



East Lothian
Council

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY 25 MARCH 2014
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar (Convener)
Councillor D Berry
Councillor S Brown
Councillor J Caldwell
Councillor S Currie
Councillor A Forrest
Councillor J Gillies
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor D Grant
Councillor W Innes
Councillor M Libberton
Councillor P MacKenzie
Councillor J McNeil
Councillor J Williamson
Mr S Bunyan
Mrs M Goldsmith

Other Councillors present:

Councillor K McLeod

Council Officials Present:

Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services)
Mr D Nightingale, Head of Education
Ms M Ferguson, Corporate Legal Adviser
Ms F Brown, Principal Officer, Education Business Unit
Ms J Ogden-Smith, Communications Officer

Clerk:

Miss F Currie, Committees Assistant

Visitors Present:

Mr R Summers, Head Teacher, Musselburgh Grammar School

Apologies:

Councillor F McAllister
Councillor P McLennan
Councillor M Veitch
Ms G Gillan

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTE OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2013

The minute of the meeting of the Education Committee on 24 September 2013 was presented for approval.

Decision

The Committee approved the minute.

The Committee agreed to take Item 5 next to accommodate Mr Ronnie Summers, Head Teacher at Musselburgh Grammar School, who had to leave the meeting early.

5. REPORTING ON SQA PERFORMANCE 2013 (POST-APPEAL)

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) informing the Committee of the trends in Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) performance (post-appeal) in East Lothian to 2013.

Head of Education, Mr Darrin Nightingale, introduced the report commending it to Members and inviting Mr Summers to present the key details. Mr Summers advised that while it was unusual for Members to see the results post-appeal, these statistics gave a more accurate view of overall performance. He drew out some of the key statistics and indicated that a 1% increase or decrease could represent as few as 10 pupils and was therefore not always a significant change. Overall, pupils in East Lothian were sustaining their performance year on year. He concluded that while exam passes were an important part of attainment, it was the responsibility of schools to maximise progress for all pupils regardless of their ability.

In response to questions from Members Mr Summers gave details of the appeal process and discussed the significance of East Lothian's results in a national context and in relation to their comparator local authority areas. While acknowledging that in some results East Lothian had performed less well than previous years, he reminded Members that there were many factors which could impact on results and that East Lothian continued to hold its own in most areas. An exception was in relation to the comparison between attainment for boys and girls. Mr Summers said that there was no explanation for the apparent gender gap, other than the recognised difference in the speed at which boys and girls mature.

Mr Nightingale indicated that while some results were encouraging, neither the Education Department nor schools were complacent. There was still progress to be made and work was already underway to consider how to improve performance in key areas.

Councillor MacKenzie expressed his concerns about some of the statistics in the report and suggested that more should be done to understand the reasons for declines in certain results.

Councillor Berry shared these concerns and indicated that previous improvements in performance appeared to be being lost. He also considered that more should be done to identify the reasons for this backward step. Mr Nightingale suggested that Councillor Berry might find it helpful to discuss this matter further at one of the Department's regular meetings with Education Scotland.

Councillor Currie suggested that there should be more scrutiny of the actions that the Education Department intended to take to address downward trends. Officers might also look at what work had been done in comparator local authority areas where results have improved over the past year.

Councillor Innes agreed that the results and comparisons were important but that there were positives as well as negatives which could be drawn from the report. He considered it important to encourage schools and support them to achieve better results in future.

The Convenor thanked officers for their report and welcomed the opportunity to analyse and debate the data. She advised Members that an action plan was being prepared and this would include robust measures to address areas of poor performance.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) Note that the data contained within the report is post-appeal.
- (ii) Note that the East Lothian results represent a continuing good profile in comparison to the national and comparator grouping averages. The Education Service recognises the key challenge is to improve attainment and education outcomes for children and young people, especially at the end of S4.
- (iii) Note the results contained within the report and that the examination results inform and guide actions in each of the six secondary schools' School Improvement Plans.

2. PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS WITH PRE-SCHOOL PROVIDERS

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) informing the Committee of the decision taken by Cabinet, on 11 March 2014, to approve guidance on how East Lothian Council chooses to enter into partnership with any new private pre-school education providers and to provide clarity on funding for existing pre-school providers.

Ms Brown, Principal Officer, Education Business Unit, presented the report. She advised Members that, from August 2014, contracts will stipulate the maximum number of places which the Council will fund at each pre-school education provider. New contracts will only be entered into when local authority nurseries are likely to reach 95% capacity by the end of the session.

Councillor Goodfellow welcomed the report and the change in policy which would ensure equal access to pre-school education across the county.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note:

- (i) The Council will only approve new requests for partnerships with new providers when all local authority nurseries in East Lothian have a projection of at least 95% places filled by the academic year end.
- (ii) The Partnership Pre-School Provider Contracts entered into between East Lothian Council and the private or voluntary pre-school education providers will stipulate the number of children that the Council will fund in each partnership centre, from August 2014. Funding will only be released to Partner Providers when children access their provision.

3. RESERVING PLACES IN SCHOOLS FOR CATCHMENT PUPILS WHO MOVE INTO THE CATCHMENT AREA DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2014/15

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to obtain the Committee's approval for retaining places for incoming catchment pupils at specified schools for session 2014/15.

Ms Brown presented the report. She explained that the proposals reflected the movement that can happen during a school session. Reserving places allowed officers to take account of changing factors such as new house building and migration. The situation would be regularly reviewed throughout the session and if any change to the figures was required this could be done in agreement with the Convenor.

Members asked questions about the figures for individual schools and how these were calculated. Ms Brown confirmed that Head Teachers were consulted and a number of factors taken into account, including consideration of the previous year's figures. She reiterated that, where it was necessary to increase or decrease the number of places available at a particular school during the session, this could be done with the agreement of the Convenor.

Councillor Currie raised the issue of the current housing development at Pinkie Road, Musselburgh and its impact on the nearby primary school. Mr Nightingale agreed to respond to his query offline.

Councillor Goodfellow and the Convenor thanked officials for their hard work in preparing this report.

Decision

The Committee agreed to hold in reserve places for incoming catchment pupils for session 2014/15 as detailed in the report.

4. ROLL CAPPING AT DUNBAR GRAMMAR, KNOX ACADEMY, MUSSELBURGH GRAMMAR AND NORTH BERWICK HIGH SCHOOL

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) asking the Committee to approve the S1-S4 intake level at the above secondary schools for session 2014/15.

Ms Brown presented the report outlining the proposed figures for 2014/15. She reminded Members that managing the secondary rolls allowed the Council to provide high quality education while ensuring equality of resources throughout East Lothian.

In response to questions from Councillor Currie, Ms Brown confirmed that the capacity of Musselburgh Grammar School was currently 1350 pupils. Mr Nightingale advised that the Education Department had taken into account recent housing developments in the town, however, should any further housing developments be approved, this would impact on future capacity. He indicated that he would be happy to discuss this matter in more detail with local Members as part of the Department's monthly catch up meetings. However, Councillor Innes pointed out that discussions on this issue should be Council-wide and involve all Members.

Decision

The Committee agreed the maximum intake levels for S1-S4 in session 2014/15, and the increases/decreases requested from June 2014, as outlined in the report.

Signed

Councillor Shamin Akhtar
Convener of the Education Committee