



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

**TUESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2016
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar (Convener)
Councillor S Brown
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 F McAllister
Councillor P McLennan
Councillor J Williamson
Ms G Gillan

Council Officials Present:

Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive – Resources & People Services
Ms F Robertson, Head of Education
Ms M Ferguson, Service Manager – Legal & Procurement
Ms J Ogden-Smith, Communications Officer
Mr C Forbes, Principal Officer, East Lothian Works
Mr P Raffaelli, Head Teacher, Dunbar Grammar School

Clerk:

Ms S Birrell, Committees Assistant (Temp)

Apologies:

Councillor D Berry
Councillor J McNeil
Councillor J Caldwell
Councillor M Veitch
Mrs M Goldsmith
Mr S Bunyan

Declarations of Interest:

None

A proposed Amendment to the Recommendations for item 6 was circulated by the Convener, and after some discussion it was agreed that it should be raised as a verbal amendment during the discussion at item 6.

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2016 FOR APPROVAL

The minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 20 September 2016 were approved.

2. EAST LOTHIAN CONSTRUCTION AND TECHNOLOGY CENTRE

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to provide update on the East Lothian Construction and Technology Centre.

Mr Forbes spoke to the report, informing the Committee that a building which had previously fallen out of use had been refurbished, with capital funding, to house the Construction and Technology Centre. The Centre would build on the academy model, and in time satisfy both the increasing demand for knowledge, and close the skills gap that had been identified in the construction industry. He drew the Committee's attention to the profile-raising launch of the project and confirmed that 61 pupils were attending the Centre this academic, adding that behaviour and attendance had been outstanding. He highlighted various parts of the programmes offered to pupils, and invited all Members to the official opening launch.

Councillor Goodfellow asked which private companies had shown an interest in partnership working. Mr Forbes advised that this work was ongoing but several local building firms were in communication with relevant staff. In response to a further question from Councillor Goodfellow, Mr Forbes agreed that in future years there could be potential to offer courses to young people who had already left school.

Councillor MacKenzie asked how the Centre's timetable meshed with the school day. Mr Forbes indicated that the Centre was open during school term dates, and the pupils normally arrived around 8:30am. Ms Robertson added that it was dependant on a pupil's course, they could be expected to attend for two full days, or two full mornings, per week. Secondary Schools in East Lothian were in the process of streamlining their timetables, so that pupils attending the Centre would not miss other work within school. Mr Raffaelli expanded on the arrangements which had been made for pupils in Dunbar Grammar School, who travelled over lunchtime to attend on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday afternoons. The inclusion of the Friday afternoon demonstrated the pupil's commitment to their course, as schools were closed. He added it would be important to work closely with all pupils, to ensure they would not miss important lessons or information during their time out of the school.

Councillor Currie asked about transportation costs and whether these could be maintained up to the predicted total of 160 pupils that was the Centre's capacity, whether there was a possibility of creating another Centre in the east of East Lothian to cut down on the travel time for pupils travelling from North Berwick and Dunbar, and what work had been carried out to ensure that apprenticeships could be found for pupils, on completion of their courses. Mr Forbes indicated that the transportation budget remained under close review, that travel times from the east of East Lothian had been greatly improved given that prior to the opening of the Centre pupils had

had to travel to Granton, in Edinburgh. He highlighted that pupils should be encouraged to demonstrate their commitment to the course via the requirement to travel, and that punctuality was part of the training for entry into the workforce. Discussions had been ongoing, both with building firms working in East Lothian, and East Lothian Council's Property Maintenance Department regarding the creation of apprenticeship posts, particularly within the shared apprentice scheme.

Gael Gillan asked about entry requirements for the Centre. Mr Forbes advised that last year the entry requirements had been minimal, but there would be an informal interview for applicants for the next academic year.

Councillor Brown asked about the gender balance within the Centre's community. Mr Forbes admitted that there were no female pupils at present but that work was ongoing to encourage a better gender balance.

Councillor Currie stated that not all pupils were suited to the trajectory of school, then university, and given that house building was a growing local industry, he welcomed the grant funding for the creation of the Centre. He agreed that travel time could be used as a way for pupils to demonstrate their commitment to attend, and hoped that a gender balance could be reached, with cognisance that this would be unlikely to happen immediately.

Councillor MacKenzie welcomed the report and noted his support for the creation of the Centre. He cautioned against an over-anxious approach to taking pupils out of school, citing The Wood Commission, which had clearly stated that the world of work and secondary school provision should be meshed. He recommended that children should be supported in gaining relevant skills outside school facilities.

Councillor Goodfellow advised that it had been almost impossible for pupils in his ward of North Berwick to access similar courses in the Edinburgh area, and welcomed the development of this facility. He hoped that house builders working in East Lothian would take advantage of potential apprentices who had completed courses at the Centre.

Councillor Innes welcomed the initiative, and thanked Mr Forbes for his attendance. He outlined that the opportunities provided to pupils, to gain experience and skills in a growing industry where there were local jobs available, would help the local economy.

Councillor Grant emphasised the positive outcome for a building that had been out of use for some time, and agreed that steps should be taken to progress gender balance in the future.

The Convener thanked Mr Forbes for his report, pointing out that 10,050 houses were planned for the East Lothian and this Centre would ensure young people had the right skills for working in the local construction industry. She noted her thanks to the Education Department, the Economic Development Department, Edinburgh College, local House Builders, and East Lothian Works.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the significant progress made to date and acknowledge plans moving forwards.

3. CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE ACHIEVEMENT OF A LEVEL IN LITERACY AND NUMERACY 2015/16

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to inform the Committee of the change in national policy to assessing and reporting on children's and young people's progress in literacy and numeracy and to note the levels of achievement in schools across East Lothian.

Ms Robertson spoke to the report, explaining that new draft national benchmarking standards had been developed to support teachers and practitioners to collect data. In line with the Scottish Government's approach, the Assessment Guidance had been developed nationally but implemented locally. She highlighted that schools had been given autonomy to collect the data via their preferred methods, and pointed out that teachers and practitioners were already skilled in helping young people achieve literacy and numeracy skills.

Ms Robertson stressed that the data presented had been classified as "experimental data", adding that the results should only be made available on a school by school basis, with a link to the school's individual website included, to show the whole school's achievements. She added that East Lothian's approach to children with Additional Support Needs was inclusive, and therefore these children had been included in the reporting.

Councillor Forrest asked about the robustness of the data, and about the benefit of publishing it, raising concerns about the creation of league tables. Ms Robertson responded that the data should be viewed as under development. Schools across Scotland had used different approaches to reporting, and some had chosen to report on 'progress towards' rather than 'achievement of' a level. The Scottish Government had also expressed concern regarding the potential creation of league tables, but the data had been published because it could have been brought into the public domain via a Freedom of Information Request. With regards to the robustness of the data, she claimed that it should be viewed as one piece of information, adding that a letter had been sent to all parents to explain the situation, and Parent Council Chairs had been briefed.

Councillor Williamson asked how Elected Members should respond to concerns raised by parents. Ms Robertson outlined that all schools had been asked to collate information as to how they had collected the data, and that it was important to highlight the inclusion policy for children working towards individual learning targets, as opposed to age-appropriate levels: this could impact the reported figures significantly, from between 5% to 23%.

Councillor MacKenzie noted the inclusion, at paragraph 3.6 of the report, of significant variations, nationally, in reporting. Ms Robertson stated that East Lothian had been commended on their reporting, because they had chosen to share expectations and experiences at cluster level. Also, ten school staff were part of the National Moderation Group and could feed back from there into schools.

Councillor Grant asked why the arrangements for assessment had been changed. Ms Robertson explained that there had been too much variation between Local Authorities to allow for the creation of a clear overview of Education across Scotland. Therefore, the OECD had recommended a system that would be comparable between schools and across Education Authority areas.

In response to a question from Councillor Goodfellow, Ms Robertson reported that standardised testing had a role to play, to target variations across Scotland, but added that this data only represented 10% of the overall curriculum.

In response to questions from Councillor McAllister, Ms Robertson outlined that if the position remained the same in 2017, when all schools in Scotland should be following the same framework, special provision would be made for some schools. Head Teachers had already been asked, as a result of this exercise, what support they could benefit from, in order to improve their literacy and numeracy, and strategies and actions would be delivered.

The Convener asked where concerned parents should be directed, in order to gain a wider understanding of the work of a school. Ms Robertson recommended school's individual websites, or their most recent Standards and Quality report, both of which would provide a fuller picture. Mr Raffaelli added that this was a live issue, and that even if results had been reported with 97% of pupils attaining a level, he would still be concerned with the remaining 3%.

Councillor MacKenzie praised the breadth and range of Curriculum for Excellence, reporting that the OECD report had appraised Scottish children as resilient. He noted concern about the drop in high level readers between 2004 and 2012, and over the release of this experimental data, but added that it was more important that children experienced the adventure of learning.

Councillor Currie cautioned against dismissing the data, recommending that there could be issues that were a cause for concern contained within the report.

Councillor McAllister pointed out that there was only so much change teachers could produce, given that so many of the factors concerning the data were likely to be environmental, not pedagogical. He agreed that there could be some validity in the findings.

Councillor Innes remarked that it would be difficult to interpret the data in any meaningful way, given the disproportional figures and the transition from one method of reporting to another.

The Convener agreed that the information presented should not be considered robust, and recommended that Members looked up the Office of National Statistics website to find the definition of experimental data. She maintained that Ms Robertson had taken the correct course of action, and it would be the responsibility of all Elected Members to flag up the experimental nature of the data presented. She emphasised that the creation of league tables would not be a positive move and highlighted the breadth and width of the Curriculum for Excellence beyond the reported information.

Decision

The Committee agreed to consider and note the contents of the report.

4. EARLY DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT: ASSESSING CHILDREN'S "READINESS TO LEARN"

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to inform the Committee of the initial results and preliminary conclusions

from the Early Development Instrument (EDI) survey, a tool for assessing children's readiness to learn on entry to Primary One.

Ms Robertson spoke to the report, outlining the recommendations at paragraph 2.1. She drew the Committee's attention to the differences between this assessment exercise and that of previous PIPs assessments, which measured skills, knowledge and understanding, pointing out that this new assessment measured emotional health and wellbeing which would also impact on the readiness to learn. She highlighted the main findings, which had been included at paragraph 3.9 of the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Goodfellow, Ms Robertson explained that the company which had delivered the survey used a quintile system, hence the move from deciles to quintiles in the reported data.

Councillor Williamson asked what feedback had been received from Primary One Teachers regarding the collection of this information. Ms Robertson advised that the main tool for assessment had been via observation, but that Councillor Williamson had raised a valid point about the management of workloads for P1 staff. She added that the data collected, once received at school level, would be useful for staff as it could allow for reflection on the quality of transition into Primary One.

Councillor MacKenzie expressed concern at the decline between 2012 and 2016, especially as projects such as Support from the Start could have shown an improvement in these figures. Ms Robertson indicated that she would be looking at this data more closely at school level, and although she was not complacent, it would be important to use the information to find out more about pre-school learning experiences children had accessed. The findings could also be used to track the children's progress in future years, especially if they had had input from Support from the Start in their early years.

In response to a question from Councillor Innes, Ms Robertson clarified that there was no comparable information available from countries where children started school after the age of five. Councillor Innes asked Ms Robertson if she thought early intervention was sometimes too early. Ms Robertson cautioned against allowing one statistic to draw an entire narrative, citing the importance of working with all early learning partners, and reminding the Committee that a myriad of influences could impact on this data.

Councillor MacKenzie pointed out that a range of experts, including Harry Burns, had recommended early intervention. Councillor McAllister agreed, claiming that the benefits of early intervention were profound, adding that other, unconnected factors could have led to the decline shown in paragraph 3.9 bullet point 1.

The Convener thanked Ms Robertson, Sharon Saunders and Steven Wray for their work on this report, which would become an effective way of finding out about early learning programmes accessed by East Lothian's children, prior to their entry to school. She added that it was key to ensure that children were ready for Primary One, and that the data could be used to influence East Lothian's Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.

Decision

The Committee agreed to consider and note the contents of the report.

5. INSIGHT LOCAL BENCHMARKING MEASURES AND GRADED COURSE AWARDS TO 2016

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to inform the Committee of trends in attainment and achievement of S5 and S6 pupils in the Senior Phase in East Lothian using the “Local Benchmarking Measures” and Graded Course awards from 2014 to 2016 from Insight.

Ms Robertson spoke to the report, confirming that it had recorded all of the achievements made at senior phase with East Lothian secondary schools. She drew the Committee’s attention to the bullet points at paragraph 3.5, warning against direct comparison between schools, due to individual school’s autonomy which would preclude these comparisons, although she added that she was not complacent regarding the findings of the report. She explained that, as outlined in paragraph 3.7 of the report, some schools allowed pupils to study fewer subjects in S4, in order to better prepare them for Higher exam courses in S5.

An overview of the main findings of the data had been included in the report at paragraph 2.11. Ms Robertson advised that a report regarding each individual secondary school’s performance would be brought to a future Committee, but pointed out that overall there had been an improvement in East Lothian’s attainment. She concluded by stating that initiatives such as the new Construction and Technology Centre could only further improve options and outcomes at senior phase.

Councillor McKenzie asked what measures had been put in place to support pupils in the lowest 20% attainment group. Ms Robertson invited Mr Raffaelli to respond regarding the strategies that had been put in place in Dunbar Grammar School to support and encourage pupils in this group. Mr Raffaelli highlighted that the data provided in the report could allow all staff, who had been trained to access and parse this information, to identify these pupils individually, prior to S1, via information provided at cluster level from Primary Schools. Once identified, the pupils’ barriers to learning could be identified, good practice could be shared, appropriate targets could be set. The breadth of the Curriculum for Excellence also helped to create a flexible approach to the education of these children, in partnership with parents and carers. He concluded by assuring the Committee that while a good deal of time was spent with this group, this was not to the detriment of those in the top 20% group, or the middle 60% group, within his school.

In response to a further question from Councillor McKenzie, Ms Robertson pointed out that the only maths level SVQF 6 option was Higher Maths, so the slight drop in attainment, mentioned in the Appendix to the report, only referred to those pupils undertaking this course choice and would not reflect wider numeracy attainments.

Councillor McKenzie asked about Advanced Higher PE. Ms Robertson briefed the Committee on an investigation into the provision of PE, adding that the SQA would be focussing on PE as part of their understanding standards. There were concerns at a National Level about the subject. Mr Raffaelli added that Dunbar Grammar had not offered Advanced Higher PE this academic year, but would be offering it next year. He echoed Ms Robertson’s concerns, which were shared with PE staff, regarding the progression from Higher PE to Advanced Higher PE, and the lack of clarity with regards to standards.

In response to a question from the Convener, Ms Robertson asserted that the attainment of each secondary school would be examined on an individual basis. She indicated that the creation of flexible pathways to education were important, and that

allowing pupils to progress to Higher in S5 would reflect a depth of learning. She informed the Committee that ten secondary school teachers were part of a National Curriculum Development Group, which fed back useful information into the Head Teachers Group.

Councillor MacKenzie welcomed the report, which allowed for detailed reflection. He pointed out that statistics were only part of the picture, and that it was just as important that pupils would become well-rounded individuals who enjoyed learning. He added that it would be important to close the gaps, whilst also raising the bar for those who could improve on their achievements.

The Convener thanked the staff in the East Lothian Education Department and the Head of Education for their hard work in raising attainment at senior level, and whilst acknowledging there was no room for complacency, highlighted the improving trend over the last five years.

Decision

The Committee agreed to consider and note the contents of the report.

6. DELIVERING EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) to inform the Committee of the Scottish Government's Education Delivery Plan Delivering Excellence and Equity which sets out the steps the Scottish Government will take to achieve improvements in both excellence and equity through closing the poverty related attainment gap. Also, to inform the Committee of the Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve Excellence and Equity in Education Governance Review, and to seek the Committee's agreement to provide an East Lothian Council response to the Governance Review to help shape future proposals for the governance of Scottish education.

Ms Robertson presented the report in detail, drawing the Committee's attention to the three core aims of the Delivery Plan, which were: 'A Relentless Focus on Closing the Attainment Gap,' 'A Curriculum which delivers for Children and Teachers,' and 'Empowering our Teachers, Head Teachers, Practitioners, Parents, Communities, Children and Young People.'

Councillor Goodfellow asked whether the response from the East Lothian Council Education Department would come back to the Council Committee for Education for approval. Ms Robertson confirmed that the deadline for the response was such that there would be no opportunity for the final response to be approved by Committee. In response to a further question from Councillor Goodfellow, Ms Robertson stated that she was not aware of any feedback from Head Teachers or teaching staff that had led to the creation of this report, or the requirement for changes to the governance of Education in Scotland.

Councillor Currie asked about the possibility of the formation of Education regions and their structure. Ms Robertson responded that there had been no detail provided about Education regions at this time. Councillor Currie asked whether the response, for which the recommendation in the report had been delegated to Ms Robertson, would be the only and final response to the proposals, Ms Robertson confirmed this was the case, due to the short time frame available.

Councillor McAllister asked whether there was capacity within the Education service to implement these changes. Ms Robertson maintained that issues were being taken forward and solutions had been found both locally and nationally, to ensure that workloads remained reasonable for staff in schools.

The Convener asked if there had been feedback from Head Teachers regarding the possibility of additional responsibilities. Ms Robertson pointed out that Head Teachers across East Lothian had very different workloads and day-to-day tasks: some were Head Teachers to more than one school, and others were required to take on class teaching.

In response to a further question from the Convener, Ms Robertson explained that the report from the OECD had allowed for examination and potential reform of any and all levels of Education.

Councillor Goodfellow proposed an amendment to the recommendations, namely that the final response should be presented to a full meeting of East Lothian Council on 28 February 2017, and that the draft response should reflect the following views; that no extra layers of bureaucracy should be introduced into the education system with East Lothian; that there is no clear educational benefit to establishing Education Regions and they should not be imposed on East Lothian; that the local link and accountability between the support and support service provided by East Lothian Council's Education Department and other departments to Head Teachers, School Leaders, Teachers, Parent Councils and Unions should not be broken; and that in light of the "tackling bureaucracy" agenda no additional legal responsibilities should be placed upon East Lothian Head Teachers and other school leaders.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Grant.

Councillor Currie expressed his concerns. He felt that accepting the amendment would mean that the East Lothian response would be brought to a meeting of East Lothian Council after the deadline for the response had passed. He maintained that the inclusion of criticism of new Education regions was premature as no details had been decided, and that to accept the recommendations, as amended, would prejudice the outcome of a planned consultation with other stakeholders.

Councillor McLennan agreed, stating that the amendments could set a precedent and exclude the views of other important stakeholders in East Lothian's response.

Councillor Innes spoke in support of the amendments, claiming that there had been significant changes made to Education across Scotland and that parents and schools should not have to deal with further changes within a short time frame.

Councillor McKenzie added that the recommendations at paragraph 3.4 of the report should be agreed and confirmed he would be supporting his colleagues and voting against the amendment.

The Convener pointed out that the amendments had arisen from concerns over the reduction of levels of bureaucracy. It was clarified that the intent was that East Lothian Council's final response would be brought to the meeting of East Lothian Council in February 2017 for noting.

The Committee then voted on the amendment (i.e. the report recommendations including the additional recommendations, as proposed by Councillor Goodfellow):

For: 7
Against: 6
Abstentions: 1

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) Note the contents of the report;
- (ii) Note that a range of consultation activities will be undertaken to gather the views of key stakeholders;
- (iii) Delegate to the Head of Education, in consultation with the Education Convener, that East Lothian Council will provide a response to the Governance Review as outlined in paragraph 3.10 to help shape future proposals for the governance of Scottish education;
- (iv) that the final response would be presented to a full meeting of East Lothian Council on 28 February 2017 for noting;
- (v) that the draft response should reflect the following views:
 - no extra layers of bureaucracy should be introduced into the education system with East Lothian
 - there is no clear educational benefit to establishing Education Regions and they should not be imposed on East Lothian
 - the local link and accountability between the support and support service provided by East Lothian Council's Education Department and other departments to Head Teachers, School Leaders, Teachers, Parent Councils and Unions should not be broken
 - in light of the "tackling bureaucracy" agenda no additional legal responsibilities should be placed upon East Lothian Head Teachers and other school leaders.

Signed

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Councillor Shamin Akhtar
Convener of the Education Committee