

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JUNE 2006

INSPECTION OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY FUNCTION OF EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1** To inform elected members of the outcome of the pilot inspection of the education function of East Ayrshire Council conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** Under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, HMIE have a statutory responsibility to inspect the functions of education authorities. In the five years since the Act, HMIE have now inspected all 32 local authorities in Scotland. This process is known by the general title INEA1. It was felt nationally that this had been a very useful exercise. However, HMIE as a result of their increasing partnerships with authorities, have developed sufficient expertise and knowledge of the functions of Councils in relation to education that has enabled them to revise the model. This revision is known by the new general title, "INEA2". This new approach is intended to be a more proportionate, intelligence-led and economical approach to inspection, which also articulates with other inspection processes, such as the Audit of Best Value and Community Planning, and forthcoming child protection inspections.
- 2.2** In early 2005, East Ayrshire agreed to be a pilot for the inspection of its education function under INEA2 arrangements. This inspection was to include the usual follow-up by HMIE on the inspection conducted under INEA1. Accordingly, the process started in April 2005, with a briefing of staff. Inspectors were present in the authority between June 2005 and October 2005. The final report was published on 31 May 2006.
- 2.3** A full copy of the report is attached as Appendix A. HMIE do not intend to publish a written document as a result of this inspection, owing to its pilot nature. However, this report has been published on the web as part of the HMIE website www.hmie.gov.uk

3. SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 3.1** The report is structured around the key questions for HMIE and other national inspection agencies. This is under the following headings:

- What key outcomes has the authority achieved and what impact has it had?
- How good is strategic leadership and direction?
- How well have key issues been addressed since the last inspection?
- What is the Council's capacity for improvement?

3.2 Within the report there is text written in bold type. These emboldened sections would be extracted in future reports to provide a summary which will be distributed to parents, and other stakeholders.

3.3 Throughout the text, a number of good practice boxes have been highlighted. In the case of East Ayrshire the good practice that has been identified relates to:

- Promotion of arts culture and enterprise
- Promotion of health through improving diet
- Community Learning and Development work in schools
- School nursing staff using "Circle Time"
- Leadership training
- Partnership with parents
- Sexual health

4. THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

4.1 The report is overwhelmingly positive with all gradings being either good or very good. One of the particular features of the report is that its description and evaluation goes beyond the simple provision made by educational services. It notes, for example, the wider support given by other council departments to the education function, and also, of course, the work of Social Work staff particularly is acknowledged. It also puts emphasis on the support given by the Council and Elected Members themselves for the education of children and young people. The work of other agencies, particularly health, is recognised. Taken together, therefore, this report is an extremely positive picture of the authority working with its partners.

4.2 In the evaluation that has taken place on the issues since the last inspection. The report notes good or very good progress on each of the six main points for action.

4.3 In keeping with all HMI reports, the inspectors note any key issues. Within this document three are given. Improving attainment in certain areas of the primary school curriculum is noted, together with the "positive promising steps such as the literacy leaders in primary schools". The second issue is exclusions from school where, levels particularly in some secondary schools are seen as being high in relation to national averages. Thirdly, there is provision for looked after accommodated young people and the continuing need to raise attainment. The authority had identified all three of these areas as part of its self evaluation, before the inspection process had begun, and

therefore, a series of actions had already been agreed in advance of both the inspection and, indeed, its subsequent report.

4.4 Key strengths were identified:

- The leadership and direction provided to the department.
- The productive links established within the Council and with other external bodies.
- The successes now evident in Learning Partnerships.
- The high level of approval for the support given by the department to the work of schools amongst Head Teachers.
- The extensive range of high quality experiences provided through which children and young people were able to achieve success in sports, arts, enterprise and activities.

4.5 The report concludes:

“East Ayrshire Council continue to demonstrate a strong capacity for improvement. HMIe was satisfied that the Council, was very well placed to meet the challenge it faced in delivery high quality education services to children and young people, their families and the wider community and to raising standards of achievement for all.”

4.6 The department will prepare a consolidated action plan for consideration by the Education Committee in its September cycle.

5. FINANCIAL/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Nil

6. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

6.1 It is to be noted that this inspection forms part of the overall set of evaluations that are linked to the Community Planning and Best Value Audit recently undertaken by the Council.

6.2 The strength of community planning arrangements was one of the factors which has contributed significantly to the success of this particular inspection exercise.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (i) note the contents of this report.

Graham Short
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

GS/EO'N
2 May 2006

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Pilot Inspection of Education Functions of East Ayrshire Council May 2006 HMle (attached as Appendix A)

Members requiring further information should contact Graham Short, Executive Director of Educational and Social Services (576017)

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**Pilot Inspection of the Education Functions of
East Ayrshire Council**

May 2006

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Introduction

The education functions of each local authority in Scotland were inspected between 2000 and 2005. A second cycle of inspections began in 2006. Section 9 of the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* charges HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), on behalf of the Scottish Ministers, to provide an external evaluation of the effectiveness of the local authority in its quality assurance of educational provision within the Council and of its support to schools in improving quality. Inspections are conducted within a published framework of quality indicators (*Quality Management in Education 2*)¹ which embody the Government's policy on Best Value.

Each inspection is planned and implemented in partnership with Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission for Scotland. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the *Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000*. It provides services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland. Together they ensure that the Scottish Executive and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

The inspection team also includes an Associate Assessor who is a senior member of staff currently serving in another Scottish local authority.

¹ *Quality Management in Education 2* (HM Inspectorate of Education 2006) is a framework of self-evaluation for Local Authority Education Services.

Inspection of the education functions of East Ayrshire Council

1. The aims, nature and scope of the inspection

HMIE inspects the education functions of all 32 councils within Scotland as part of its commitment to inspect and report on the quality of education and to help secure improvement. HMIE reported on the first inspection of East Ayrshire Council in February 2003. In the period since the publication of this report HM Inspectors have worked with senior officers of the council to monitor progress on the main points for action arising from the 2003 report. With the agreement of the council, HMIE decided to bring together the follow-through inspection due in 2005 with a pilot of a revised model for the inspections of the education functions of councils. The pilot inspection was carried out over two main phases, in June and September 2005 by a team of inspectors with expertise in education, social work, finance and health. This report sets out the findings of this pilot inspection and reports on the progress the council had made on the main points for action contained in the original inspection report.

2. What is the context of the authority and what challenges does it face?

Background

East Ayrshire Council continued to face the challenge of meeting the needs of children and young people in areas with significant levels of economic and social disadvantage. The demise of mining and other heavy industries posed major difficulties for the authority. The proportion of pupils with free meal entitlement (FME) was broadly in line overall with the national average. However, there was significant variation across the council area with several schools having very high levels of entitlement to free meals amongst their pupils. In other parts of the council area major structural developments, such as the opening of the M77 motorway were contributing to growth and economic benefits, notably in new housing and increased house prices. Such social and economic disparities among communities, changes – some rapid – and the strong allegiances to discrete communities even within a compact geographical area were significant factors with which the council had to contend. As part of its decentralisation scheme, the authority had established seven local committees, bringing together elected members and local people.

Political and organisational structure

Since the previous inspection of the educational functions of East Ayrshire Council in 2002, there had been some changes within the Council and Education and Social Services.

The administration of East Ayrshire Council remained unchanged. Labour councillors held 23 of 32 seats. The highly experienced Chair of the Education Committee continued to provide very effective leadership of the committee and was very supportive of the Department. He demonstrated a strong commitment to improving the lives of the young people in East Ayrshire, and maintained a high profile in schools and the community.

Following the merger of education and social work to form the Department of Education and Social Services, separate committees were retained with responsibilities for education and social work. However, the two committees liaised closely in dealing with issues of common interest. The Chief Executive, who was appointed in 2004, also showed a keen interest in the work of the Department and was very supportive of its priorities for improvement in its services for children and young people. The Director of Educational and Social Services had close and productive working relationships with senior Council officials, other Directors and the Chair of the Education Committee. He continued to work very effectively with the Chair of the Education Committee and professional colleagues.

The restructuring of the Educational and Social Services Department, which was taking place at the time of the previous inspection, had resulted in an extended team of six Heads of Service covering key areas of the Department's work. These were Schools Support, Quality Improvement, Social Work, Resource Support, Onsite Services and Community Support, including early years education and community learning and development (CLD). The separation of the school support and quality improvement remits had resulted in a clearer focus on educational development and a strengthening of the support and challenge role of the quality improvement team.

The establishment of nine Learning Partnerships by the authority in 2002 was a key approach in devolving responsibility to headteachers and promoting more effective, joined-up working amongst support agencies in the delivery of children's services. The range of agencies included pre-school, school, CLD, social work, psychological services, health, and leisure services. Nine quality improvement officers (QIOs) were deployed to work closely with establishments across each of the Learning Partnerships. Their contribution to developing the effectiveness of Learning Partnerships was recognised by senior managers in schools and other stakeholders.

3. What key outcomes has the authority achieved and what impact has it had?

Impact on children and young people

East Ayrshire continued to provide pre-school children with a high quality education. Pupils at primary school were well looked after, treated fairly and benefited from a positive climate for learning. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics required improvement. The council had identified this aspect of its performance as a concern and had introduced a range of measures to address the situation. In secondary schools, performance in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of S2 was improving. Performance from S4 to S6 in SQA examinations was mixed with

some aspects showing improvement, others remaining broadly as before and a few showing some decline. Against many of the measures used, East Ayrshire performed better than comparator authorities², but below the national average. Rates of exclusion from school, while showing some improvement, remained too high. Similarly, while the council was making progress in improving the achievements of looked after and accommodated young people here too, more still needed to be done. CLD made an important contribution and, overall, the quality of provision was good and, in places, very good. Very significant numbers of children and young people, from all areas, participated successfully in a wide range of sporting, arts and other activities, such as citizenship, beyond the formal curriculum. The encouragement given to such wider achievements was a major strength. There was strong evidence from the ongoing programme of follow-through visits and inspections, and from surveys and meetings with key stakeholders, undertaken by HMIE that the authority had a positive role in supporting its schools and securing benefits for pupils. The council's education services were having a positive impact on families and the wider community and there were numerous examples of good practice. Very good progress had been made against targets in the Children and Young Person's Integrated Service Plan.

Performance of pre-school establishments, schools and community learning and development – inspection evidence

The following represents a summary of evaluations made in inspections of pre-school establishments and schools between 2002 and 2005.

Pre-school

The pre-school centres inspected provided good or very good experiences for children. There were no major weaknesses in any aspects of provision. The following were key features of the findings of these inspections.

- The quality of programmes and of children's progress in each of the five key areas was good or very good in almost all centres.
- Staff/child interaction, meeting needs, assessment and recording and support for development and learning were good or very good in almost all centres.
- The effectiveness of leadership and provision and deployment of staff were good or very good in almost all centres.

Primary

There were particular strengths in the quality of pastoral care, climate and relationships, and equality and fairness provided. Aspects such as the structure of the curriculum, the quality of the teaching process, partnership with parents and the community were also good, or very good in almost all schools, but with the balance weighted more towards

² The term 'comparator authorities' refers to the group of education authorities which are comparative to each other in terms of socio-economic and demographic factors.

good. The overall quality of pupils' learning and meeting pupils' learning needs was more variable, with important weaknesses identified in around a quarter of inspections. The quality of leadership was very good or good in most schools. However, where leadership was only fair, there were also weaknesses in self-evaluation and expectations and promoting achievement. Accommodation and facilities were good in the majority of schools. The quality of attainment in English language and mathematics had important weaknesses in just under half of schools inspected.

As only one secondary and one special school were inspected in the period January 2003 to June 2005 no overall statement on performance in these sectors is offered here. All inspections by HMIE result in published reports and these can be accessed on the HMIE website at: www.hmie.gov.uk.

Evidence from follow-through inspections of schools

From August 2003 to March 2005 when revised arrangements for follow-through inspections came into effect, follow-through reports were issued for 16 schools, 12 primary, three secondary, and one special school.

In the case of schools where HMIE conducted a follow-through inspection, very good progress overall was achieved in the four primary schools. Inspectors found clear evidence of QIOs supporting these schools well in taking forward a substantial improvement agenda, and of the positive impact of the leadership of the headteachers, three of whom had been appointed since the original inspection. Improvements in programmes, learning and teaching, approaches to self-evaluation and leadership had, in most cases, resulted in significant increases in pupils' attainments and achievements. In the follow-through inspections of two secondary schools, HMIE found that overall both had achieved good progress in addressing the main points for action in the inspection report. However, improvements to programmes of study and courses, learning and teaching had yet to impact fully on raising attainment. The authority has responded effectively in attempting to address difficulties in a small number of departments where attainment continued to give cause for concern.

Moderation visits by HMIE generally confirmed the evaluations made by QIOs in respect of progress achieved in addressing the main points for action in the original inspection reports.

Community learning and development

HM Inspectors carried out an inspection of CLD in the Cumnock area of East Ayrshire Council in April 2005. The strategic management of CLD is addressed within this report on the education functions of East Ayrshire Council.

CLD provided a good service to the communities in the Cumnock area. The service and its partners offered young people and adults a variety of opportunities to develop their skills and abilities and to find employment. The use of a range of effective consultation methods with young people was commendable. The service had engaged with a wide range of partners. In particular, the work within the East Ayrshire Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) had resulted in a number of innovative and effective approaches to providing services in areas such as learning, transport, health and

personal finance to address the considerable local deprivation in the former mining communities. These services were having an impact in combating social exclusion. However, in some areas there needed to be more imaginative and creative approaches to both youth work and adult learning that would provide participants with sufficient challenge and raise aspirations.

Evidence from National Assessments in primary schools and at S2, from SQA results and attendance figures

National Assessments

Over the period 2002 to 2004, attainment in reading and writing in primaries had remained broadly constant while mathematics had improved slightly. Performance in all three areas was below the averages for comparator authorities and national averages, in 2002 to 2004. National and comparator averages were not available for 2005.

At secondary, overall attainment by the end of S2 had shown an improving trend in reading and writing, although from a lower base. It had remained fairly constant in mathematics. From 2002 to 2004, it exceeded the performance of comparator authorities in all three areas and the national average in reading and mathematics. It was slightly below the national average in writing. In addition, the proportions of pupils achieving above the expected national level showed an improving trend and was above the national average.

The authority was aware of the relatively weak performance in reading and writing in primary schools and was giving a high priority to raising attainment in these areas in the current session. 'Literacy Leaders' had been identified in each primary school and a staff development programme put in place to assist them in coordinating and supporting literacy development in their school. Additional, experienced teachers were being deployed to work with early intervention teams in schools, with a particular focus on closing the gap in pupils' attainment in reading and writing at the early stages. A detailed analysis of National Assessment attainment data by the authority had identified schools and stages where there were specific weaknesses and enabled it to target additional support where it could have the greatest potential impact. Recent inspection evidence highlighted the positive impact of the DARTS (directed activities related to text) initiative on developing pupils' language skills, particularly in reading for information, through group and paired discussion.

Using the education authority's arrangements for management structures in schools, a number of secondary schools had appointed principal teachers of literacy with responsibility for improving standards in language through cross-curricular approaches. Initiatives such as Future Learning and Teaching (FLAT) projects were providing opportunities for primary and secondary teachers to work across sector boundaries with a view to increasing their awareness of learning and teaching approaches and to improving continuity and progression, particularly in language and mathematics.

SQA attainment in secondary schools

Overall, performance of pupils at S4, S5 and S6 was above that for pupils in comparator authorities, but below national averages. There was no strong, consistent, trend.

The authority had taken a number of measures aimed at raising attainment in secondary schools. They had strengthened their approaches to providing more rigorous analysis of whole school and subject attainment. Central staff and an external consultant provided a wide range of statistical information and analyses to assist staff in schools and officers in identifying strengths and priorities for raising attainment. QIOs were extending their role in supporting and challenging secondary schools. As part of their programme of visits to schools, QIOs discussed attainment analyses with senior managers and principal teachers. They monitored schools' and departments' action to address areas of weakness and regularly reviewed progress in taking forward key developments. Curriculum Management Meetings (CMMs) provided opportunities for QIOs to discuss with principal teachers ways of improving performance in specific subject areas and to identify issues of concern.

The performance of the lowest-attaining 20% of S4 pupils had shown some improvement from 2001/2002 to 2002/2003, but had declined in 2003/2004. Overall, the attainment gap between the lowest 20% and remaining 80% of S4 pupils was broadly in line with the national average in 2001/2002 and 2003/2004, and better than the average for 2002/2003.

The number of children and young people looked after³ by the authority was 330 in March 2004, of whom 30 were in residential care. The overall number of looked after children increased by almost a third in the five-year period from 1999. The Council had recently approved plans to extend and improve the provision of residential accommodation for young people in care. The modernisation programme for residential services included provision for the creation of dedicated educational space within care facilities.

The proportion of looked after and accommodated young people leaving care who achieved at least a basic qualification in one subject had increased in 2004/2005. The proportion of these young people achieving at least a basic qualification in both English and mathematics had also risen over the same period. However, these figures remained below the national average. The authority had recently successfully bid for additional government funding for a pilot initiative aimed at raising the attainment of this group of pupils. Planned strategies included the development of computer-based, self-study materials for pupils in literacy and numeracy, tutoring support for individual children and young people, and the preparation of study guides for parents, carers and residential staff to help them support pupils using the self-study packages. Following consultation with parents and carers, the authority identified the issue of transition to adult life as a priority. In response, a social services transition team was established, based in a special school to facilitate integrated working. The team's task is to develop approaches to supporting children with additional support needs and their families in the transition to adult life.

³ The term 'looked after' in this report includes all children looked after or looked after and accommodated by the Council.

Attendance and absence

Attendance in primary schools was close to the national average and had shown an improving trend. In secondary schools, following an improvement in 2003, attendance had decreased slightly in 2004, when it was just below the national average. The proportion of pupils staying on to S5 in secondary schools had shown a slight downward trend from 2002 to 2004, but remained about the national and comparator authority averages.

Exclusion rates in East Ayrshire's schools were amongst the highest nationally. Overall, 3.5% of all pupils had been excluded, with just under half of them having been excluded more than once. Exclusions in secondary schools accounted for around five sixths of the total. The efforts of the education authority and schools to tackle this issue had resulted in a significant reduction in the number of openings lost through exclusions in 2004/2005 compared to the previous year. The authority continued to support schools in their efforts to reduce exclusions, through close monitoring of action plans by QIOs and the Pathways to Inclusion Group, and staff training activities focusing on ways of improving pupil behaviour in schools. Nonetheless, this remained an area requiring improvement.

Broader achievements by pupils and young people

East Ayrshire Council was successfully maintaining and strengthening its approaches to improving the quality of education for its children and young people with a view to raising further their attainment and achievement. A particular thrust of this approach was the emphasis given through the *Creative Minds* initiative to promoting pupils' self-confidence, good citizenship and achievement. With the very enthusiastic and effective leadership of the Lead Officer for Culture and Enterprise, the authority provided a wide range of enriching experiences for young people in arts, cultural and enterprise activities. Enterprise and Leisure Development Officers attached to each Learning Partnership also played a key role in promoting and supporting developments in these areas in schools. There was a large number of examples of innovative, good practice which had a very positive impact on pupils' learning experiences.

Features of good practice: Promotion of arts, culture and enterprise

- The participation of large numbers of pupils, from all areas of the council, in very successful choirs, orchestras and bands, dance groups, and drama productions.
- An extensive programme of showcase events which illustrated the high standards achieved by pupils in art, music and drama.
- A series of stimulating conferences used to recognise the achievements of staff and pupils in enterprise and cultural activities and to share examples of good practice.
- An increased uptake in national qualification courses in art and design, music and drama.

The Council was also strongly committed to ensuring the physical wellbeing of young people through its extensive programme of sports and leisure activities and focus on health promotion. The Leisure Development Manager and her team of sports and leisure coordinators provided a range of projects to promote more active lifestyles amongst children and young people and to develop their skills and self-confidence through participation in a variety of sports, dance, outdoor adventure and play activities. A detailed evaluation of the Recreational Partnership project (2002 to 2004) by the Leisure Development Manager demonstrated the positive impact on pupils and the wider community. It also showed high levels of participation by young people in projects coordinated by her team.

Features of good practice: Promotion of health through improving diet

East Ayrshire's approach to implementing the Government's *Hungry for Success (HfS)* initiative has been characterised by:

- the integration of HfS within an overall commitment to making every school a health promoting school;
- strong partnerships involving pupils, school staff, parents, public health practitioners, dieticians, food suppliers, catering staff and food campaigners;
- school meal menus developed to replace processed foods with fresh ingredients healthily cooked and dining rooms refurbished;
- catering staff undertaking nutrition training, in addition to training for the delivery of the new menus;
- a quarter of primary schools offering meals prepared using organic or locally produced ingredients; and
- drawing up a Charter for school meals and communicating and promoting this to schools and parents.

Developing confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors

Participation in the wide range of arts, cultural, physical and enterprise activities described above played a very important part in developing confidence in children and young people across the council area. For example, those participating in after-school drama clubs responded very positively to a brief questionnaire asking them how they thought the project had helped to develop such attributes as confidence, self-esteem and communication skills. Young people, parents and school staff reported favourably on the gains in communication, confidence, participation and attendance made through collaborative working within the Learning Partnerships where social work assistants and community link workers had worked alongside the children's services coordinator, school nurses and the teacher for looked after and accommodated children.

The council continued to promote initiatives designed to involve young people in contemporary affairs through a number of forums, including the Scottish Youth Parliament. It had very successfully increased the numbers of pupils participating in enterprise activities, though there was room to increase further the number of work experience placements available for older pupils, especially in the more rural areas.

There was a strong commitment by the council to promoting active citizenship among pupils in schools and young people in the community. Inspections in the period January 2003 to March 2005 found, for example, that climate and relationships and equality and fairness were good or very good in all schools. The East Ayrshire Youth Forum and Student Council Seminar, *What's Important to You?*, had proved very successful with nearly 600 young people in attendance. The latter built upon a preliminary survey which identified areas of interest to be discussed. Pupils from S1 and S2 gave an introductory presentation and led workshops on a range of topics, local, national and international.

Features of good practice: CLD work in schools

Staff in the CLD team, Cumnock and Doon Valley Credit Union and Cumnock Academy had worked imaginatively to extend the savings aspect of the Credit Union into Cumnock Academy. The three organisations had developed a service within the school called 'Junior Savers' for senior pupils. This enabled young people in an area of social deprivation to save money. Both the number of savers within the school and the amount of money saved had grown substantially. There were now plans to extend this service to younger pupils.

There were many examples of children and young people working together, taking the lead in initiatives and applying creative, problem-solving, approaches to address a range of challenging issues and situations. In music there were a number of initiatives which had enabled pupils to work with their peers, pupils from other parts of Scotland or from overseas, and professional musicians and composers. Similar opportunities in art and design, drama and dance had been enjoyed by substantial numbers of pupils. The council was working closely with the Scottish Executive Education Department and Careers Scotland as part of the *Determined to Succeed*⁴ initiative and almost all schools now had explicit plans to involve their pupils in enterprise activities.

Features of good practice: School nursing staff using *Circle Time*

As in many councils, *Circle Time* was used across the area by education staff. It was noted that this approach led to improved confidence and esteem amongst young people and helped to give them a voice in discussing issues important to them. In East Ayrshire Council, interest in the approach by other professionals, notably the school nursing team, led to their becoming fully trained to deliver *Circle Time* and adopting it as part of their work in improving young people's well being in a variety of settings. The approach has, for example, been used successfully in a pilot sexual health input for pupils at S1.

⁴ *Determined to Succeed* - Scottish Executive, 2002.

Impact on staff, families and the wider community

Staff

The council had succeeded in establishing a strong sense of identity and ownership among almost all staff. Headteachers, in particular, were very positive about the support they received and the extent to which they were involved and empowered. Staff were well informed about the council's aims for education and the part they could play in helping to realise them. They valued the practical assistance of centrally-employed staff, for example in developing aspects of the curriculum or new approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. The council's programme for continuing professional development was viewed positively and the courses themselves were judged to be very successful by those attending them. Of particular note was the increase in joint courses which allowed staff from different professional backgrounds to attend courses and events of shared interest. Such courses were highly valued and formed an important part of the council's approach to delivering more integrated services to children, young people and their families.

Features of good practice: Leadership training

The Department had developed very good approaches to leadership training for senior managers. All headteachers (and some deputy headteachers) in two Learning Partnerships had participated in an intensive leadership training programme delivered by Columba 1400 and supported by the Hunter Foundation. The authority's handbook for promoted staff provided very helpful guidance on leadership and management to support the professional development of chartered teachers, principal teachers and senior managers. This set out information on standards and responsibilities, a review of progress on support programmes and details of training events planned for 2005/2006. Senior school staff had been seconded by the authority to consider leadership development at different levels of responsibility - from principal teachers managing specific projects to headteachers leading whole school developments or Council-wide initiatives.

Families

The survey of School Boards carried out on behalf of HMIE for the inspection showed that, overall, School Boards were satisfied with the support given to schools. Particular strengths were the high level of satisfaction with communication and the opportunities to join with other groups to learn about developments. All who responded reported that they were aware of how well their school was performing. Most concerns were expressed about accommodation, finance and resources though even here a majority declared they were satisfied.

The education authority gave a high priority to engaging in partnership with parents. Senior staff of the Authority used the School Board Steering Group as a forum for engaging with parent members from every School Board. Discussions led by members of this group on the format for a Parents' Open Day resulted in a very successful event

involving schools, parents and high-profile members of the community in a focus on health issues.

As part of the council's commitment to working with parents the Executive Director and Heads of Service held a series of open meetings, including *Listening Suppers* and focus groups for parents of children with additional support needs. These meetings provided opportunities for parents to meet senior staff informally to be updated on recent developments, to be consulted on future directions and to raise any matters of concern. The Executive Director indicated a clear commitment, wherever possible, to incorporate comments into future plans and to resolve difficulties.

The education authority also gave a high priority to supporting vulnerable families in areas of social disadvantage. The education authority and the East Ayrshire SIP worked closely to develop a range of programmes in the former mining communities in the south of the authority. The new Family Centre in Cumnock provided free transport for parents in outlying areas to enable them to access its services. The Virtual Baby project involved both young people and their parents in an imaginative and effective programme to lower the level of teenage pregnancy. The education authority worked very effectively with East Ayrshire Women's Aid to provide support and access to educational opportunities for families within women's refuges.

Features of good practice: Partnership with parents

- Representation of parents' views through parent membership of the Education Committee and the Pathways to Inclusion Group.
- Home-link projects to encourage greater parental involvement in their children's learning, with a specific focus on reading development, had been introduced at P3 and P5 stages.
- Support for parents through parenting skills workshops to help them deal with challenging behaviour and maintain children's attendance at school.
- Developing family learning packs to promote greater involvement of parents in their child's learning in areas such as reading.

Community

Learning Partnerships

East Ayrshire Council started its nine Learning Partnerships in 2002. Since that time, this approach has been systematically developed as the cornerstone of the approach to the delivery of integrated services. Each Learning Partnership brings together the main agencies involved in supporting children and families, including social services and health professionals. The focus is on the delivery of quality services to the individual young person with raising attainment as the high priority.

The initiative is managed by a steering group chaired by the Executive Director and involving the chairs of all nine Learning Partnerships together with representatives of other agencies. Each Learning Partnership has its own budget and a core support team of staff. Learning Partnerships are able to develop their own programmes on matters

like health education or literacy. As a result, some very innovative projects have developed at local level which respond to the Council's strategic priorities. This work has been subject to independent external evaluation. The authority has also produced and used its own quality framework to evaluate the delivery of integrated services.

The council worked effectively with a number of bodies, such as the SIP, and supported a wide range of community groups to increase skills, resources and networks. This involvement was helping to develop and sustain a lively community base as part of the regeneration process. Notable initiatives included the contributions of the CHiP van (Community Health in Partnership) in promoting health and the *Mile High Club* in reducing teenage pregnancies. The CHiP van visited rural communities to provide classes and programmes on healthy lifestyles which were based on the particular, identified, needs of the communities themselves. Programmes addressed such concerns as heart disease, cancer and mental health as well as general well-being. The Mile High Club had provided young people aged ten to 18 years with opportunities to participate in such activities as walking, jogging or running.

Features of good practice: Sexual health

Staff from education, health and youth workers from YIPworld in the Cumnock area had developed a collaborative approach to address teenage pregnancy levels that were above the national average. Teaching staff and health workers provided an integrated programme of personal and social education in both formal and informal settings. Sexual awareness and sexual health were presented to school pupils as part of their PSE curriculum. A programme from YIPworld and health staff complemented this in the evening in an informal setting. A drop-in service was also available to young people at the local community hospital. This combination of formal and informal support by an integrated team had made a notable impact on rates of teenage pregnancy in the area, which are now lower than the national average.

4. How good is strategic leadership and direction?

The overall quality of strategic leadership and direction provided was very good, with some excellent aspects.

Vision, values and aims

The council had a clear, appropriate vision for the development of education services to children, young people and adults living in the communities within its borders. This vision was set out in a number of key planning documents which, taken together, provided a clear, coherent, basis for action and which articulated well with corporate goals and the roles of other bodies and initiatives such as the SIP, the Better Neighbourhood Services Fund (BNSF) and National Priorities. Educational Services remained a cornerstone of the council's plans for economic development and promoting achievement and equality of opportunity. The Council's Community Plan includes as themes, 'Improving Opportunities' and 'Promoting Community Learning' which are highly relevant to the delivery of educational services. The other themes within the

plan such as ‘Eliminating Poverty’ and ‘Improving Health’ further support the priority of better integration of services for children and young people.

Leadership and direction

Elected members with responsibility for education and senior officers provided leadership of the highest quality. Key factors were:

- the combined experience, energy and commitment, of the Chair of the Education Committee and the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services;
- the clear lead given by the Chief Executive and the emphasis placed on corporate working within the council;
- the very strong support and leadership given by the Heads of Service; and
- the commitment to listening to and consulting stakeholders.

Those charged with providing leadership and direction for education services were highly aware of the economic, social and cultural history of the area, the challenges the past posed and the ways in which it could be used to benefit its citizens. They were equally aware of the impact of changes, including those such as the opening of the M77 motorway, which were very recent but were already having a noticeable effect on parts of East Ayrshire. Senior officers demonstrated a depth of understanding of the different strengths and needs of the various communities which comprised the council area and the often imaginative way in which the council sought to harness strengths and meet needs. The Director of Educational and Social Services provided highly impressive support for a number of important initiatives such as the Government’s strategy for enterprise in education, *Determined to Succeed* and the promotion of modern European languages.

Leadership of people and partnerships

Elected members and senior officers had clearly established that partnership working was central to achieving the aims and objectives set out in the council’s plans. There was ample evidence to indicate that the council was succeeding in building on the successes identified at the time of the original HMIE inspection. There were many positive reports from a range of stakeholders of productive inter-agency working. In particular, the Learning Partnerships established in 2002 were now well-established and the joint-working evident among education, social work and health professionals was resulting in real benefits for children, young people and their families. Teamwork was highly developed and improving, with increasingly productive joint-working involving professionals from backgrounds in education, leisure, social work and health.

Leadership of change and improvement

Overall, staff working in the Learning Partnerships and schools were very positive about the lead given by the authority to improving the quality of the services they provided and to developing their own capacity for improvement. The results of the

questionnaire issued to headteachers on behalf of HMIE were very positive with almost all agreeing or strongly agreeing that the authority had helped promote continuous improvement. Notably, 99% were confident that the authority was helping their establishment to improve its quality of education. A strong feature of the responses from those interviewed was their appreciation of the lead given to innovation, creativity and enterprise and the devolution of responsibility to those working with their local communities. This commitment to innovation was also evident in the wide range of inter-council, national and international initiatives being undertaken, including one involving two other councils which was focusing on approaches to managing and leading the education service.

5. How well have key issues been addressed since the last inspection?

HM Inspectors found that the evaluations of progress made by the authority itself in relation to the original inspection report published in February 2003 were well supported by the evidence obtained in the course of the present inspection. Overall, the council had made very good progress.

East Ayrshire Council was responding very well to the challenges it faced in providing high quality education for children and young people and to support its communities. It was building on the strengths identified in the previous inspection of the education functions of the council, especially in its services for pre-school children and its promotion of arts, sports and enterprise activities. Involvement and achievement in a broad range of such activities was highly commendable. Staff were appreciative of the efforts made by the council to support them and, tellingly, almost all headteachers who responded to the survey commissioned by HMIE thought the council added value to their work. In interview many pointed to the strong encouragement given to leadership, taking responsibility at local and school level and to innovate. Educational Services played an important role in contributing to a number of important national and international developments.

While, overall, the council had made very good progress in meeting the main points for action set out in the inspection report of February 2003 there remained a need for improvement in:

- *pupils' attainment, notably in reading and writing in primary schools;*
- *the achievements of looked after and accommodated children; and*
- *reducing further exclusion rates, mainly in secondary schools.*

Progress with the Main Points for Action from the report of February 2003

The following section outlines the main points for action the Council was asked to address in 2003 and reports on the progress made against each one.

- ***The Children's and Young People's Integrated Service Plan should be improved, in line with the recommendations contained in this report, to specify more clearly the outcomes of initiatives and provide a firm basis for evaluating their success.***

The council had made very good progress in meeting this recommendation.

The revised SIP had a clear focus on outcomes with a specific impact section showing clear, explicit, links to National Priorities and Local Improvement Objectives. Where appropriate there were useful references to information gained through data analyses and the results of visits by QIOs. The plan articulated clearly with the council's Community Plan and Children's Services Plan. Senior officers' responsibilities within the plan were clearly set out. Staff were made aware of the plan through meetings, posters for schools and a helpful digest for teachers.

- ***Senior managers should proceed with plans to clarify the management, roles and responsibilities of the Quality Improvement Team and ensure that Quality Improvement Officers have a manageable number of targets including those relating to their prime function of quality improvement in schools.***

The council had made very good progress in meeting this recommendation.

Staff involved in quality assurance and improvement met regularly as part of a Quality Forum chaired by the Head of Service with overall responsibility for quality improvement. QIOs' roles and responsibilities were now clearly defined as part of a national agreement and subsequent discussions at individual level. A key feature of their work was a programme of four phased visits per year to schools linked to the development planning cycle. The increasing focus of QIOs' role in supporting the work of the Learning Partnerships was widely recognised by senior managers in schools and children's services coordinators.

A quality assurance framework had been established which provided a more consistent approach to self-evaluation within education, early years, social work and CLD. These approaches had provided the evidence base for separate standards and quality reports for each of the key services.

- ***The Education Department should continue to develop the use of statistical data by central staff and schools to help inform approaches to raising standards of attainment among pupils.***

The council had made very good progress in meeting this recommendation.

A performance and statistics unit within the Department provided analyses of a wide range of performance measures, self-evaluation exercises and other relevant statistics to members of the Quality Improvement Team. Detailed analyses of attainment data issued to schools provided a sound basis for pupil tracking, target

setting and improvement planning. In their discussions with senior managers and principal teachers, QIOs regularly monitored the action taken, and progress achieved, by schools and departments in addressing areas of identified weakness in pupil attainment.

- ***The Council should continue to improve the overall quality of school accommodation to ensure that buildings and facilities provide an appropriate learning environment.***

The Council had made good progress in meeting this recommendation.

The School Estate Management Plan (SEMP) submitted by the Council to the Scottish Executive in January 2004, set out its long term vision for improvement of the school estate. An update of the SEMP, submitted in 2005, confirmed the timetable by which the Council aimed to meet its objectives.

The authority had carried out a comprehensive survey of all schools and community centres. This survey had been used to produce a School Estate Strategy which identified priorities for fabric upgrades and refurbishments for those school buildings in most need of improvement. Priority was also given to improving disabled access according to future identified needs. Headteachers were asked to complete a self-evaluation proforma to provide an annual update on the condition of buildings.

The Council's PPP project, Building Learning Communities, which would result in new or refurbished and extended accommodation for two secondary and two primary schools with additional community facilities, was now at an advanced stage. In addition, the Council was in the process of implementing a major fabric upgrade for the seven secondary schools not included in the PPP project. This programme had yet to impact on all schools and there remained weaknesses in accommodation in some.

- ***Improved support should be provided for developments in the secondary school curriculum.***

The Council had made very good progress in addressing this recommendation.

The Head of Service: School Support had implemented a range of measures to improve the support for staff in secondary schools in taking forward curriculum developments. Bi-annual CMMs led by principal teachers, provided a forum for discussions on subject-specific issues and for addressing professional development needs. With support from the authority, a number of subject groups had arranged additional meetings to share good practice and cooperate in the development of curricular materials. Electronic links between subject leaders in each school had also contributed to the exchange of ideas. Regular meetings between the Head of Service, the QIO with responsibility for CMMs and lead principal teachers helped ensure consistency and the sharing of good practice across the secondary curriculum.

- *The Education Department, working with other agencies, should continue to refine and implement its inclusion policies. In particular, it should ensure coherence in planning and providing for pupils with special educational needs, including those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.*

The council had made very good progress in meeting this recommendation.

The development and introduction of the council's comprehensive policy *Reducing Barriers, Raising Attainment*, and the associated documentation had helped to ensure that staff, parents, children and young people, were able to access information on the services available to meet a wide range of additional support needs. This documentation was widely disseminated and available electronically on the council's website.

Key issues

Improving attainment, notably in reading and writing in primary schools: there was, as yet little evidence of improvement in pupils' attainment in these areas. The council was well aware of the situation and had taken a number of positive, promising, steps designed to improve the situation, such as the literacy leaders in primary schools, staff development and a close focus on attainment by QIOs in their engagements with schools. Nonetheless it is important that the council continues to monitor the performance of its schools very closely and takes all steps necessary to improve attainment.

Exclusions from school remained above national and comparator authority averages. Exclusion rates in 2003/2004 were amongst the highest of all education authorities in Scotland: 20 per 1000 pupils in primary schools compared to the national average of 11, and 155 in secondary schools compared to 105 nationally. Figures for 2005 suggested that the council was enjoying some successes, principally in reducing the overall time lost through exclusions.

Provision for looked after and accommodated young people was an area where again the council was aware that performance on national measures was below national and comparator authority figures and improvement was required. There were indications that, on a range of other measures, the council was achieving success, but it still required to effect further improvements to ensure that the needs of this group were making good progress and achieving all they could.

6. What is the council's capacity for improvement?

East Ayrshire Council continued to demonstrate a strong capacity for improvement. HMIE was satisfied that the council was very well placed to meet the challenges it faced in delivering high quality education services to children and young people, their families and the wider community and to raising standards of achievement for all. HMIE will continue to monitor and support progress through the District Inspector and CLD Inspector's regular contacts with the authority.

Key strengths

- The leadership and direction provided by the Chair of the Education Committee, Chief Executive, Executive Director of Education and Social Services, and the Heads of Service.
- The productive links established within the council and with other external bodies.
- The successes now evident within the Learning Partnerships inspected in delivering improved services to children, young people and their families.
- The high level of approval for the support given by the Education Department to the work of schools among headteachers surveyed and interviewed.
- The extensive range of high-quality experiences provided through which children and young people were able to achieve success in sports, the arts and enterprise activities.

Main points for action

The council should continue to:

- improve pupils' attainment, especially in reading and writing in primary schools;
- reduce exclusions; and
- ensure that looked after and accommodated young people are able to progress and achieve appropriate qualifications.

Annette Bruton
HM Chief Inspector
Directorate 5

Appendix 1

Quality Indicators

We judged the following to be *very good*

- Impact on individual learners
- Impact on parents and families
- Impact on staff
- Impact on the wider community
- Vision, values and aims
- Leadership and direction
- Leadership of people and partnership
- Leadership of change and improvement

We judged the following to be *good*

- Continuous improvement and performance

How can you contact us?

If you wish to comment about education authority inspections

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of education authority inspections, you should write in the first instance to Annette Bruton HMCI, at HM Inspectorate of Education, Directorate 5, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Our complaints procedure

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to Hazel Dewart, Business Management Unit, HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600 258 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4-6 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. You can also telephone 0870 011 5378 or e-mail enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk

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