

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of virtual meeting held at 10.00am on 19 August 2021.

Present:

Councillor Alan Lafferty (Chair)	Councillor Gordon Wallace
Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)	Councillor Colm Merrick (Vice Chair)
Councillor Caroline Bamforth	Dr Frank Angell
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Ms Dorothy Graham
Councillor Jim McLean	Mr Des Morris

Councillor Lafferty in the Chair

Attending:

Mark Ratter, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement); Joe McCaig, Head of Education (Performance and Provision); Siobhan McColgan, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager (Developing People); Graeme Hay, Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change); Colin Hutton, Senior Communications Officer; John Burke, Committee Services Officer; and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

Apologies:

Mary McIntyre.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1715. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

SQA EXAMINATION DIET 2021

1716. Councillor Lafferty invited Joe McCaig, Head of Education Services (Performance and Provision), to give an overview of results in East Renfrewshire schools from the SQA examination diet 2021. Mr McCaig clarified that the oral update given at this meeting would be followed by a more detailed analysis paper at a future meeting of the committee.

Having summarised the background to cancellation of the 2020/2021 examination diet and its replacement with an alternative certification model which would be based on teacher judgements, supported by assessment resources and quality assurance, the Head of Education Services (Performance and Provision) explained that in response, the Education Department co-ordinated a local authority approach to quality assurance and moderation of assessment instruments in all secondary schools. This represented a different approach to the 2019/2020 alternative certification model, since the attainment was determined purely by demonstrated assessment evidence rather than inferred attainment.

Staff had worked tirelessly to ensure that all assessment evidence was properly validated and moderated while also providing a high quality of learning and teaching continued throughout the pandemic and any subsequent school closures.

It was further explained that in accordance with the certification model, the SQA sampled evidence from all schools in addition to which Education Scotland reviewed the processes of the Education Department and schools. Furthermore, the Education Department worked with other local authorities in the West Partnership Collaborative to ensure that any actions taken in terms of the alternative certification model reflected best practice at both a local and national level.

Thereafter the Head of Education (Performance and Provision) presented some of the highlights from the results generated by the alternative certification model, which had been issued on 10 August 2021.

94% of pupils had attained 5 or more awards at National 3 level with 95% attaining 5 or more awards at National 4 level or better. This was broadly similar to the previous year's attainment.

At National 5 level or better, 79% of S4 pupils had attained 5 or more awards. This was the second highest performance to date. In particular, at St Luke's High School, the proportion of S4 pupils attaining 5 or more awards at National 5 was the highest since 2016.

The gap between pupils residing in the least and most deprived postcodes in attaining 5 or more awards at National 5 had reduced for the third year in a row, and was at its lowest recorded level.

The highest ever proportion of S5 pupils had attained 3 or 5 or more awards with the second highest proportion of pupils ever attaining 1 or more awards. Half of all S5 pupils attained 5 or more awards at Higher while almost 75% attained 3 or more awards. Several schools in East Renfrewshire recorded their highest ever performance for S5 pupils.

At Advanced Higher level, the highest ever proportion of pupils had attained 1 or more awards and several schools had recorded their highest ever proportion of pupils attaining Advanced Higher awards.

It was noted that candidates would be able to appeal against any award by going direct to the SQA. Appeals could be made on 3 bases: that an academic judgement had been made in error; that there had been an administrative error; or that there had been some discrimination that had taken place in respect to the award. The SQA had decided that for most national qualifications, the assessment modifications that were in place for 2021 would continue for 2021/2022.

Referring to proposals for 2021/22, it was explained that on 18 August 2021 the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills had informed Parliament that subject to national health guidance it was planned that an examination diet for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher would take place in session 2021/2022. Should any cancellation of the diet occur, teachers and lecturers would be asked to use their professional judgement of assessment evidence gathered throughout the school year to determine grades.

The Head of Education (Performance and Provision) having thanked all pupils, parents and staff for their vital contributions during a challenging year for all in education and congratulated them on their achievements through the year, Provost Fletcher asked if there was any indication that the gap between performance in East Renfrewshire schools and other local authorities had narrowed as a result of the current situation. In reply, the Head of Education (Performance and Provision) explained that significant work had been undertaken to ensure that all assessment pieces used by schools had been valid and reliable in determining grades.

This had involved a lot of moderation and validation work by both the schools and the SQA and he was confident that those awards were robust and reliable. In terms of comparative local authority performance, it was difficult to assess at this stage as information would not be released until later in the year through the Insight tool. However, he pointed out that East Renfrewshire's performance had exceeded all its virtual comparators. Work would be ongoing with all schools to ensure that those high standards were maintained going into the 2022 exam diet.

Councillor Bamforth also added her thanks to all parents, pupils and staff for their hard work and asked if the data gathering that had taken place in 2021 would be continued in case of any cancellation of exams for 2022. The Head of Education (Performance and Provision) pointed out that East Renfrewshire schools were very data rich and that had been one of the cornerstones of the authority's continued success. Further guidance was expected to come from SQA following the recent announcement of the exam diet for 2022. The expectation was that assessment evidence would be gathered throughout the year and could be used in case of any cancellation of exams. This would not present additional workload to teachers as it was a standard part of the curriculum.

Councillor Wallace asked if some of the positive initiatives that had come from the implementation of remote learning would be maintained, even in a standard learning setting. In reply, the Head of Education (Performance and Provision) confirmed that this would be the case, with the Director confirming that all high quality resources identified as part of the remote learning offering would be retained for the use of East Renfrewshire pupils.

Councillors Merrick and Buchanan also added their praise to pupils, parents and staff for their considerable efforts over the year and beyond, through the COVID pandemic.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) also highlighted the work of education hubs and emergency childcare services that contributed to increasing educational equity and closing the attainment gap. She also pointed out that the alternative certification model remained in place should it be required and there was a proposal that the working group set up around the model would continue to meet to ensure that any mitigation of COVID related issues in 2022 could be implemented immediately. Furthermore, there was an ongoing national debate around the role of examinations, with some pupils responding better to the alternative model than the usual exam diet.

Councillor Lafferty thanked all for their contributions and congratulated the Education Department as well as pupils and parents for their ongoing work, hoping that the improvements could be maintained year on year.

Thereafter, the Committee agreed to note the report.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT YEAR END REPORT 2020-2021

1717. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members of the year end performance of the Education Department for 2020/2021. The report was based on performance indicators and activities in the Outcome Delivery Plan 2020-2023 (ODP), approved by Cabinet in October 2020. Detailed performance results were attached as an appendix to the report.

The Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change) explained that due to differences in corporate/educational reporting cycles, there was a slight disconnect in when figures for some measures would become available and any blanks in the appendix were due to the figures not being finalised.

The report highlighted some real strengths in adaptation of service delivery and noted the professionalism, commitment and innovation of staff in delivering a high standard educational service in a very challenging environment. This set a strong base line to build upon for future years' performance.

The information presented in the report showed a very positive picture overall with key strengths highlighted including, amongst others: very good performance in terms of attainment, and leaver destinations; very high satisfaction levels with the Council's schools as expressed in Citizen's Panel results; and progress with digitisation of "back office" functions and processes, including the launch and rollout of the Parents' Portal.

Councillor Bamforth thanked the officers for an excellent report and highlighted, in particular, the effectiveness of interventions taking place at the Early Years stage. She also highlighted that 30 schools and centres in East Renfrewshire had been awarded green flag eco-school awards, which was very important in terms of the ongoing climate change crisis.

Councillor Wallace noted that while performance remained high, there had been a decrease in young people moving on to positive destinations and queried the reasons for this. He also asked for an explanation in terms of increased costs noted in the report. The Head of Education (Quality Improvement) indicated that follow up measures had shown that positive destinations had actually increased and there had been a timing issue where children hadn't yet moved into that positive destination when the initial survey data was compiled. The Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change) stated that extra funding had come in to schools in terms of supporting additional teachers and resources. Despite schools being closed, some costs were fixed, for example, salaries. It was agreed that he would report back to Councillor Wallace on the specifics of the funding figures indicated in the report.

Thereafter, the committee:

- (a) approved the Education Department's Year End report for 2020/2021; and
- (b) agreed that further details on the increased costs highlighted by the report be provided to Councillor Wallace.

BUILDING BACK BETTER AND FAIRER DRAFT FRAMEWORK 2021-2022

1718. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education on the Education Department's draft Building Back Better and Fairer Framework 2021-2022.

The report explained that there were well established and effective systems in place within East Renfrewshire to support schools and services to improve continuously. However, establishments and communities had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including two extended periods of school closure with children and young people moving to remote learning.

The report outlined many ways in which East Renfrewshire schools had been effectively dealing with the challenges which had arisen due to the pandemic, but the Director of Education pointed out that there was an expectation that educational establishments would continue to respond to COVID on an ongoing basis.

During the past 18 months, the Education Department had engaged with staff, parents and pupils on changes made as a result of COVID. Those discussions had allowed the department to reflect on what had gone well or could be improved. In particular, stakeholders had highlighted the resilience of the children, the quality of support available for families in East Renfrewshire and the support available for staff, including professional learning opportunities

in developing digital skills. However, it was also highlighted that there was a need to improve IT provision, address network issues and allow more opportunities for clubs and extra-curricular activity.

The draft Framework, a copy of which was attached as an appendix to the report, had been created to take account of the key areas highlighted in the consultations and establish priorities required to support schools and services as they recovered following the pandemic. It was designed to complement the activities set out in the Local Improvement Plan (LIP), with a particular focus over a 15 month period, as opposed to the three year period of the LIP.

The Framework also had a clear focus on improving outcomes for all learnings, with particular focus on addressing the inequalities of outcome experienced by different equity groups.

Councillor Lafferty asked if Head Teachers were now more able to take annual leave, as he was aware that during the initial phases of the pandemic, they had struggled to do so. The Director of Education reassured the committee that the position was greatly improved in summer 2021.

Councillor Wallace expressed concern around support to social care and the synergy social care services had with educational outcomes. He asked what the position of the Education Department was on the proposed centralisation of social care and what impact it could have on education. The Director of Education responded that the original proposal had only proposed to look at adult social care services, but children's services had been brought in via a recent consultation. He stated that the intention was to produce more consistent outcomes across the country, however, there was a debate to be had through the consultation on whether a centralisation of services would be the best way to achieve that. Councillor Wallace indicated that he had been pleased with the partnership working he had seen between education and the Health and Social Care Partnership, and sincerely hoped that this was preserved.

Councillor Bamforth asked that the impact upon teacher wellbeing through the pandemic be considered as part of the Framework. The Head of Education (Equality and Equity) pointed out that there had been a strong focus on staff wellbeing, particularly with the Healthier Minds resources that had been developed by the Educational Psychology department, many of which focused on teacher/staff wellbeing.

Councillor Merrick enquired about parental engagement and how many parents felt empowered enough to contribute to these processes. The Head of Education (Equality and Equity) stated that there had been a number of lessons learned on parental engagement and the Framework would assist with that. There was also a new Parental Engagement and Involvement Strategy being developed to particularly look at this subject. A suite of training was also being offered to staff on effective communication with parents.

Councillor Buchanan welcomed the focus on continuous improvement. He referred to the comments by Councillor Wallace in terms of partnership working and inter-departmental working, in particular around social care. He shared the concerns expressed and stated that the responses to the consultation from the Council would be robust.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to approve the Building Back Better and Fairer Framework 2021 -2022.

