

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE : 20 MARCH 2007

EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES: PRIORITY TO IMPROVEMENT 2007 - 2010

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Elected Members of a new approach to Service Improvement Planning and to seek approval for the Annual Statement of Educational Improvement Objectives 2007 – 2010.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act, 2000 established a system of "National Priorities in Education, and the associated requirement that education authorities should develop their own local improvement objectives. At the same time schools¹ were also required by law to develop their own improvement priorities, to publish them and report to parents.

In East Ayrshire, we have tried to help schools by aligning our own objectives closely to the national priorities, and develop a system of planning that will subsequently allow schools and nurseries to align their own priorities with these wider systems. All of this, including the monitoring of plans is managed by the Quality Improvement Team. It is this system that has driven up standards within East Ayrshire and ultimately led to two highly successful evaluations by HMle.

3. REASONS FOR CHANGE

- 3.1 Given the success of the system, then there needs to be clear reasons for change. In summary, these are:
- A growing feeling that the present system of improvement planning has become too familiar and routine to schools and nurseries and is therefore restricting innovation rather than encouraging it.
 - Too much time is being spent on form-filling and similar bureaucracy rather than managers using the time to actually drive up standards.
 - Critically, that there were too many priorities (33 national and 16 local ones) to allow a focusing of effort.
 - Supporting improvement systems such as teachers' continuing professional development could not be easily aligned to the system.
 - National developments such as "A Curriculum for Excellence" were no longer fitting within the existing frameworks.

¹ The term "school" is used but applies equally to other establishments particularly Early Years Centres.

- International research that improvement planning could actually act as a barrier to positive change.
- Consideration by HMLe that the system requires to change under their “Journey to Excellence” initiative

4. The Proposals

4.1 Putting Children and Young People at the Centre

At its heart, this seeks to recognise the needs of the individual children in East Ayrshire, taking account of their background, talents and the barriers to learning. This recognises that many children in our area face social disadvantage, family problems, health issues, rural isolation and the effects of poverty. At the same time our children display exceptional talent and creativity with strong traditions of caring and the ability to achieve alongside the most advantaged areas in the nation.

Our children and young people deserve to achieve to their fullest potential, and at levels that are comparable to, or better than national averages. Their achievements require to be recognised beyond examination successes and should include the arts, sport, enterprise, environmental concern and in caring fields. Above all, on conclusion of formal schooling they should all move on to a position resulting from unobstructed access to a considered and appropriate life choice. For almost all this should be a position in education (either higher education or further education), employment or training. This should apply irrespective of background or place of residence.

4.2 Clarity of Focus

To this end, there should only be 5 Improvement Priorities for the Education Service:

- **Improved standards of literacy**
- **Improved standards of numeracy**
- **Improved attendance and levels of inclusion**
- **Promotion of health and well being**
- **Sustainable development**

All of these are directly relevant to the learning needs of our young people and the community of which they are a part. Consultations with heads of establishments of all sectors have confirmed this approach as meeting the needs of young people and the school community.

In more detail, these priorities mean:

Improved standards of literacy:

The emphasis will be on reading, writing, talking and listening across the curriculum. Equally it may mean improving standards of literacy in key areas of learning such as historical literacy, or even scientific literacy.

Improved Standards of numeracy:

Confidence with numbers is essential to living. Most obviously many vocational areas – accounts, engineering, mechanics, construction, retail and leisure trades – require skills with number. Numeracy is more than mathematics, it is building confidence in data handling and analysis.

Improved attendance and levels of inclusion

Put simply for children to learn, they need to attend. Ensuring good attendance is more than efficient registration, it is about establishing a real interest in learning, making the curriculum accessible for everyone, encouraging and supporting motivation, and meeting learning needs.

Promotion of health and well being

All schools will be encouraged to become health promoting schools. But, this is also about lifestyles, personal and social development and young people feeling good about themselves. It is also about tolerant and caring attitudes.

Sustainable development

The importance of our planet and our community is paramount. Young people must be helped to understand this and the need to safeguard their own future and that of their children. All of our schools should be eco-schools. They will encourage responsibility through participation, citizenship and enterprising approaches.

4.3 Freeing Creativity in our Staff

This approach will allow schools, and their staff to devote more time to supporting learning rather than in bureaucracy and form filling. They will be free to develop their own priorities, suited local need and state of development. They will not be required by the Authority to complete long and complex documents, although they will still be free to use established planning formats if it helps. This will harness the creativity of our people and give them more time for the young people.

4.4 Allowing Headteachers to Manage

Similarly, headteachers will have more time to manage and to support staff in these key areas. They will be able much better to use their own creativity and imagination. Above all they will be able to produce an improvement programme matched to the needs of the pupil population and the local community served by the school.

4.5 Aligning Other Systems

This simplification will allow the Authority to produce a much better alignment of other systems to support the priorities. There will therefore be an impact on:

- Allocation of finance and resources directly to the five areas of priority

- Provision of continuing professional development concentrated on these 5 areas.
- Adjustment of system of professional review and development to make these areas much more explicit than at present
- Production of support materials and strategies in these areas.

4.6 Delivering Better Outcomes

Due to the increased focus on clearly identifiable issues central to education, the expectation is that there will be improved attainment and achievement in all 5 areas for the young people of East Ayrshire. Put simply, attainment and achievement levels should be raised to being equal to, or in excess of national averages.

While this gives schools more flexibility it should not be seen as a soft option. If anything the levels of accountability are significantly increased in that better outcomes are not merely anticipated, they are expected. Further, the simplicity and clarity of the system means that it can now be reasonably expected that these issues will be routinely discussed at all management meetings, in-service training and as a focus for discussion across sectors and professional agencies.

Every school's plan should be visible in all classrooms and in public areas of the school.

4.7 Parents and Families

All parents, carers, children and young people will be informed about these priorities. Because of the simplicity of the system it will be easier for schools to explain the purposes of education and to identify the key areas of improvement. More importantly, parents should be able to discuss these areas with the school and members of staff. The system can therefore be used as a way improving discussions at parents' evenings and within the new parents' forums and councils.

5. LINKS TO COMMUNITY PLAN AND OTHER INITIATIVES

Appendix 1 gives a diagrammatic representation of the links between these initiatives and the five local Improvement Objectives.

- 5.1** The five areas are directly linked to the themes of the Community Plan. It therefore follows that there will be a natural alignment to the main areas of activity at local level and within the service to those of the higher level Community Plan.

The same set of priorities will apply in Learning Partnership Plans, and will feature prominently in the revised Children and Young People's Integrated Service Plan.

The mapping exercise of national and local planning links will be undertaken centrally by the Quality Improvement Team, again freeing schools from this task.

5.2 National Links

Despite its simplicity, this approach is capable of being closely linked to national initiatives:

- The Curriculum for Excellence
- The Scottish Executive's Vision for Children and Young People (the "7 Outcomes")
- The Journey to Excellence
- The National Priorities in Education

So long as schools take account of these wider developments in considering their plans they will be free to develop their own improvement agenda, including adding any priorities they wish, to suit their needs.

5.3 These 5 priorities also have direct relevance to Community Learning and Development and Onsite Services. The identification explicitly of inclusion and attendance matters creates a direct link to social work interests and plans, and therefore a dialogue on these shared areas of concern.

6. LEGAL/POLICY/FINANCIAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The proposal is wholly delivered within the existing frameworks of the Department.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Elected Members are invited to

- i) endorse the changes to service improvement planning set out in the report
- ii) approve the key priorities identified for education for the period 2007 - 2010
- iii) invite the Executive Director to report on progress in due course
- iv) otherwise note the contents of the report.

Graham Short
Executive Director (Educational and Social Services)

KMcK/MR
27 February 2007

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

i) Nil

Members wishing further information should contact Kenneth McKinlay, Principal Quality Improvement, Tel: (01563) 555650

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