



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

**TUESDAY 11 JUNE 2019
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar (Convener)
Councillor F Dugdale
Councillor A Forrest
Councillor N Gilbert
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor J Henderson
Councillor W Innes
Councillor S Kempson
Councillor K Mackie
Councillor J Williamson
Rev. G Sheridan

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor C Hoy

Council Officials Present:

Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services)
Ms F Robertson, Head of Education
Mr R Parker, Service Manager – Education
Ms P Smith, Principal Officer (Information & Research)
Ms B Skirrow, Principal Officer
Mr N Craik-Collins, Lead Officer – Curriculum & Estate Development
Mr G Clark, Head Teacher, Preston Lodge High School
Mr C Gerrie, Head Teacher, Musselburgh Grammar School
Mr P Reynolds, Head Teacher, Ross High School
Ms C Slowther, Head Teacher, Dunbar Grammar School

Others Present:

Mr S Gilmour-Jack, Class Teacher/EIS Representative

Clerk:

Ms F Currie, Committees Officer

Apologies:

Councillor J Findlay
Councillor P McLennan
Ms E Malcolm

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON 12 MARCH 2019 FOR APPROVAL

The minutes of the Education Committee meeting on 12 March 2019 were approved.

2. EDUCATION SERVICE DIGITAL LEARNING STRATEGY

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) informing the Committee of the preparation and production of a draft Digital Learning Strategy 2019 that will formalise the Council's approaches to driving forward digital learning within and across its schools.

Richard Parker, Service Manager – Education, presented the report outlining the background and purpose of the strategy. He advised Members that a working group had been set up to look at key areas for implementation and had progressed an audit tool to identify the current skills, knowledge and experience of staff and learners. This information would help inform the implementation of the strategy. In addition, Digital Leaders, recently appointed in each school, and the Education Support Officer (Digital Learning) within the South East Improvement Collaborative would help facilitate delivery of the strategy across the county's schools.

In response to questions from Members, Gavin Clark, Head Teacher at Preston Lodge High School, advised that teachers were clearly instructed not to expect pupils to provide their own devices. Chromebooks were being rolled out across schools and the use of school devices was encouraged, particularly when students were working in groups. He added that any concerns that staff had about a lack of equity or potential stigma attached to using school devices had not materialised.

Mr Parker and Fiona Robertson, Head of Education, responded to further questions from Members. They provided further information on funding challenges, assessing the development of skills, connectivity across the school estate, and online security and safeguarding of users.

Councillor Goodfellow welcomed the strategy. He said that digital inclusion was something to which all young people should be entitled and it was important that the Education Service helped pupils to develop the skills necessary to benefit from technology.

The Convener also welcomed the strategy. She highlighted the continuing improvements and good practice being demonstrated across the county's schools and emphasised the importance of additional funding to ensure equity across the school estate.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) Note the work undertaken to date to produce a draft Digital learning Strategy and support ongoing developments to produce a finalised Strategy for implementation across our schools; and
- (ii) Note the finalised Strategy document will be brought to a future meeting for approval.

3. PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2017-2020 EVALUATION

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) providing the Committee with an update on the evaluation of the Parental Engagement Strategy 2017.

Bev Skirrow, Principal Officer, presented the report. She reminded Members that the Strategy had been launched in September 2017 as part of the Council's commitment to improve the quality and extent of parents' involvement in their child's learning. She advised that two surveys had been undertaken in February 2019 to evaluate the views of school staff, parent councils and other parent forums. Overall, the responses were positive and the themes which emerged from the survey would be discussed at future parent council meetings.

Ms Skirrow responded to questions explaining how improvement actions would be identified and included in school improvement plans.

Councillor Forrest welcomed the report and the level of involvement demonstrated by parents, staff and pupils within schools.

Councillor Mackie observed that while many parents were engaged with their child's learning, there were many who were not, and any strategy that could improve this was to be welcomed.

The Convener thanked officers for their report and informed Members that in a recent CoSLA document on parental engagement East Lothian was highlighted as an example of good practice. She looked forward to further improvements in the future.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the report.

4. PUPIL EQUITY FUND

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) providing the Committee with an update on how schools were using Pupil Equity Funding allocated by the Scottish Government to raise attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap.

Ms Robertson presented the report. She advised that grants were made direct to schools to spend on localised work and the amounts distributed varied depending on local needs. She referred Members to Appendix 1 for information on individual schools and explained that the sums were calculated based on the number of pupils entitled to be registered for free school meals.

Ms Robertson responded to questions. She explained that the number of pupils entitled to be registered for free school meals was based on national criteria and she agreed to provide further information to the Members on the methodology. She also outlined some of the innovative approaches used to encourage eligible families to sign up. Ms Robertson outlined the central costs involved in administering the PEF monies and how schools in a local area could pull together to maximise the potential benefits of PEF funding. She advised that the PEF was due to cease at the end of the current parliamentary term and local authorities were awaiting an announcement on future

funding. She also replied to questions on the crossover with Area Partnership funding and Scottish Attainment Fund monies, and the results of the Audit Scotland funding review.

Councillor Kempson welcomed the report and clarification on the role of PEF. She added that this information would be very useful to the Area Partnerships.

Councillor Goodfellow observed that the second part of the report demonstrated the Council's good use of PEF monies. This was a very important part of addressing inequalities within Scottish education system and he hoped that whatever mechanism replaced PEF was able to continue this work and that it would extend beyond S3.

Councillor Innes found the report a useful guide to where PEF monies were going in schools. However, he stated that funding for education should be adequate and continuous rather than on an ad hoc, year-to-year basis.

The Convener agreed that stable and fair funding was essential and she would continue to highlight concerns about inequalities in assessing funding bids. In the meantime, she was pleased to see the work being done with PEF monies across the county's schools.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the report.

5. POSITIVE SCHOOL LEAVER DESTINATIONS 2017/18 AND EAST Lothian COUNCIL'S DEVELOPING THE YOUNG WORKFORCE (DYW) STRATEGY

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) informing the Committee of trends in the initial destinations of pupils who left East Lothian's schools; and updating the Members on recent developments and activities associated with the developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Strategy.

Neil Craik-Collins, Lead Officer – Curriculum & Estate Development, presented the report summarising some of the key findings and outlining the background to how the data was measured. He also drew Members' attention to the partnership working initiatives with Skills Development Scotland and the next steps for increasing the number of school leavers in positive destinations.

Mr Craik-Collins responded to questions providing further information on follow up work, the LEAPS programme, employer-funded further education, Modern Apprenticeships, and whether school leavers in East Lothian are disadvantaged by having no further education college within the county and how this was being addressed.

Councillor Dugdale welcomed the report and said that she had recently attended an event involving S5 pupils and had been impressed by the range of future career opportunities on offer.

The Convener thanked officers for the report and for their continuing efforts to promote as broad a range of opportunities as possible.

Decision

The Committee agreed to consider and note:

- (i) The Positive School leaver Destination data for pupils who left East Lothian schools in 2017/18; and
- (ii) The range of activities to improve post-school destinations and support the Council to deliver its strategic objectives to reduce unemployment and improve the employability of East Lothian's workforce and reduce the attainment gap and raise attainment and achievement of our children and young people.

6. INSIGHT NATIONAL BENCHMARKING MEASURES TO 2018

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) informing the Committee of trends in attainment and achievement of school leavers in East Lothian using the National Benchmarking Measures from Insight.

Ms Robertson presented the report summarising the key performance statistics in relation to three National Benchmarking Measures: improving attainment in literacy and numeracy; improving attainment for all; and tackling disadvantage. She advised Members that attainment in East Lothian had improved overall over the five year period to 2017/18 but that further improvement could still be made, particularly in Literacy and Numeracy at SCQF Levels 5 and 6 and in relation to closing the attainment gap.

In response to questions, Paul Reynolds, Colin Gerrie and Claire Slowther, the Head Teachers from Ross High School, Musselburgh Grammar School and Dunbar Grammar School, provided some context to the results in their schools. They also emphasised the importance of accurate information and the ability to track pupils' progress and put in place targeted support for their learning. They indicated that PEF monies were being used to target young people from the most deprived backgrounds in an effort to narrow the attainment gap. However, it was important to note that the lowest performing 20% did not always represent the most deprived children.

Ms Robertson also responded to questions outlining the some of the intervention strategies being used to break down barriers to learning. She gave an example of teaching staff working alongside children's services to raise the attainment of vulnerable children in the longer term. Ms Robertson also provided examples of schools sharing information and expertise to improve pupil's performance and she reiterated to importance of accurate data to develop evidence-based strategies.

The Convener welcomed the report which showed the improvements made since last year and identified where further work was required. She also thanked the Head Teachers present for sharing their insights with the Committee.

Decision

The Committee agreed to consider and note the progress and areas for improvement in education attainment in the Senior Phase in East Lothian secondary schools.

7. SOUTH EAST IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) providing the Committee with an update on progress made towards taking

forward the priority areas for improvement set out within the South East Improvement Collaborative (SEIC) Improvement Plan.

Ms Robertson presented the report outlining the background to the SEIC, the Phase 2 Plan and its identified themes and workstreams. She advised Members that a number of networks had been established to encourage collaboration and that Scottish Government funding was being used to recruit to the posts required to support the delivery of the workstreams. To date, the SEIC had successfully recruited to 10 of the 16 identified posts. She also drew Members attention to the planned improvement priorities set out in the report and the intention to submit a revised Plan to the Scottish Government in June 2019.

Ms Robertson responded to questions. She outlined the support provided by Education Scotland for the work of the SEIC including travel and subsistence costs for officers from East Lothian's Education Service, and to the difficulties in recruiting staff on a temporary basis to support the work of the SEIC. She also provided further details of the independent review of specialist provision and policies for children with additional support needs.

The Convener welcomed the update and reiterated the importance of ensuring that staff involvement in the SEIC did not impact negatively but instead helped to deliver improvements for East Lothian's schools.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note:

- (i) The priority areas for improvement being taken forward in partnership with members of the South East Improvement Collaborative; and
- (ii) The progress made towards improving professional collaboration and school empowerment across the South East Improvement Collaborative.

8. FLEXI-SCHOOLING

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) informing the Committee of the national guidance on flexi-schooling as outlined in the Scottish Government Home Education Guidance and providing an overview of flexi-schooling within East Lothian.

Ms Robertson presented the report summarising the background to the flexi-schooling guidance and policy. She informed Members that East Lothian received very few flexi-schooling requests and the reasons for each were varied. She added that of six requests received in session 2018/19 one had been granted on a temporary basis.

Ms Robertson responded to questions. She explained the duties placed on the Council regarding home-schooled pupils but that these only related to pupils who had previously attended school in East Lothian. She said that the Council had no locus to intervene in the case of children whose families had moved into the county from elsewhere and had not enrolled their children in a local school. She explained the procedure for considering flexi-schooling applications and that these were decided on a case by case basis. She emphasised the importance of identifying what was best for each child and ensuring that the child's voice was part of any application.

Ms Robertson also outlined the arrangements for monitoring home-schooled children within the county and the Education Service’s approach to ensuring the wellbeing of these children. She acknowledged that there were gaps in the guidance and she continued to raise this issue at Scottish Government level.

Councillor Innes observed that ‘one size fits all’ was not the right approach and the Council needed to be flexible enough to accommodate reasonable differences within the education system. However, it also needed to ensure that the quality of education did not suffer and that granting a request was in the best interests of the child.

Councillor Gilbert echoed these remarks. He said that the perception from outside was that East Lothian was shut off to the idea of flexi-schooling and perhaps the Council needed to be more open to this approach.

Councillor Kempson welcomed the report and was glad to see that the child was the central focus of any application and that all the circumstances were taken into account when considering an application.

Councillor Mackie expressed concern that a child could move into the county, not be enrolled at school and the Council had no locus to intervene. She encouraged Ms Robertson to continue to pursue this issue at Scottish Government level.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- (i) Note the contents of the report; and
- (ii) Note that the Education Service intends to review the East Lothian guidelines ‘Children Educated at Home – guidance for education service staff’ as part of the ongoing review of all education policies and guidance. An Integrated Impact assessment will be carried out when reviewing the guidelines.

9. HEAD TEACHER APPOINTMENTS

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

The Convener offered her congratulations to the successful candidates.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the Head Teacher appointments.

Signed
Councillor Shamin Akhtar
Convener of the Education Committee