across the Council and partners and also for the role played by the EIS and other trades unions in helping to open schools safely and in line with Scottish Government guidance, the committee agreed to:-

- a) note the contents of the report and endorse the department's recovery planning approach;
- b) welcome the successful reopening of all East Renfrewshire schools and early learning settings to children, young people and staff and the efforts of staff across the Council to support this; and
- c) request that further updates are provided to the committee on the department's recovery and the use of additional Scottish Government resources to address learning loss amongst school pupils.

CHAIR