

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL
AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
25 September 2014
Report by Clerk
NATIONAL EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT
SCHOOL EDUCATION

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To provide information on the Accounts Commission report on *School Education*.

RECOMMENDATION

2. It is recommended that the Committee considers the report.

SCHOOL EDUCATION

3. A copy of the Accounts Commission report on *School Education* has already been circulated to all Audit and Scrutiny Committee Members. The Members who are leading on the review of this particular report are Councillor Gilbert and Councillor McCaskill. In accordance with arrangements established by the Committee for dealing with such reports, the Director of Education has provided comments on it. A copy of the feedback is attached to this report (see Appendix).

RECOMMENDATION

4. It is recommended that the Committee considers the report.

Local Government Access to Information Act 1985

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Background Papers: Accounts Commission report on *School Education*

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 SEPTEMBER 2014

Report by Director of Education

SCHOOL EDUCATION

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION REPORT PREPARED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of the report is to apprise members of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of the assessment of the Education Department's practices against the recommendations made in the '*School Education*' Accounts Commission report prepared by Audit Scotland.

RECOMMENDATION

2. It is recommended that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee acknowledges the response and actions taken by the Education Department.

BACKGROUND

3. In June 2014 Audit Scotland published the '*School Education*' report on behalf of the Accounts Commission, following their audit of primary and secondary school education across Scotland.
4. Audit Scotland's review sought to assess how efficiently and effectively councils are using their resources to maximise pupil achievement in schools and to examine the following:
 - How much councils spend on school education and what they spend it on;
 - How effectively councils are driving forward improvements in pupil achievement; and,
 - How efficiently councils are using their resources to maximise pupil achievement.
5. Audit Scotland used a range of approaches in their audit including document reviews, data analysis, surveys (including all 32 councils), interviews and focus groups. They carried out in-depth interviews with a range of staff in four councils, Aberdeenshire, East Renfrewshire, Fife, and Glasgow City. East Renfrewshire was one of three councils where they also held focus groups with teachers and pupils.
6. The involvement in East Renfrewshire took place in November 2013 and comprised interviews with the Convener and Vice Convener for Education and Equalities, the Opposition Spokesperson for Education, Director of Education, Head of School Performance and Provision, some Quality Improvement staff, head teachers of Carolside and Crookfur primary schools and St Ninian's and Woodfarm high schools. In addition to discussion with head teachers, some teachers and pupils were involved in focus groups.

REPORT

7. The key messages in the 'School Education' report are:
 - In 2012/13, councils spent £4.8 billion on education services, of which £3.8 billion was spent on primary and secondary education. Around two-thirds of this expenditure (68 per cent) was on staff costs. Councils' spending on education fell by five per cent in real terms between 2010/11 and 2012/13, largely as a result of employing fewer staff. Councils' education services are likely to continue to face budgetary pressures, and they need to be alert to the potential impact of increased workloads on remaining staff.
 - Performance has improved against all ten of the attainment measures examined over the last decade. However, there is significant variation in attainment between individual councils, schools, and groups of pupils; and there is a considerable gap between Scotland and the top performing countries. Current measures at both national and council level focus on the attainment of secondary pupils at S4-S6 level. There are no comparable measures available at a council and national level on wider achievement, or the performance of pupils from P1-S3.
 - Levels of deprivation have a large influence on attainment. Some schools have achieved better attainment results than their levels of deprivation would indicate, suggesting that the gap between the lowest and highest performing schools cannot be wholly attributed to different levels of deprivation. Closing the gap in performance between schools is likely to be critical to improving overall attainment levels.
 - Councils that have made the most improvements have focused on areas such as developing leadership skills, and improving both teacher quality and systems for monitoring and tracking pupil data. There are also increasing opportunities for pupils to develop a wide range of skills for living and working in the wider world. Councils are starting to target resources to improve both attainment and wider achievement but there is scope to improve strategic planning and strengthen the role of elected members in holding education services to account.
8. East Renfrewshire is referenced a number of times in the report and case study 3 on page 35 is about our local practice in continuing to raise attainment.
9. The audit report made a number of recommendations that it has asked councils to consider. These are included in the attached appendix alongside East Renfrewshire Education Department assessments.
10. The thrust of the key messages and recommendations in the Audit Scotland publication are considered to present no difficulty for the department or the council. Indeed we have operated and led developments in these areas for a number of years as fundamental to our continuous improvement agenda to achieve and attain the best possible outcomes for all learners as efficiently and effectively as possible.
11. The department shuns complacency, and as noted in our response to the recommendations, even where a response has been evaluated as in place and working well, we will continue to seek continuous improvement in all aspects.

RECOMMENDATION

12. It is recommended that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee acknowledges the response and actions taken by the Education Department.

Mhairi Shaw
Director of Education
September 2014

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APPENDIX

1. Education Department response: 'Assessment of Current Position in ERC'

Background Paper

1. 'School Education' Accounts Commission report prepared by Audit Scotland, 19 June 2014

Key Words

This report relates to the response to the recommendations made by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission on their 'School Education' audit.

Key Words include:

School Education, Audit Scotland, Attainment, Achievement, Performance, Expenditure, Improvement

Assessment of Current Position in ERC						
Recommendations Councils should:	No action needed	No but action in hand	Yes in place but needs improving	** Yes in place and working well	Not applicable	ERC Comment
Ensure they fully understand why levels of attainment vary between their schools and different groups of pupils				✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The drive to raise attainment has always been the key focus of East Renfrewshire Education Department- it underpins our vision of <i>Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences</i> (formerly Inclusion, Achievement, Ambition and Progress for All as noted in the Audit Scotland report). We recognise that attainment matters to the progress of all children and young people and in this regard the importance of performance and information management as part of quality improvement. • The Department has always used the analysis of management information and benchmarking as part of its drive for continuous improvement. Benchmarking is used to help see if the ambition of raising attainment is being realised for all young people, by looking at particular key groups. For example, taking a closer look at performance in terms of gender, ethnicity, poverty, looked after status, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and lowest performing 20%. It is recognised that not all of these groups are mutually exclusive, but it has been shown that specific groups can be identified where there is particular scope for improvement. Comparison at all levels is used to highlight and question differences to stimulate improvement ultimately for each and every individual learner. • We also recognise the importance of the context within which schools work, since social background and other factors are linked to performance. Appreciating the wider context within which children and young people learn and linking to performance, can help us understand the need for certain support to overcome barriers to learning.

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Recommendations Councils should:	No action needed	No but action in hand	Yes in place but needs improving	** Yes in place and working well	Not applicable	ERC Comment
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full and open reporting of performance results, in the context of benchmarking with other authorities/schools/groups etc, enables us to better understand our schools and areas where excellent practice exists, to celebrate and disseminate that to improve outcomes for all children and young people. It also enables us to more easily scrutinise performance, by highlighting areas where there is scope for improvement. • A key part of our improvement practices is the monitoring and tracking of individual pupil progress from early years to post-16 in literacy and numeracy, through baseline and standardised assessments in primary and early secondary, through to national qualifications. This helps us identify each learner's strengths and areas for improvement, and groups of learners. • In approving the Education Local Improvement Plan and the Council's Outcome Delivery Plan, elected members have challenged the department and schools to support and monitor the progress of specific groups. Benchmarking is used to evidence and report on any improvement.
Develop and implement strategies to reduce the gaps in performance between the highest and lowest performing schools				✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through rigorous analysis of performance at all levels and benchmarking we know where we can further raise standards. This helps inform improvement, but looking at the statistics alone does not affect improvement. Ascertaining what is behind differences in performance is as critical as initially uncovering the differences themselves. The department's quality improvement activity is focused on that. • Identifying the gaps, understanding the reasons behind

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						<p>them (through for example, commissioning research) informs our improvement activity which may include developing policy, providing Continuous Professional Development activities to improve practice and the targeting of resources to support and challenge better experiences and outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The gaps between the lowest and highest performing schools can be associated with various factors in addition to individual learners backgrounds and needs and so it is important to identify and spread good practice for example in the teaching of mathematics, as well as supporting individuals. Gaps can be minimised by increasing the attainment for all through improving leadership at all levels, the provision of high quality learning experiences, a focus on improving learning & teaching, targeted early intervention, and breaking down barriers to learning. • Our performance management arrangements monitor outcomes and report regularly on delivery against strategic objectives, such as raising attainment among the lowest performing pupils. Such information is shared widely e.g. to Education Committee, staff groups and parent council chairs. Reporting takes different forms, for example through our annual self-evaluation report (Standards & Quality), presentations and specific reports. • Information has been shared with head teachers and cascaded to other staff on approaches to engaging different groups of learners that have had success. Examples of this include research by our Psychological Services on the ethnic achievement gap and the factors affecting

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						<p>educational outcomes for children and young people of Pakistani descent; the authority's review of Mathematics, Modern Languages, Literacy and English and associated action plans and staff development; and at present the QI team is compiling a report based on head teachers' evaluations of the impact of their local strategies/practices on how they used their additional resource to improve the attainment of the lowest 20%; this will in turn inform the department's Lowest Performing 20% Action Plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other work is shared more widely as well as locally. East Renfrewshire has taken part in the national School Improvement Partnership Programme (SIPP). Crookfur and Thornliebank Primary Schools have been involved and supported both practically and strategically by a Quality Improvement Officer. The SIPP is overseen and financially supported by Education Scotland and aims to encourage staff to learn from each other, experiment with their practice and monitor and evaluate change with a focus on innovating to tackle educational inequality to improve attainment. The evaluation support is being provided by researchers from the Robert Owen Centre at Glasgow University. This action research will contribute to reducing gaps in performance. Extremely positive feedback has been received of the work done to date by ERC with Crookfur / Thornliebank primary schools looking at raising attainment in mathematics for P5 boys and ethnic minority learners. • Monitoring and evaluation are essential to continuous improvement and so strategies and practice are placed in this context to ensure continued relevance and drive for success.

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Continue to work with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to develop a suite of agreed performance measures which would provide an overall picture of educational attainment and achievement across Scotland			✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERC Education Department is an active contributor in working with Scottish Government and Education Scotland. We contribute to consultations and have shared our practice. Senior officers in the department are members of the Association of Directors of Education networks such as the Performance and Improvement group, and the Curriculum Assessment and Qualifications group, which are key national forums influencing developments around performance measures that would provide an overall picture of educational attainment and achievement across Scotland. • EMIS has regularly reported back to officers in the Scottish Government and Education Scotland about the importance of such bodies providing timeous data (when it is current and relevant to maximise its use/impact) and performance measures (that are relevant and provide insight into a range of areas and stages of education) and sharing that nationally to stimulate improvement. The provision of such information provides external benchmarking for schools and authorities to further challenge improvement. • In addition to providing feedback to for example consultations over the continued publication and availability of national datasets, officers have been actively involved in the piloting of the new national benchmarking tool (Insight) for helping to analyse and compare school performance in the senior phase (via secondary school 'qualifications' S4-S6). • At present there are no comparable measures at a council

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						<p>or school level to compare the performance of pupils prior to the senior phase in schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERC has developed its own assessments, measures and tracking in the early years and primary sectors which, with Curriculum for Excellence levels in the broad general education phase, provides evidence to intervene earlier in a pupil's learning to help them fulfil their potential. Officers in East Renfrewshire have already requested and will continue to work with national bodies to seek that such a tool is developed to facilitate benchmarking of measures prior to the senior phase.
<p>Review the sufficiency of information provided to education committees on attainment at S4-S6, pupil performance between P1-S3 and wider achievement. They should also ensure committees have the time and support to adequately challenge and hold to account education services</p>				✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's Education Committee has supported the provision and benchmarking of performance information since its inception in 1996. In particular there have been regular discussions of comparative performance information on how the Council's schools are doing relative to those in other education authorities across Scotland. Benchmarking and continuous improvement are as important to elected members, as they are to the Council's education leaders and staff in schools as they all work together to realise each learner's potential. • Detailed presentations are made to committee to show how as an education authority and as individual schools the Council performs, benchmarked against family groups of similar authorities and schools. Not only are similar comparators used to show performance against 'similar others' or family groups, but performance is also benchmarked across all available data, for example all education authorities.

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						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to celebrating excellent practice, it also enables elected members to more easily scrutinise performance, by highlighting areas where there is scope for improvement. Committee members can and do request that something is done to improve these relative weaknesses and in due course the reporting of subsequent results should provide evidence that performance has indeed improved, and if not members question why not. • Although the main focus of interest has always been attainment - at all levels and stages of education - performance results in other areas are also made and shared to inform and stimulate improvement, e.g. presentations and reports to committee on school leaver destinations, exclusion and attendance rates, HMIE quality indicators, etc • Reports to committee, in particular the annual Standards and Quality Report and progress by the Education Department with the Outcome Delivery Plan, include various performance measures (in all school sectors e.g. Proportion of P1 children who have reached all of the expected developmental milestones on entry to school, % of primary pupils achieving appropriate curriculum for excellence levels and S2 standardised test levels, S4-S6 national qualifications, school leaver destinations) and progress towards targets. • Information of wider achievement is also included such as Duke of Edinburgh Awards, ASDAN Awards/Personal Effectiveness, Sports Leadership and Skills for Learning, Life and Work Qualifications.

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						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The presentations and such reports are subject of much interest and discussion by elected members.
Develop more coordinated approaches to gathering and recording information on the range of wider achievement activities offered in schools, including the levels of pupil participation and the outcomes they achieve. This will help councils to scrutinise performance and ensure resources are being used as efficiently as possible			✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The authority's Recognising Achievement and Raising Attainment strategy guides and supports schools to celebrate achievements. Working to achieve a variety of awards helps our children and young people to develop a range of skills and attributes which will support them to improve their skills for life, learning and work. The link between attainment and wider achievement is valued. By encouraging and promoting achievement in its widest sense both within and out with school, helps provide the climate and support to continuously improve standards of attainment, in addition to wider achievement being important in its own right. Young people's achievements are recognised through a wide range of awards and awarding bodies, including the ASDAN Award, John Muir Award, Saltire Award, Caritas Award, and the Modernising Volunteering Award. The Conveners' Awards for outstanding achievement is given annually in an awards ceremony to particular young people or groups. As part of feedback by Audit Scotland, they noted that ERC was one of the sixteen councils who collect data on their pupils' wider achievement. Audit Scotland also made follow-up contacts to some of our schools and our partner agencies to further examine our good practice in wider achievement such as our long established links with the Duke of Edinburgh programme and our vocational provision

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						<p>providing individualised and skills based programmes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMIS has developed a system with a school cluster to help them to record and track systematically the achievements of individual pupils. This system enables schools to monitor and evaluate the up-take and frequency of a range of activities including whole school responsibilities, extra-curricular and community involvement. • Use of such collated information lets school staff celebrate wider achievements and identify and then encourage those pupils with low participation levels, supporting them as appropriate. Aggregating the information enables the department to celebrate achievement, disseminate good practice and challenge and support those schools with lower levels of achievements/ participation.
Ensure education strategic documents contain clear priorities and actions that set out what is to be achieved in the short, medium and long term. Performance management arrangements should monitor outcomes and report regularly on delivery against strategic objectives, such as raising attainment among the lowest performing pupils				✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The department's vision, <i>Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences</i>, is designed to reflect the Council's Single Outcome Agreement (SOA), the Corporate Statement- Your Council Your Future, and the outcomes we strive to achieve for and with our residents. • Each year the department's Quality Improvement team and service managers carry out an extensive audit to identify strengths in our current provision and areas where further improvement is required. This is a strongly evidence-based exercise and results in the annual Standards and Quality Report (S&Q). • The Local Improvement Plan (LIP) reflects the areas for improvement identified through this annual process and outlines the actions we will take (what we will do to bring

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						<p>about improvement) over the next three years to achieve the expected impact and outcomes (what we will measure and report on). This plan has a clear focus on improving outcomes for all learners, and the impact expected on the experiences of children and young people in schools and centres. Our target outcomes and expected impacts are organised under the Getting it Right for Every Child wellbeing indicators (SHANARRI). The LIP is informed by the department's Outcome Delivery Plan which details the targets and indicators which will be used to measure the impact of our work in contributing to the delivery of East Renfrewshire's SOA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising attainment has always been a strategic objective of East Renfrewshire Education Department. For example the current LIP includes as expected outcomes and impacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – continue to be the highest performing mainland council area as measured by national examinations; – improved attainment in the senior phase; – an improvement in the attainment of the lowest performing 20% of East Renfrewshire's school age children and especially looked after children; and, – improved reading, writing and mathematics throughout the years of the broad general education. • Related activities are detailed such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – continue to support and challenge schools to raise attainment through analysis of data, improved professional judgements, the target setting process

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						<p>and improved learning teaching;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide further support to senior staff and teachers in schools in using tracking and monitoring tools, including the new Senior Phase Benchmarking Tool (Insight); and, - share best practice in raising attainment of the lowest performing 20%. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools, centres and clusters planning for improvement is based on the results of their own self-evaluation and guided by the LIP where they identify those aspects of performance in which improvement is necessary, while giving due weight to major local and national priorities such as improving the attainment of the lowest performing 20% and Curriculum for Excellence. • The S&Q report and the LIP are therefore fundamental parts of the department's and schools' framework for improvement, guiding our work with annual updates to take account of changing priorities.
Consistently use the Scottish Local Government Benchmarking Framework to compare their performance against other councils, and share good practice to improve educational attainment and wider achievement				✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As noted earlier, the department has always used benchmarking as part of its drive for continuous improvement with comparisons of performance at all levels (individual/group/school/authority) within and outwith the authority where relevant/available. • The department has used, and will continue to use, the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) along with benchmarking from other published datasets and local measures and to improve its service delivery and outcomes for children and young people. The Convener for Education

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						<p>and Equalities and Director of Education were invited to give evidence on benchmarking and continuous improvement and the use of LGBF in East Renfrewshire to a recent Local Government and Regeneration Committee at the Scottish Parliament</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The department contributed to the consultation on the development of the LGBF indicators and continues to feedback to refine the indicators for future releases to maximise their relevance and impact in terms of supporting improvement. • The department has also been part of the LGBF positive destinations family pilot, which seeks to explore the reasons behind the variation in performance for this indicator and enable the sharing of good practice across local authorities.
Fully assess the potential long-term impact on attainment and wider achievement of budget reductions			✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has supported the department to minimise the impact on front line services, in particular the classroom, of budget reductions. The importance of good quality teaching and learning is valued by elected members as is the importance placed on education by the community. • The authority is well placed to monitor changes in standards of attainment and wider achievement given its established systems and practices, focus on getting the basics right and measured approach to considering changes in the best interest of learners . • Linking the impact of any future approved budget reductions related to schools, prefive establishments and the department's quality improvement activity in challenging and supporting establishments to improve the attainment

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						<p>and achievement for all learners, will be closely monitored as we seek to target reduced resources to best effect.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It should be appreciated that raising standards is multi-faceted and complex, and some changes may transpire more quickly than others, with reductions in some areas not necessarily negatively impacting directly on standards, yet other less obvious reductions may more keenly be felt. • As a department we would argue that benchmarking of performance and information is even more important for elected members and officers in the current financial climate. Against a backdrop of budgetary pressures, growing public expectations and increasing demand for services, local authorities face difficult challenges of delivering efficiency gains, managing risk and raising performance. Elected members need to know how best to allocate resources, as do officers in the drive for continuous improvement. Benchmarking performance helps provide to elected members useful insights that can inform and support sound strategic and operational decision-making.
Monitor and act on the impact of revised working practices and staff reductions across all affected groups (e.g., teachers, administrative staff, classroom assistants) on staff wellbeing by, for example, monitoring sickness absence levels,				✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have undertaken a teacher workload survey and agreed associated action plan in conjunction with members of the teachers unions. This 2013 survey identified a number of workload generators of significant concern to teachers. Consequently, reporting to parents (all sectors), forward planning (primary schools) and new National Qualifications (secondary schools) became the focus for head teachers and trade union representatives when they met for a partnership event in December 2013. The report of the Scottish Government's Working Group on Tackling

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and through specific questions in staff surveys.						<p>Bureaucracy (November 2013) was also used to inform the discussions. A Joint Secretaries' Advice Note was issued by the LNCT in April 2014 to provide advice for establishments ahead of negotiations on working time agreements for session 2014/15 and an action plan to address the key areas is being jointly prepared.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an annual employee engagement survey conducted by the Council covering all staff groups including school-based staff. Topics include views of work and workload, management of change and improvement, and recognition and support. • The results of both surveys are reviewed and discussed at management and team meetings, and with staff to feedback results and effect necessary change/improvement. • In addition to the above, educational establishments undertake consultation exercises with all stakeholders including staff (teaching and other staff), as part of self-evaluation and improvement planning. The department samples all schools over a 4-year period. Questions in this annual survey are devised and used to inform progress towards key outcome targets contained in for example the Outcome Delivery Plan. • Schools and the department monitor and report on staff absence levels, taking a proactive approach to managing attendance. • The Council has attained healthy working lives gold award as part of our commitment to staff wellbeing.

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