



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

**TUESDAY 17 NOVEMBER 2020
VIA VIDEO CONFERENCING FACILITIES**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar (Convener)
Councillor F Dugdale
Councillor J Findlay
Councillor A Forrest
Councillor N Gilbert
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor J Henderson
Councillor C Hoy
Councillor W Innes
Councillor S Kempson
Councillor P McLennan
Councillor J Williamson

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor F O'Donnell

Council Officials Present:

Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services)
Ms L Brown, Head of Education and Children's Services
Ms J Tait, Chief Operating Officer, Children's Services
Dr L Binnie, Principal Educational Psychologist
Mr S Cooper, Team Manager, Communications
Mr N Craik-Collins, Education Service Manager
Ms K Haspolat, Quality Improvement Officer
Mr D Henderson, Finance Manager - Service Accounting
Ms J Holland, Senior Solicitor
Ms P Homer, Lead Officer -Early Years and Childcare
Ms C McGarr, Education Support Officer
Mr R Parker, Service Manager – Education (Strategy and Operations)
Ms L Rodger, Head Teacher, North Berwick High School
Ms P Smith, Principal Officer (Information and Research)
Mr N Trussler, Quality Improvement Officer

Clerk:

Ms J Totney, Team Manager – Democratic and Licensing

Apologies:

Miss G Gillan, EIS
Rev G Sheridan

Declarations of Interest:

None

Prior to the commencement of business, the Clerk advised that the meeting was being held remotely, in accordance with the Scottish Government's guidance on physical distancing; that the meeting would be recorded and live streamed; and that it would be made available via the Council's website as a webcast, in order to allow public access to the democratic process in East Lothian. She stated that the Council is the data controller under the Data Protection Act 2018; that data collected as part of the recording would be retained in accordance with the Council's policy on record retention; and that the webcast of the meeting would be publicly available for up to six months from the date of the meeting.

The Clerk recorded attendance of Committee Members by roll call.

Councillor Akhtar, Convener of the Education Committee, opened the meeting by acknowledging the challenges faced by the Education Service during the Covid-19 pandemic and expressed her grateful thanks to all staff who are supporting schools. The Convener also extended her congratulations to Ms Brown on being appointed to the post of Head of Education and Children's Services.

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON 25 JUNE 2020 FOR APPROVAL

The minutes of the Education Committee meeting held on 25 June 2020 were approved.

2. COVID-19 – UPDATE ON THE ONGOING OPERATION OF SCHOOLS AND IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SESSION 2020/2021

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) providing the Committee with an update on the reopening of schools for session 2020/2021 and the ongoing mitigations in place to ensure the health and safety of all children, young people and staff; the systems and processes in place for dealing with positive COVID-19 cases in schools and new guidance issued by the Scottish Government on 30 October 2020; and the impact of the pandemic on the wider Education Service.

The Head of Education and Children's Services, Lesley Brown, presented the report and highlighted the key points which included the re-opening of schools, the updated and improved approaches to blended learning, resource implications, and next steps.

Before inviting questions, the Convener proposed that an additional recommendation be added to the report to read: "That the Committee commends the efforts made by the Education Service, all school staff, and schools in response to the Covid-19 pandemic", which was seconded by Councillor Williamson.

Ms Brown replied to questions from Councillors Kempson, Bruce and Gilbert regarding self-isolation, home schooling, contact tracing and school cleaning. She reported that generally a small number of children have had to self-isolate, and that blended or paper-based learning is put in place for pupils who are self-isolating. Dr Lynne Binnie

added that around 300 pupils had been asked to self-isolate during the second term but that this had not extended to whole classes. Ms Brown explained the risk assessment processes used to ensure school cleanliness and safety, and advised that the Education Service is frequently commended by the NHS Health promotion team.

Answering further questions from Members, Ms Brown outlined the work that is being done in conjunction with Head Teachers to focus on pupils' health and wellbeing and Dr Binnie outlined the Resilience programme and the Mental Health Strategy programme that are being rolled out across all schools, advising that additional targeted support and resources are prioritised for children showing signs of distress. Ms Brown reported that Google Classroom has been extremely successful during Covid-19 lockdown and that the Education Service could quickly revert to blending learning if required. She provided some examples and assurances regarding the work that is being done with the Quality Improvement Team in relation to improvement plans and confirmed that raising attainment and outcomes continue to be a priority.

In response to Councillor McLennan, Ms Brown provided information on pupil and teacher absence; the practice of children being outside at lunchtimes, especially given the impending winter weather; and actions that are being taken to enable pupils to stay inside school buildings at lunchtimes. Councillor McLennan indicated that he would discuss protocols for school lunchtimes off-line with Ms Brown.

Councillor Goodfellow enquired about employment support for pupils who would be leaving school at Christmas or at the end of the current school session. Neil Craik-Collins, Education Service Manager, explained the monitoring and support work that is being done by East Lothian Works in respect of the 55 pupils who are winter leavers; reported that a Workforce of the Future policy is being developed; and advised on the comprehensive partnership working that is ongoing to ensure that support is available for each school leaver. Councillor Goodfellow then asked about the purchase and distribution of additional Chrome Books in schools and about additional tutoring being made available for pupils who had perhaps struggled with remote learning during lockdown. Ms Karen Haspolat, Quality Improvement Officer, provided the information on the number of devices that had already been issued and those that are currently on order. Ms Brown then explained that supplementary one-to-one tuition in core subjects would be available to a small number of pupils in the six secondary schools, and that this tutoring project is being supported by third sector organisations and Queen Margaret University.

The Convener asked if there had been any feedback or confirmation of any funding to cover Covid-19 related costs for Education. Mr D Henderson, Finance Manager – Service Accounting, confirmed that East Lothian Council has received a share of nationally allocated funding in respect of additional teachers and safe return to school. He provided Members with the amounts that had been received for 2020/21 and the amounts that would be paid in 2021/22 and advised that these figures are reflected in the Education and Children's Services financial position. Mr Henderson added that there would be a further allocation of funds in respect of safe return to school, and that an evidence based return would be required to be submitted in this regard.

Councillor Goodfellow extended his thanks and appreciation to school staff and to colleagues in IT for their preparedness to deliver remote blended learning. These comments were echoed by Councillor Dugdale, in particular in relation to the safe return to schools. Councillor McLennan praised the leadership that had been provided across the whole of the education spectrum. Councillor Innes welcomed the very positive report and endorsed the strategies that had been put in place. He wished to express special thanks to the support provided by cleaning staff in schools.

The Convener thanked all parties and colleagues for their massive efforts to support the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Education Service.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. note the steps being taken by the Education Service and schools in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, including the ongoing mitigations in place to ensure the health and safety of all children, young people and staff.
- ii. note the systems and processes in place for dealing with positive COVID-19 cases in schools.
- iii. note the impact of the pandemic on the wider Education Service.
- iv. commend the efforts made by the Education Service and schools in response to the Covid-19 pandemic

3. EDUCATION SERVICE PROGRESS REPORT AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2020/21

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) seeking the Committee's approval of the Education Service progress report on key improvement priorities achieved for session 2019/20 and identification of key improvement priorities planned for session 2020/21.

Ms Brown summarised the content and format of the report, pointing out that the majority of the full suite of data was for the session to 2018/19 and that the Scottish Government had stated that data should not be gathered for 2019/20 due to the interruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor McLennan welcomed the report and commented on the impact of issues such as health, housing, unemployment and the causes of poverty in relation to the attainment gap, and enquired about the multi-agency, partnership, and broader approaches that were being considered when addressing issues and formulating policy. Ms Brown explained that the data was being examined in conjunction with schools and that the Attainment Adviser from Education Scotland has a lot of expertise in closing poverty related attainment gaps. Mr Nick Trussler, Quality Improvement Officer, added that the Attainment Adviser is working with Head Teachers and with Associated school groups to identify the causes of attainment gaps in each area and that there would be one-to-one engagement with individual schools as required. Ms Brown stressed that the approach to closing the attainment gap was broader than just input from the Education Service and that the transformation and integration of the Council's Education and Children's Services is a critical step forward. She invited Judith Tait, Chief Operating Officer - Children's Services, to make comment. Due to connectivity issues, it was agreed that Ms Tait would revert to Councillor McLennan after the meeting. In response to a further question from Councillor McLennan about the links between local employers and schools, Mr Neil Craik-Collins, Education Service Manager, commented on the current initiatives taking place which include the introduction of Developing the Young Workforce School Co-ordinators in Secondary schools, close working with the Council's Economic Development Unit and East Lothian Works, foundation apprenticeship schemes, and the Employability Recovery

Plan which makes connections with businesses and seeks to secure employment opportunities.

Councillor Hoy thanked officers for their work in tackling the poverty related attainment gap. He noted the year-on-year increase in the gap for S3 fourth level data in relation to literacy and numeracy and asked if there was any reason for this, or evidence that the period of lockdown could widen the attainment gap next year. Ms Brown advised that the Education Service are identifying the areas for improvement and focus and that there is no hard evidence that the lockdown would have a detrimental impact on next year's data; however, Head Teachers and school staff are very alert to potential individual cases. She reminded Members that the tutoring project was one initiative which had been implemented for any pupils who required additional support. Mr Trussler provided further information of the setting out of key outcomes, national practice, and stated that there are four common attainment gap themes across all school groups which were the priority for improvement in conjunction with Education Scotland. Ms Brown advised that she would revert to Councillor Hoy with more specific details about the increase in the attainment gap to 2018/19, in relation to literacy and numeracy.

In response to questions from Councillors Dugdale, Forrest, and McLennan, Ms Brown outlined the considerable work that is underway with Children's Services, reported that there had been remote engagement recently with young people regarding their experience of the Education and wider services, that work is being done to improve attendance, there is the ability to focus on specific schools with support from Education Scotland, and that the Improvement Plans model was based on Associated school groups rather than on school clusters. She added that the future intention is to have improvement meetings with multi-agency representatives that would shift away from being officer lead.

The Convener welcomed the strategy paper and the next steps that had been set out to raise attainment, stressed the importance of working with families and young children, and thanked Officers for their thorough examination of the attainment data.

Decision

Following a roll call vote the Committee unanimously agreed to:

- i. note the overall positive progress made by the Education Service in delivery on the Council's Plan and the priorities within the National Improvement Framework.
- ii. note the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the progress of the 2019/20 priorities and the steps being taken to secure continuous improvement in session 2020/21.
- iii. approve the Progress Report and Improvement Plan (Appendix 1)
- iv. note that this Progress Report and Improvement Plan will be submitted to the Scottish Government in line with the Local Authority's statutory duty pending Committee approval.

4. INSPECTION OF NORTH BERWICK HIGH SCHOOL BY EDUCATION SCOTLAND

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) on the inspection of North Berwick High School by Education Scotland.

Mr Trussler introduced the report and referred to the summary of findings and key strengths. He congratulated the school on its Inspection report, particularly the leadership and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Ms Lauren Rodger, Head Teacher, reported that she was delighted with the report, and expanded on the findings which included very positive feedback on inclusiveness, a sense of belonging, the quality of learning and teaching, listening to young people, meeting individual learners' needs, and the focus on wellbeing. She added that North Berwick High School would feature in Education Scotland's National Attainment report as an exemplar of good practice.

Councillor Findlay, local Ward Member, extended his thanks to Ms Rodger and her team on the excellent inspection report, and asked about the impact from Covid-19 on vocational pathways and the matter that had been raised in the inspection report in relation to bullying. Ms Brown advised that there had been no work experience placements but that East Lothian Works and Edinburgh College were continuing to look at suitable support and opportunities. Ms Rodger stated that the anti-bullying findings were disappointing and that the school guidance team was now leading on initiatives to address this and that pupils have been consulted regarding solutions.

Councillor Goodfellow, local Ward Member, commented that the inspection report is a true reflection of the school's excellence. He encouraged that the good practice be widely shared.

Councillor Henderson, local Ward Member, thanked the Head Teacher and all involved, and encouraged all of the East Lothian Secondary Schools to be equally as high performing.

The Convener thanked Ms Rodger for her commitment and dedication and for inspiring and motivating the team and pupils at North Berwick High School.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. note the content of the Education Scotland report (Appendix 1) and note the Summarised Inspection Finds (Appendix 2) dated 23 June 2020.
- ii. congratulate the Head Teacher and staff on the good practice identified in the Education Scotland report published on 23 June 2020.
- iii. acknowledge that, as a result of the inspection findings, Education Scotland are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. East Lothian Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

5. NEW POLICY AND ACCOMPANYING ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY (2020-2023): INCLUDED, ENGAGED & INVOLVED: INCLUSION, EQUALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) seeking approval of the new policy and updated accessibility strategy: “Included, Engaged & Involved: Inclusion, Equality and Accessibility for All” and to note that the Council’s updated accessibility strategy (2020-2023) now sits within a new inclusion policy rather than as a separate document.

Ms Clare McGarr, Education Support Officer, presented the report and summarised the background information and recommendations. She advised that the action plan now involves parents more fully, includes forums for young people, and provides a mentoring programme for parents.

The Convener commented that this is an important, positive strategy which underpins the creation of an inclusive culture in schools and addresses barriers faced by children and young people.

Decision

Following a roll call vote, the Committee unanimously agreed to:

- i. approve the draft policy: ‘Included, Engaged & Involved: Inclusion, Equality and Accessibility for All’ (Appendix 1).
- ii. approve the accompanying draft accessibility strategy (2020-2023) (Appendix 2).
- iii. note the amalgamation of the accessibility strategy with the new inclusion policy.

6. POLICY: RESPECT FOR ALL: PROMOTING POSITIVE AND RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS IN OUR SCHOOLS

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) seeking approval of the updated anti-bullying policy: “Respect for All: Promoting Positive and Respectful Relationships in our Schools”

Ms McGarr summarised the report and advised Members that focus groups and consultations had now been carried out.

In response to Councillor Hoy, Ms McGarr undertook to revert with data for LGBT bullying cases. Councillor Hoy stated that two schools in East Lothian have attained the LGBT Bronze Charter and encouraged a greater update of this across all local authorities and schools.

Councillor Innes stated that this is an important report given that bullying can have a profound effect on pupils. He stressed the need to instil a culture of respect across the whole school portfolio.

The Convener stated that it is hugely important that there is a clear and consistent message across all schools to engage with the anti-bullying policy.

Decision

Following a roll call vote, the Committee unanimously agreed to:

- i. approve the updated anti-bullying policy: Respect for All: Promoting Positive and Respectful Relationships in our Schools (Appendix 1).
- ii. note specifically the guiding principles, legislative context, and procedures for recording bullying incidents.

7. UPDATE ON EXPANSION OF EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE TO 1140 HOURS

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) providing a further update on the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of 1140 hours of early learning and childcare in East Lothian, and on the implications of the flexible use of 1140 hours revenue funding for COVID-19 related expenses on the programme.

Ms Brown outlined the purpose of the report and drew Members' attention to the background information, progress update, and financial funding update. She added that East Lothian Council remain committed to fully delivering 1140 hours, are fully engaged with the Scottish Government, and that the Education Service will provide a further update to the Education committee in due course.

In response to Councillor McLennan, Ms Brown advised that an update briefing could be arranged for Members once the revised statutory implementation date is known. She advised that the Education Service was putting plans in place now to be ready to deliver once the implementation date is announced.

Ms Pauline Homer, Lead Officer – Early Years and Childcare, described the work that has taken place with child minders, playgroups and nurseries and confirmed that an approach is currently in place to enable parents to continue in work and education.

Councillor Dugdale enquired about the funding situation to which Ms Brown advised that the uncommitted 1140hrs funds for the current year had been redirected to other services but that revenue and capital grant funding was expected in the new financial year. Ms Brown informed Members that the Education Service is working closely with Scottish Government to understand the expectations in relation to meeting the statutory implementation date.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. note this further update on progress with reinstating those settings previously offering 1140 hours as part of the implementation of the expansion plan.
- ii. note the financial implications arising from the flexible use of the 1140 hours revenue funding for COVID-19 related expenses on the programme.
- iii. note that, as previously agreed, the Council will be unable to introduce any further 1140 hours settings beyond those already mentioned in this report, in financial year 2020/2021. All future developments will be closely monitored, to ensure no detrimental impact on the delivery of the plan which was previously costed and achievable within the funding provided by the Scottish Government.

8. 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.

Mr Parker, Service Manager – Education (Strategy and Operations), presented the report and advised Members that Mr Buchanan would take up post on 7 December 2020.

The Convener thanked all those who had been involved in the selection panels, which had been held remotely, and passed on her congratulations to those who had been appointed to Head Teacher positions.

Decision

The committee noted the Head Teacher appointments.

9. REVISION TO SCHOOL SESSION DATES 2020/21

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) seeking approval to make a change to the dates for the current school session 2020/21 to align the dates for the festive period closure with the neighbouring authorities of City of Edinburgh Council and Midlothian Council, and seeking that Members note that the revision of dates also helps address any potential issues that may arise in relation to possible positive COVID-19 cases and the requirement to carry out contact tracing amongst pupils and staff once schools have closed.

Mr Parker presented the report and explained the background to the change in the school session dates.

In response to Councillor Henderson, he explained that a few representatives from Parent Councils were of the view that the revision to the school dates did not provide enough notice for working parents to make alternative childcare arrangements.

Answering a question from Councillor Williamson, Mr Parker confirmed that work has already started on setting the school session dates for 2022/23 and that where possible, these would be aligned across East Lothian, Midlothian and the City of Edinburgh Councils.

Decision

Following a roll call vote, the Committee unanimously agreed to:

- i. approve the change to the school session dates for the festive break in the current school session, 2020/21, with the last day of this term being brought forward by one day to Tuesday 22nd December 2020 and for the start of the new term to be brought forward by one day to Wednesday 6th January 2021. This aligns East Lothian dates with those of our neighbouring authorities, City of Edinburgh Council and Midlothian Council.

Signed

Councillor Shamin Akhtar
Convener of the Education Committee