



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

**TUESDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2016
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar (Convener)
Councillor D Berry
Councillor S Brown
Councillor A Forrest
Councillor J Gillies
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor D Grant
Councillor W Innes
Councillor M Libberton
Councillor P MacKenzie
Councillor F McAllister
Councillor P McLennan
Councillor J McNeil
Councillor J Williamson
Ms G Gillan
Mrs M Goldsmith

Council Officials Present:

Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive – Resources & People Services
Ms F Robertson, Head of Education
Mr R Parker, Service Manager – Education (Strategy & Operations)
Ms M Ferguson, Service Manager – Legal & Procurement
Ms L Gaughan, Education Support Officer
Ms P Homer, Lead Officer Early Years & Childcare
Ms L Humphrys, Childcare Development Officer
Mr R Lewis, Senior Information Officer
Ms J Mackay, Media Manager

Clerk:

Ms F Currie, Committees Officer

Apologies:

Provost L Broun-Lindsay
Councillor J Caldwell
Councillor S Currie
Councillor M Veitch
Mr S Bunyan

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 31 MAY 2016 FOR APPROVAL

The minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 31 May 2016 were approved.

2. HEAD TEACHER APPOINTMENTS

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to inform the Committee of the Head Teacher appointments made by the Appointments Sub-Committee.

Members welcomed the appointments and expressed the hope that the new Head Teachers would work closely with the Parent Councils and continue the positive progress which had been made at both schools.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the Head Teacher appointments.

3. EAST LOTHIAN COUNCIL EDUCATION APPEALS 2016

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to inform the Committee of the outcome of East Lothian Council's Education Appeals in 2016.

Councillor Goodfellow was pleased note that there had been sufficient flexibility to reorganise classes to accommodate additional places where the need was justified.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the outcome of the Education Appeals.

4. HONEST TOUN NURSERY FOLLOW UP INSPECTION VISIT BY EDUCATION SCOTLAND, CARRIED OUT JOINTLY WITH THE CARE INSPECTORATE

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to report to the Committee the outcome of Education Scotland's follow up inspection visit to the Honest Toun Nursery, Musselburgh, and to note that the Care Inspectorate was still pending.

Liz Humphrys, Childcare Development Officer, presented the report summarising the background to the most recent visit, the areas where improvement had been made and those where improvement was still required. She advised Members that the Nursery would continue to receive support from Council staff to address these outstanding issues.

Responding to questions from Councillor Berry, Ms Humphrys explained the reasons for the differing report format. However, Councillor Berry asked if, in future, the previous report could be attached as background and that a more detailed

explanation of the findings of the visit be included in the covering report. Fiona Robertson, Head of Education, acknowledged Councillor Berry's remarks and agreed to consider these for future reports.

Councillor Williamson observed that the improvements in the Nursery had made staff more confident and parents were very pleased with the standard of service provided.

Councillor Mackenzie welcomed the improvements outlined in the report; however, he had some reservations over the wording of the document. He was particularly pleased to note the use of outdoor learning, the involvement of a Parent Focus Group and the appointment of a new Deputy Manager.

Councillor McAllister also welcomed the report and its findings. He noted the use of play in learning and the professionalism of staff, both of which were highlighted in the report.

Councillor Innes said that it was clear that Education Scotland was pleased with the progress made since the last visit. He commended staff for their key role in achieving these improvements and providing high quality care for children in Musselburgh.

The Convener echoed her colleagues' remarks and noted that Education Scotland had confirmed that no further follow up visits would be required.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) Note the contents of the Inspection report from Education Scotland; and
- (ii) Note that, as a result of the many improvements made, no further follow up visits will be made by Education Scotland to the Honest Toun Nursery in connection with this inspection.

5. SHARED INSPECTION OF COCKENZIE PRIMARY SCHOOL BY EDUCATION SCOTLAND AND EAST LoTHIAN COUNCIL

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to report to Committee on the shared inspection of Cockenzie Primary School by Education Scotland and East Lothian Council.

Education Scotland had indicated in its previous report of 15 December 2015 that there would be an extended visit to the school with the Local Authority before the end of the school session. This visit took place on 7 and 8 June 2016.

Ms Robertson presented the report summarising the background to the most recent visit and the areas where improvements had been recorded. She advised that, as a result of the leadership of the Head Teacher and the progress made by the school, Education Scotland would be making no further visits in connection with this inspection.

In response to questions from Members, Ms Robertson outlined the progress being made through the Council's numeracy strategy. She also agreed to consider their requests for additional background information to be provided with future reports.

Councillor Libberton expressed her pleasure at the contents of the report. She noted that the improvements had increased confidence in the children, staff and parents and she acknowledged the work of the excellent staff team.

Councillor MacKenzie concurred with his colleague. Referring to an Education Scotland report on staffing resources, he noted the investment in staff within the school, the commitment to professional development and the effectiveness of the senior leadership team.

Councillor Brown also welcomed the report and, in particular, the comments on the clear vision and leadership demonstrated by the Head Teacher.

Councillor Innes observed that it was vital to have strong leadership and a highly motivated staff team to deliver the Head Teacher's vision. He congratulated both teaching and non teaching staff.

Ms Gillan agreed with Councillor Innes. She also hoped that the example of Cockenzie Primary School could be used as a model for other schools that were underperforming.

Councillor Berry concurred with the views of his colleagues. He was particularly pleased to see the school engaging not just with parents but also with the wider community.

The Convener also agreed with the comments of Members and commended the school for demonstrating positive progress at every stage of the inspection process.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) Note the content of the Education Scotland letter to parents;
- (ii) Congratulate the Head Teacher and staff on the very good progress that has been made by the school since the previous visit by Education Scotland in October 2015; and
- (iii) Congratulate the Head Teacher on the clear vision for the school and note her leadership of change is strong.

6. UPDATE ON THE NAMED PERSON SERVICE

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to provide the Committee with an update on the implementation of the Named Person Service.

Ms Robertson presented the report outlining recent developments including the impact of the Supreme Court judgement. She also responded to questions on the proposals for a secure e-mail address for Named Persons and whether feedback had been received from parents.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) Note the content of the report; and

- (ii) Note the outcome of the Supreme Court's decision on the implementation of the Named Person Service.

7. UPDATE ON MEADOWPARK – THE COMMUNICATION PROVISION AT KNOX ACADEMY

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to update the Committee on the development of Meadowpark, the new Communication provision at Knox Academy.

Linda Gaughan, Education Support Officer, presented the report outlining progress on issues including access to accommodation, staff training, inter-agency working, pupil numbers, building works and the future development of the outdoor space. She explained that although this facility could be opened up to pupils from neighbouring local authority areas, projected pupil numbers indicated that the number of East Lothian pupils entering Meadowpark was expected to rise significantly. She also advised that additional building work had resulted in a budget overspend and further detail was provided in the report.

Ms Gaughan responded to a number of questions from Members. She confirmed that the additional building work had had no direct impact on the small number of pupils, all of whom were very settled. She agreed that it was important for the parents to forge links with the Parent Council at Knox Academy and efforts were ongoing.

In relation to the outdoor space, Ms Gaughan confirmed that the budget had been tight and the decision had been taken to focus on the inside space. While there was already one safe and secure playground area in the unit, she said the intention would be to expand into other playground areas as pupil numbers increased. Ms Robertson added that staff at the unit were working with parents, pupils and STRiVE to design appropriate outdoor provision. She also gave an assurance that the existing outdoor space was safe and secure.

Alex McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive, reminded Members that the budget for this project had been the subject of previous reports. It had overspent due to unforeseen building work and would be reviewed as pupil numbers at the unit increased.

Ms Gaughan explained the staged assessment process which determined whether a child remained in mainstream education or was placed in a specialist unit. She also outlined the cost of sending a child to a unit outwith East Lothian.

Ms Robertson added that the staged assessment process was used to identify the needs and support requirements of each child but, where possible, children would be educated in the mainstream with appropriate support. However, specialist units would be used where necessary. She confirmed that children with other types of challenging behaviours were appropriately managed in mainstream education by staff working closely with each child and their family.

Ms Gaughan outlined the staff to pupil ratio for the unit and advised that the building work should be complete by early November 2016.

Councillor McNeil commended the involvement of senior pupils as volunteers at the unit and the links forged with the wider community.

Councillor MacKenzie welcomed the progress made on the unit but said that he had grave concerns over the provision of safe outdoor space. He added that such spaces should not only be safe but enriching and therapeutic as well and should not be curtailed by budgetary constraints.

Councillor McAllister commented that while he could see the cost benefits of integrating all pupils into the mainstream this did not always provide a material benefit for the children. He acknowledged that there were many conditions and behaviours which may prove challenging and was not suggesting that there should be specialist units for all. However, he observed that when a policy became the presumption it could become ingrained and difficult to change. He concluded that the most important point was that all children, regardless of their needs, were treated with dignity and supported to achieve their maximum potential.

Councillor Innes expressed his disappointment at some of the remarks made by other Members. He suggested that there may be a lack of understanding about the role of specialist units and that the presumption should always be to treat all children the same unless their needs required otherwise. He stated that this project would continue to have the full support of the Council and there was no suggestion that any of the existing provision within the unit was in any way unsafe.

Councillor Goodfellow observed that the critical point was that children with additional needs were accommodated within East Lothian and that they, and their families, did not have the added stress of travelling outside of the county to access education. He supported the policy which ensured that the decision on whether a child was educated in a mainstream or a specialist unit was based solely on their individual needs.

The Convener concluded the debate by praising the quality of the unit and thanking the staff for their hard work in delivering a service which would address the needs of its pupils both in and out of the classroom.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note progress regarding the development of Meadowpark, following approval at Cabinet on 9 June 2015.

8. EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE STRATEGY 2016-2021

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to ask the Committee to approve and adopt the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy 2016-2021.

Pauline Homer, Lead Officer Early Years & Childcare, presented the report outlining the background and key elements of the strategy, including the use of play in learning. She also referred to the challenges facing the service as a result of the Scottish Government's planned increase in early learning and childcare hours from 600 to 1140 by the year 2020.

Ms Homer responded to a range of questions from Members providing advice on the requirement for feeding and sleep areas for three and four year olds, the criteria for determining 'Priority Twos' and proposals being considered for providing the additional hours, for example through a 22 hours per week/50 weeks per year service. She also confirmed that the strategy would be evaluated and revised to take

account of what was working and what could be done better, and responded to questions on the shortage of places in rural areas and the Book Bug programme.

In response to further questions, Ms Robertson said that in future the Standards and Quality reports could be brought to the Committee to allow them to review progress and she would consider the suggestion of annual progress reports on implementation of the additional hours of early learning and childcare. She also agreed that parental choice and engagement were very important, not least to ensure that appropriate provision was available across the county.

On the issue of qualified teachers in nurseries, Ms Robertson advised that the Council was looking at its staff complement in nurseries and the role of degree qualified staff. She added that the staffing model for additional hours was not yet clear but all options would be considered. She confirmed that the Council was being asked to provide budgetary information to the Scottish Government so it could be clear on the financial implications for all local authorities.

Gael Gillan stated that the EIS position was that there should be a fully qualified teacher in each nursery.

Councillor MacKenzie observed that the Scottish Government's policy on additional hours was a means of tackling child poverty by allowing mothers to become economically active. He also referred to the importance of parental support and engagement and that play was a vital part of every child's learning and development.

The Convener emphasised the importance of officers having the flexibility to amend the strategy as and when required. She suggested that the recommendations contained in the report be amended accordingly.

Councillor McLennan agreed that flexibility was important and that the policy on additional hours should be supported by the EIS and others outwith the local authority. He asked that the resource issues be brought back to the Committee and said that this was a massive opportunity to improve early learning and childcare and one which he encouraged all Members to support.

Councillor Berry commented that this early learning laid the foundation for a child's education and, irrespective of where the funds came from, the Council should not shirk its responsibilities. However, he found parts of the strategy weak and in need of improvement. He added that parental engagement was a pivotal factor and that the Council must ensure that parents were part of their children's education.

Councillor Innes stated that existing early intervention strategies did not seem to be working and were instead compounding past mistakes. He observed that the introduction of additional hours would mean that two year olds were in education for longer each week than secondary school pupils and that this may be detrimental to their development. He noted the existing challenges in meeting demand for childcare and expressed concern about how the additional hours would be delivered.

Councillor Goodfellow said it would be important going forward to develop the strategy to take account not only of the increase in childcare hours but also the 50% increase in population expected in East Lothian over the next ten years.

The Convener brought the debate to a close. She thanked everyone for their contributions and again emphasised the importance of having flexibility within the strategy to meet changing needs. She formally moved an amendment to

recommendation (i) to add “...and to allow the flexibility to adapt as required.” Councillor Innes seconded the motion and the Members agreed the recommendations as amended.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) Approve and adopt the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy 2016-2021, and to allow the flexibility to adapt as required;
- (ii) Note the actions required and challenges posed by the increase in early learning and childcare hours from 600 to 1140 hours by the year 2020;
- (iii) Note the actions proposed to take the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy forward over given timescales; and
- (iv) Note the work required across Council Departments and through partner agencies to improve outcomes and to close the attainment gap for children in East Lothian.

Councillor Berry raised a complaint about the management of the meeting stating that he and other Members were not being given an equal opportunity to ask questions or to respond to comments made during debates.

Councillor McLennan raised similar objections about being refused the opportunity to speak a second time during the debate on the last item, despite being allowed to do so at another meeting. He called for a consistent approach to be used at all meetings.

Morag Ferguson, Service Manager – Legal & Procurement, provided advice on the relevant Standing Orders and indicated that Standing Orders provided for one contribution only from a Member during the debate on an item. She confirmed that the Convenor of a meeting had discretion to depart from this but was not obliged to do so.

9. SQA SUMMARY OF ATTAINMENT 2016

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to inform the Committee of overall pass rate levels in East Lothian in SQA Examinations 2015/16 and the level of attainment of secondary pupils in S5 and S6.

Ms Robertson presented the report summarising the background and providing additional context to some of the results outlined in the report. She advised that it provided a high level overview of performance on SQA qualifications and a further report would be presented later in the session which would include the updated Insight data. Ms Robertson also reminded Members that this was the first year of presentation for the new Higher and Advanced Higher exams.

In response to questions from Members, Ms Robertson provided advice on the format of the statistical data and how this information would be analysed and used to improve future results. She confirmed that information on college courses would be picked up through the Insight data and that this would be included in the next report to the Committee.

Councillor Berry said he would welcome a more holistic view of attainment results. He was concerned about there being too much focus on SQA results and that vocational training should not be seen as second best.

Councillor MacKenzie observed that the policy and financial implications of the report were stated as 'none'. Referring to an Audit Scotland report on education, he emphasised the importance of directing resources at the areas which statistics had shown required improvement. He hoped to see this issue addressed in the next report.

Councillor McLennan made a similar point about the need to look closely at budgetary pressures and how and where to target resources. He asked if it would be possible for a report be brought to the next meeting or if a briefing could be arranged for Committee members in advance of the Council's annual budgetary process.

Councillor Innes sounded a note of caution stating that the Scottish Government had indicated its desire to fund education directly to schools. It would therefore be important to clarify how this would work before the Council could make an assessment of its own budget.

The Convener thanked staff for their work on the report and noted that the results continued to move in a positive direction.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) Consider and note the contents of the report; and
- (ii) Note the examination results continue to inform and guide actions in each of the six secondary schools' School Improvement Plans.

Signed

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Councillor Shamin Akhtar
Convener of the Education Committee