

**Audit Scotland Report: School Education  
(Audit Scotland June 2014)****Report by Mary Smith, Director, Education, Communities and Economy****1. Purpose of the Report**

To provide the Audit Committee with a summary of the Audit Scotland report on School Education and the Council's position in relation to the report's findings. The full School Education report is available at [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk).

**2. Background**

Audit Scotland published on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2014 their report on the audit they carried out to assess how efficiently and effectively councils are using their resources to maximise pupil achievement in schools. The audit focused on primary and secondary school education in Scotland. They examined:

- how much councils spend on school education and what they spend it on
- how effectively councils are driving forward improvements in pupil achievement
- how efficiently councils are using their resources to maximise pupil achievement.

Sarah Pollock, Performance Audit and Best Value, Audit Scotland attended a meeting of Midlothian's elected members on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 to present the findings of their report on Scottish education.

**3. Key Messages**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.

- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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 learning, life and work preparing them to play an active role in the wider world. Councils are starting to target resources to improve both attainment, wider achievement and employability skills but there is scope to improve strategic planning and strengthen the role of elected members in holding education services to account.

#### **4. Audit Scotland Recommendations**

The report noted the following nine recommendations stating what Councils should do, the text in italics that follows each recommendation is how Midlothian Council is currently addressing or planning to address each one:

- 4.1 Ensure they fully understand why levels of attainment vary between their schools and different groups of pupils.

*All schools are issued with school attainment reports drawn from Insight. This includes a key focus on closing the attainment gap using key data e.g. Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data and Looked After Tariff scores which enables schools to identify, target and measure impact of improvement initiatives.*

- 4.2 Develop and implement strategies to reduce the gaps in performance between the highest and lowest performing schools.

*The Education and Lifelong Learning and Employability team is targeting additional support for our most disadvantaged communities and lowest performing schools. The Self-Improving School strategy is promoting collaboration with schools in East Lothian focussed on developing 'Closing the Gap' strategies.*

- 4.3 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.

*The Insight development has been welcomed by secondary schools and provides the type of targeted data which will support schools improvement. A similar development which is able to report on the progress of pupils through the Broad General Education (BGE) would be welcomed and a some of our primary schools are now involved in the Raising Attainment for All (RAFA) programme.*

- 4.4 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.

*The data provided by Insight provide elected members with the level of detail needed to scrutinise the performance of schools and the education service. The education service is currently reviewing the reports which can be provided by standardised assessment which will provide a benchmark of attainment progress through the BGE. Schools continue to develop the use of SEEMIS tracking to monitor and report on progress through the BGE.*

- 4.5 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.

*Schools are developing pupil profiles which record wider achievement progress and support the P7-S1 and S3-S4 transitions.*

- 4.6 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.

*The measures reported through covalent have been reviewed to align with national measures and independent national data.*

- 4.7 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.

*The local benchmarking framework is used in order to compare performance against other councils through our formal reporting mechanisms which include an annual attainment report, quarterly reporting and the Education Service Annual Plan. The new insight tool has been a key tool from which school level reports are produced to ensure that schools are regularly evaluating their performance against the virtual and national measures.*

*Midlothian schools are also involved in local Quality Improvement Partnerships (QIPS), the national School Improvement Partnership Programme (SIPP) and Raising Attainment for All (RAFA). These partnerships are designed to ensure that our schools share good practice within and out with the local authority. Visible Learning has been adopted as a key driver to improve outcomes for learners in Midlothian and as a result Midlothian have presented at a UK conference on this work. In addition, Midlothian is also involved in the Numeracy Hub initiative which is an inter-authority group which focuses on improving numeracy outcomes for learners.*

- 4.8 Fully assess the potential long-term impact on attainment and wider achievement of budget reductions.

*There are four education themes contained within the Business Transformation programme which include a review of the Pre-school provision, the review of secondary provision for the senior phase, school administration and the review and rationalisation of the school estate and catchment areas. These key themes will be equality impact assessed and are monitored through formal reporting mechanisms to the Business Transformation Board. In addition, our resources are specifically targeted towards ongoing preventative intervention programmes in our more deprived communities. This work will be evaluated as part of the wider Closing the Gap strategy.*

- 4.9 Monitor and act on the impact of revised working practices and staff reductions across all affected groups (eg, teachers, administrative staff, classroom assistants) on staff wellbeing by, for example, monitoring sickness absence levels, and through specific questions in staff surveys.

*A staff survey is carried out annually and follow-up actions are reported formally. Sickness absence is robustly monitored and ongoing key actions are led by school group managers reporting to the Head of Education and Director of Education, Communities and Economy. Sickness absence is also reported in our quarterly scrutiny reports.*

A self-assessment tool, designed to help councillors review progress in implementing the recommendations in the report was published with the report and is available at [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk).

## 5. Report Implications

### 5.1 Resource

There are no direct resource implications as a result of this report.

### 5.2 Risk

There are no additional direct risks to be considered as a result of this report.

### 5.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- Community safety
- Adult health, care and housing
- Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- Sustainable growth
- Business transformation and Best Value
- None of the above

### 5.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Midlothian Council and its Community Planning Partners have made a commitment to treat the following areas as key priorities under the Single Midlothian Plan:-

- Early years and reducing child poverty
- Economic Growth and Business Support
- Positive destinations for young people

This report does not directly impact Midlothian Council's key priorities.

### **5.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes**

Whilst not directly impacting Midlothian Council's and wider partners performance and outcomes the report does ensure consideration is given to wider strategic planning and performance management as part of Midlothian Council's response to Audit Scotland's recommendations noted in the report.

### **5.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach**

This report does not directly impact actions and plans in place to adopt a preventative approach.

### **5.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders**

There are no additional Communities or other stakeholder issues arising directly as a result of this report.

### **5.8 Ensuring Equalities**

This report does not recommend any change to policy or practice and therefore does not require an Equalities Impact Assessment.

### **5.9 Supporting Sustainable Development**

There are no sustainability issues with regard to this report.

### **5.10 IT Issues**

There are no direct IT implications arising from this report.

## **6. Recommendations**

Note the Audit Scotland report and the position of Midlothian Council in relation to the report's recommendations.

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