



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

**TUESDAY 16 JUNE 2015
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 D Grant
Councillor J Gillies
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor W Innes
Councillor M Libberton
Councillor P MacKenzie
Councillor P McLennan (Items 1 – 5)
Councillor J McNeil
Councillor J Williamson
Mr S Bunyan
Ms G Gillan
Mrs M Goldsmith
Mr M McHugh

Council Officials Present:

Mr D Nightingale, Head of Education
Mrs M Ferguson, Service Manager – Legal & Procurement
Mr D Scott, Quality Improvement Officer
Ms K Haspolat, Quality Improvement Officer
Ms J Ogden-Smith, Communications Officer

Clerk:

Ms F Currie, Committees Assistant

Apologies:

Provost L Broun-Lindsay
Councillor A Forrest
Councillor F McAllister
Councillor M Veitch

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 24 MARCH, 31 MARCH, 7 APRIL AND 21 APRIL 2015 FOR APPROVAL

The minutes of the meetings of the Education Committee held on 24 March, 31 March, 7 April and 21 April 2015 were presented for approval.

Decision

The Committee agreed to approve the minutes.

2. HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY 2015-2018

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to seek the approval of the Committee for the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015-2018.

Quality Improvement Officer, David Scott, presented the report outlining the background to the creation of the Strategy, including the results of Inspection reports and the Health & Wellbeing Aspect Review, and policies such as Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). He explained that the Strategy placed a clear expectation on schools to move forward but it also recognised that the level and timing of progress will depend on the circumstances and needs within each school.

Responding to questions from Members, Mr Scott advised that work was already being done with pupils of all ages to improve their understanding of good health and wellbeing. He said that the lack of timescales within the Activity Framework would provide flexibility for schools to set and achieve goals according to their individual circumstances. He confirmed that teaching staff had been involved in discussions around implementation of the Strategy and how this might feed into school improvement plans.

Councillor MacKenzie welcomed the report and emphasised the important role that environment has in encouraging children to improve their health and wellbeing.

Councillor Berry expressed concern about the lack of clear timescales within the Activity Framework and felt that this may lead to confusion and a failure to achieve measureable improvements.

Councillor Currie commented that while it was important to have a starting point and a clear way forward, he was concerned that no additional resources had been set aside to help staff achieve further improvements. He said that performance against key indicators would determine if results could be achieved within current budgets.

The Convenor thanked staff for their hard work in preparing the Strategy and Activity Framework. She said that this work would interlink with a number of other areas to improve children's health and wellbeing and encourage them to be more engaged in their learning.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. approve the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015-2018 and authorise its distribution to all educational establishments; and
- ii. authorise educational establishments to implement the Activity Framework resulting from the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

3. NUMERACY AND MATHEMATICS STRATEGY 2014-2018

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to seek the approval of the Committee for the Numeracy and Mathematics Strategy 2014-2018.

Quality Improvement Officer, Karen Haspolat, presented the report. She highlighted key aspects of the Activity Framework, including the 'What you say counts' campaign which would engage not only with pupils and staff but also with parents and local communities in promoting and developing better numeracy and mathematics skills from early years onwards.

In response to questions from Members, Ms Haspolat explained that the Strategy was aimed at both primary and secondary schools with a focus on how mathematics and numeracy skills are taught and how to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. She confirmed that family support was a fundamental part of the strategy and that, for some parents, this may involve supporting them to improve their own numeracy skills along with those of their children.

Ms Haspolat acknowledged the success of previous campaigns, such as 'Dunbar Counts', and indicated that these may be rolled out to other areas in future. She advised that the Strategy was fully supported by teaching staff and its implementation would be tailored to meet the needs of individual schools or clusters. She also outlined the arrangements in place for monitoring, reporting and measuring the overall success of the Strategy.

The Head of Education, Darrin Nightingale, advised Members that he would consider how best to report progress to future meetings of the Committee.

Councillor MacKenzie suggested that one way to measure success would be to increase the number of pupils studying Higher Maths, a target already identified by the Scottish Government.

Councillor Berry welcomed the Strategy which he said underlined the importance of teaching numeracy to children from an early age. He said it was important to have a minimum standard of attainment.

Councillor McLennan said that an important factor would be parental and community involvement, similar to that already seen in the successful 'Dunbar Counts' campaign.

Councillor Libberton commented that this was an excellent report and very forward thinking. She too emphasised the importance of improving numeracy and literacy and on narrowing the attainment gap.

The Convenor commended the Strategy as an important tool in equipping all children in East Lothian with basic numeracy skills and reiterated the Council's commitment to this key goal.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. approve the Numeracy and Mathematics Strategy 2014-2018; and
- ii. authorise educational establishments to implement the Activity Framework resulting from the Numeracy and Mathematics Strategy.

4. QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY 2015

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to seek the approval of the Committee for the Quality Assurance Policy 2015.

Mr Scott presented the report. He advised that the policy had been drafted in August 2014 and piloted between November 2014 and May 2015. It placed a number of expectations on schools in relation to audit work, the quality and standard of reporting, self evaluation and career long learning for staff. There would be an emphasis on involving more colleagues in the process and sharing good practice and support with 'buddy' schools. Any recommendations for action would be included in each school's improvement plan and progress would be reviewed on a regular basis. Mr Scott also briefed Members on the new arrangements for in-house school inspections with fewer annual visits and a focus on supporting schools in preparation for their Education Scotland inspections.

Mr Nightingale added that this policy had seen a change in the way schools discussed attainment results with the emphasis on assessing performance in a supportive and challenging way. Two meetings had taken place for each secondary school and the feedback from staff was encouraging.

Responding to questions from Members, Mr Scott acknowledged that the team within the Council was small but said that including Head Teachers had helped to improve the process. He confirmed that schools were involving parents in the process through closer engagement with Parent Councils, and he outlined some of the key changes in relation to staff and classroom reporting.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. approve the Quality Assurance Policy; and
- ii. authorise distribution of the Policy to all educational establishments.

5. LEARNING AND TEACHING POLICY 2015

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to seek the approval of the Committee for the Learning and Teaching Policy 2015.

Ms Haspolat presented the report advising Members that the original policy, published in 2006, had been reviewed and updated to reflect recent changes in education. The review group involved head teachers from local schools and the draft policy was put out for consultation between December 2014 and January 2015.

In response to questions from Members, Ms Haspolat said that the original policy was considered good practice at the time of publication and had remained relevant until quite recently. She explained that the term 'critical mass' referred to the building of staff capacity within schools by valuing staff and ensuring high quality development opportunities.

Responding to a question on pupil behaviour, Mr Scott said that, in his view, good learning and teaching encouraged pupils to become more engaged in class, resulting in a reduction in poor behaviour.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. approve the Learning and Teaching Policy; and
- ii. authorise distribution of the Policy to all education establishments.

6. SCHOOL EDUCATION – A REPORT PREPARED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND (JUNE 2014) ON BEHALF OF THE ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to update the Committee regarding the Education Service position with regard to Audit Scotland recommendations in relation to Pupil Attainment and Wider Achievement and Improving Pupil Performance.

The Convenor advised Members of her intention to propose an amendment to the recommendations of the report to ensure that regular progress reports were submitted to the Committee in future. Councillors Currie, McLennan and Berry objected to this on procedural grounds. They were advised by the Clerk and the Legal Adviser that a verbal amendment was permissible under Standing Orders if it was seconded.

Councillor McLennan felt that the proposed amendment should have been disclosed at the beginning of the meeting. However, he was advised that an amendment could only be proposed at the time the report in question was being considered and, if seconded, must be considered and voted on by the Committee.

Mr Nightingale presented the report. He outlined the background to the audit, which had focused on primary and secondary school education in Scotland, and highlighted some of the key messages. He also summarised the position in East Lothian's schools with particular reference to pupil attainment and improving pupil performance.

Responding to questions from Members, Mr Nightingale said that he had contacted Audit Scotland to discuss changing East Lothian's classification from that of a 'rural' local authority to ensure greater consistency when using tools such as the Virtual Comparator. He advised that additional resources had been provided to support the change over to the new exam system and that the SQA were aware of concerns about some exams, such as Higher Maths. He said that adjustments could be made to pass marks should these concerns be reflected in the overall level of results.

Both the Convenor and Mr Nightingale also acknowledged the importance of providing regular updates to the Committee on progress against key attainment goals, and that this should begin at the next meeting in September 2015.

Councillor MacKenzie referred to the individual priorities and actions outlined in the report and the results of national benchmarking which showed that East Lothian was below the national average for attainment at level 5. He welcomed the suggestion of progress reports being presented at each Committee meeting.

Councillor Berry said that this report was long overdue. He noted that the reduction in levels of deprivation within the county did not seem to be reflected in improvements in attainment. He said he looked forward to seeing further statistics and updates at future meetings.

Councillor Currie commended the report and pointed out that Education Committees had a key role to play in terms of scrutiny. He expressed his concerns over the disparity in results in East Lothian, and when compared to the national average, and said that this reinforced the need for robust scrutiny to ensure progress.

Councillor Innes noted that the report seemed to suggest that attainment was getting worse in more deprived areas despite additional resources. He cautioned Members over committing further resources to these areas until they could be sure that it would produce the required results.

Councillor Goodfellow welcomed the report and noted that despite cuts by the Scottish Government the Council had managed to maintain teacher numbers.

The Convenor commended the report and noted that, although still below the national average, attainment levels in East Lothian were the highest they had ever been. She welcomed the proposals for further improvements and proposed an amendment to the report recommendation to ensure regular progress reports were presented at every Committee meeting. The amendment was seconded by Councillor Libberton.

Further concerns were expressed by some members over the handling of the proposed amendment. Councillor Currie said that, in his view, it was not competent and indicated his intention of lodging a complaint. Councillor Berry left the meeting in protest. The Clerk advised Members that the motion was competent and had been handled correctly. The Convenor moved to a vote on the proposed amendment:

For: 11
Against: 0
Abstentions: 5

The amended recommendation was approved.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. note that the Council (28 October 2014) agreed that raising attainment in schools, particularly for pupils from more economically 'deprived' backgrounds, is one of the Council's key priorities;
- ii. welcome the actions and next steps detailed in the report appendix; and

- iii. ask the Head of Service to report to each Education Committee on the progress with ELIPS and the actions which are being implemented to raise attainment.

Signed

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Councillor Shamin Akhtar
Convener of the Education Committee