

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 6 FEBRUARY 2001

MANAGING WITH INFORMATION

Report by Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To advise Elected Members of the implications for schools in East Ayrshire arising from the publication by the Scottish Executive of a report on Making More Effective Use of ICT in Management and Administration.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The National Management Information Systems (MIS) project was established early in 1995 following a meeting of a joint CoSLA/SOEID group chaired by the Secretary, Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID). It continued to operate with financial support from SOEID and considerable support in kind from education authorities until it was ended in March 1999.

The project's aim was to promote and develop the use of electronic data exchange in Scottish education. This is now part of the Government's strategy for creating the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). In August 1988 the Minister for Education at the Scottish Office reaffirmed the target that: *From 2002 general administrative communications to schools. should largely cease to be paper-based.*

- 2.2** The major partners in electronic data exchange are schools, education authorities, SEED and SQA. Discussions, both formal and informal, were held regularly to ensure that the views of all were taken into account.

The project operated at both strategic and technical levels. A set of key data-exchange principles has been formulated to provide an overall framework within which partners operate. The project consulted regularly with partners on a range of issues in order to move towards consensus.

3. BENEFITS OF ELECTRONIC DATA EXCHANGE

- 3.1** Implementing a standard for electronic data exchange reduces the burden on data providers, such as schools and education authorities, in meeting the requirements of data users such as SEED and education authorities. The work involved in completing and checking paper forms is largely eliminated.
- 3.2** The additional benefits are in more effective management and administration and in support for quality initiatives such as 'How Good Is Our School?' and 'Best Value'. Both initiatives place significant emphasis on the identification of performance indicators and the publication of benchmark data.

3.3 This report offers a vision for the future of MIS in schools, the benefits for users of MIS and the issues to be addressed in moving forward. Potential benefits include making more use of the information schools hold or can hold to:

- monitor pupils' progress
- evaluate curricular provision
- manage the use of resources
- perform day-to-day administration more efficiently.

4. MIS IN SCHOOLS

4.1 A school's MIS can support the work of all staff, be they teachers, senior managers, administrative or other support staff. Sometimes the task will involve recording data. More often it is likely to involve accessing data already in the system. Once entered, the data can be used in a variety of ways, for example:

- Teachers can record pupils' attendance and attainment.
- Heads of department can use pupils' attainment and class information to monitor provision.
- To monitor pupils' progress, guidance staff can access curriculum, attainment, attendance, timetable and other data for pupils for whom they have responsibility.
- Senior managers can use the MIS to help them timetable, organise class cover, locate pupils, plan the curriculum and monitor finances and other aspects of the schools' provision.
- Office and support staff play a major role in creating and managing the data that others will access, such as pupil records, staff records, school policies, minutes of meetings, etc. In some areas, their responsibilities will have changed to include data maintenance and data quality.
- Education authority staff can use the information generated by the schools for administration, planning and monitoring. They can return information about pupils (special needs, free meals, transport, etc.), staff (such as absence cover) and resources to the school as outputs from central systems. The authority can also provide benchmark data.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1 To make things happen, authorities and schools need to have individuals who share the vision and can realise the potential. East Ayrshire has staff who have significant skills and expertise in this field.

5.2 Modern software is undoubtedly more straightforward to use. Because of this it is easy to underestimate staff development needs. When a new use of MIS is introduced it is sometimes possible to implement it on a pilot basis, allowing the authority and schools to target staff development and support. Such training is a key component of East Ayrshire provision and support to schools.

- 5.3** Everyone needs to be assured that data are available on a controlled basis. Password protection is available but needs to function within a clearly defined code of practice and be enforced. To ensure the integrity of the data, it is appropriate to make some data available as a read-only copy rather than give access to the main database. Security of data is an important feature of East Ayrshire's provision.
- 5.4** Electronic data exchange occurs with the least disturbance and difficulty when schools make effective use of management information systems. The MIS is becoming essential to the day-to-day running of establishments and the data is kept up to date for that purpose. With the right software, data can be exported and exchanged electronically with little or no additional effort. The flow of data can be two-way; data such as national and education authority norms can be shared electronically. Relevant information can be made available to those with an interest in the school, such as staff, pupils, parents and prospective parents.
- 5.5** A well-run computerised management and administration system supports the key business processes of an organisation and provides a means of monitoring provision and improving effectiveness. Using a management information system is not an end in itself; it has to be seen in the context of helping an organisation deliver its services and achieve its developmental objectives. East Ayrshire educational establishments are at the forefront of these developments.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** Support for central and school MIS is through existing resources and the Excellence Fund -National Grid for Learning.

7. LEGAL / POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** Nil.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1** It is recommended that Members: -
- (i) note the contents of the report.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services

KMcK/NG
18 January 2001

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. "Managing With Information -Making More Effective Use of ICT in Management and Administration"
(Learning and Teaching Scotland / Scottish Executive 2001)
2. "Time for Teaching -Improving Administration in Schools" (SOEID 1999)

Members wishing further information should contact Graham Short, Head of Schools, Tel: (01563) 576118 or Kenneth McKinlay, Principal, Quality Development, Tel: (01563) 555650.

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER: GRAHAM SHORT, HEAD OF SCHOOLS

AGENDA