

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 1 FEBRUARY 2005

NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND LOCAL IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek approval for the submission of the standard annual report to the Scottish Executive on the progress made by the Authority in overtaking the National Priorities in Education and for a new set of local improvement objectives.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 established a system of National Priorities in Education and local improvement objectives. After consultation these national priorities were detailed for education authorities, and are also set out in the Authority's document "Priority to Improvement" which is widely available through all educational establishments and services. The National Priorities are central to all improvement planning in relation to school-based education in this Authority.
- 2.2 It is an essential part of this process that the Scottish Executive gather information annually on progress against National Priorities in education authorities. New local improvement objectives also require to be set annually.
- 2.3 Once collected, the Scottish Executive widely publish the results of the exercise – including, for example, authority reports on the national web-site.

3. PROGRESS MADE IN NATIONAL PRIORITIES

The Annual Report is a detailed and technical document. It is available in the Member's Information Point. The main points emerging from this year's annual report are:

- the continued commitment to drive up standards of literacy and numeracy in primary schools through ambitious but realistic targets;
- a highly successful target setting exercise for the attainment of children with additional support needs;
- a diverse approach to developing new methods of learning and teaching;
- increasingly sophisticated methods of analysing and interpreting examination results;
- increased use of curriculum flexibility;
- rigorous approaches to self evaluation;
- a focused, and well structured approach to continuing professional development for teachers;

- development of innovative approaches to managing pupil discipline;
- a clear approach to improving school buildings within an overall asset management plan;
- steadily improving adult:child ratios in schools;
- commitment by all establishments to health improvement;
- piloting of the integrated assessment framework;
- deployment of a range of staff to support the work of schools at learning partnership level;
- successful integration of children with additional support needs into mainstream education;
- effective provision in Gaelic Education across all sectors;
- active adoption of drugs education programme and related policies;
- a wide-ranging programme of international links;
- 25% of schools have obtained or applied for “Eco-school” status;
- wide participation in school councils;
- participation by pupils in a wide range of arts, sporting and cultural activities;
- widespread adoption of enterprise in education approaches; and
- a structured approach to promoting creative thinking in young people.

4. COMMENT ON NATIONAL PRIORITIES

4.1 The report shows significant and productive activity across a wide range of areas. This level of progress is due to the hard work and commitment of a wide range of people – most notably the teachers and young people themselves. Such success merits recognition.

4.2 However, the outcomes highlighted in the report also show that there is no scope for complacency. Maintenance and improvement of the standards reached will require continued work and emphasis. This is particularly true of the most disadvantaged children.

5. LOCAL IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES FOR 2005

5.1 In previous years the practice has been to relate the local improvement objectives closely to the National Priorities for education. This approach allows for streamlining of planning processes and ensures a coherence of approach.

5.2 The usual wide-ranging consultation process has taken place. This has involved school boards, young people, the teachers’ unions, ancillary staff unions, and heads of establishments. This year, a new and significant exercise was mounted which involved members of the Directorate conducting seminars within learning partnerships for all staff. This was to allow all colleagues to contribute directly to the improvement planning process. A number of very positive and worthwhile views were obtained as a result of this exercise. For the coming year, it is proposed to further develop this idea and thereby to give class teachers and all other school based staff a stronger voice in identifying the issues which are important to them.

- 5.3** As a result of these consultations it is clear that there is no imperative to promote a significant change in direction from previous years. However, some changes are proposed from Priority to Improvement 2004:

National Priority 1: more emphasis should be given to the promotion of vocational education in association with the concept of curricular flexibility.

National Priority 2: the reference to continuing professional development (CPD) should be extended beyond teachers to ensure that all staff can benefit from a structured programme suited to their professional needs. There should be explicit reference to “healthy eating” within “healthy lifestyles”. Some marginal adjustment of terminology is also required in this section to reflect changes in emphasis in improvement planning processes.

National Priority 3: there should be specific reference to the use of information communication technology in supporting the promotion of equality issues. The requirement to plan for and implement the terms of the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act will be added to this section.

National Priority 4: references to school should be replaced by “educational establishments” to allow for early years and community-based learning services. In order to give work a sharper focus, the objectives should also refer to attainment and achievement in addition to learning.

- 5.4** The consultation process also revealed that this year there are some issues that cannot be meaningfully categorised under the national priorities. A new category of “Special Authority Objectives” will therefore be opened. Within this category, the following is proposed:

- Contributing to the evaluation of the pilot and subsequent development of the integrated assessment framework.
- Development and implementation of an evaluation framework for the delivery of integrated services.
- Implementing an effective quality assurance system for child protection.
- Developing key elements of the curriculum arising from “A Curriculum for Excellence”

6. POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** Nil

7. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** The section “Special Authority Objectives” within the local improvement objectives allows for the inclusion of objectives that are a priority to services associated with schools that previously could not have been catered-for, including Onsite and Community Learning and Development. Such objectives will however be reviewed against other planning processes such as the Community Plan and the Children’s Service Plan.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1** The local improvement objectives and the implementation of the national priorities themselves is supported through the National Priorities Action Fund which is a special-to-purpose grant from the Scottish Executive.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1** It is recommended that Members :
- (i) approve this report as the basis for the mandatory submission to the Scottish Executive;
 - (ii) ask the Executive Director (Educational and Social Services) to write to headteachers, teachers and school boards highlighting the progress that has been made against the National Priorities in education in 2004;
 - (iii) approve this report as the basis for the authority's statutory local improvement objectives for 2005;
 - (iv) note that some objectives will require co-ordination with other mandatory processes; and
 - (v) authorise the Executive Director (Educational and Social Services) to carry out such harmonisation with other plans that is necessary to ensure the continued delivery of quality and improving services; and
- (iii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

John Mulgrew
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

GRS/GRS
17 January 2005

Members requiring further information should contact Graham Short, Head of Service: Quality Improvement, (01563-576089).

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Priority to Improvement 2004

Implementation Officer: Graham Short