

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of meeting, held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on Thursday 22 August 2024.

Present:

Councillor Andrew Anderson (Chair)	Councillor Gordon Wallace
Councillor Tony Buchanan	Ms Fiona Gilchrist
Councillor Kate Campbell	Ms Dorothy Graham
Councillor Owen O'Donnell (Leader)	Mr Des Morris
Councillor Katie Pragnell (Vice Chair)	Ms Evelyn Yedd*
Councillor Colm Merrick	

Councillor Anderson in the Chair

(*) indicates remote attendance

Attending:

Mark Ratter, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); Joe McCaig, Head of Education Services (Provision); Siobhan McColgan, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Graeme Hay, Senior Manager Leading Change (Education); Tracy Morton, Senior Manager (Developing People) and Jennifer Graham, Democratic Services Officer.

Apology:

Councillor Danny Devlin.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

918. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

SQA VERBAL UPDATE

919. Councillor Anderson invited the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) to give an overview of examination results in East Renfrewshire Schools in 2024. Once again, the examination result performance of the pupils had been outstanding.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) clarified that the verbal update given at this meeting would be followed up by a more detailed analysis at a later date. She explained that pupils had performed very well across all key measures, with record levels of performance in S5, and a return to full assessment across Nat 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses. She added that S4 learners in 2023/24 were the cohort who did

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not finish P7 and missed a significant part of S1 due to restrictions during the Pandemic, so it was testament to their dedication and resilience that their achievements could be recognised today. Thereafter, she presented some highlights from the examination results.

In S4, 96% of pupils achieved 5 or more qualifications at Nat 4 or better, similar to the results last year. At Nat 5 level, 77% of pupils achieved 5 or more awards, this was similar to 2019, when full course assessments had last taken place. At Mearns Castle High School, pupils achieved their second highest proportion of 5 or more Nat 5 passes in S4, and the quality of awards across East Renfrewshire continued to rise with 61% of Nat 5 qualifications awarded at A Grade, an increase of 7% on pre-pandemic levels.

In S5, 84% of pupils obtained 1 or more Higher, 71% obtained 3 or more Highers and 52% achieved 5 or more Highers, the authority's best ever result at S5. There was an increase in the proportion of S5 pupils in St. Luke's and St. Ninian's High Schools achieving 3 or more and 5 or more Higher passes compared to last year. Pupils in Woodfarm and Williamwood High Schools achieved their best ever results at S5 with an increase of 5% and 10% respectively achieving 5 or more Highers. 27% of Barrhead High School learners had achieved 5 or more Higher passes, a remarkable 7% increase on the last year of full course assessment in 2019 and the second highest result.

In 2024, there was an increase in the proportion of S5 boys gaining 5 or more Highers at 45%, and 50% of all S5 pupils achieved a Higher at A Grade.

Eastwood High School saw an increase in S6 results from the previous year, and at Advanced Higher stage, performance across the authority remained strong at 42%. The performance figures demonstrated that the Education Department continued to aim higher and deliver for all pupils across the authority.

In conclusion, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) thanked all pupils, parents and staff for their vital contribution to the achievements of all of our young people.

Having heard Councillor Anderson, supported by members of the committee, congratulate staff, pupils and parents for their excellent achievements, the committee agreed to note the report and comments made.

DRAFT LITERACY AND ENGLISH STRATEGY 2024-27

920. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education providing an update on the evaluation undertaken of the Education Department's previous literacy strategy, and seeking approval of a refreshed Literacy and English Strategy 2024-27.

The report explained that the strategy identified six key aims over a 3 year period and provided a clear set of actions for the department. Amongst other things, the Strategy aimed to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities in literacy development; the employability skills of pupils, school leavers and adults; and the quality of teaching and learning. A review of the impact of the literacy strategy had been delayed due to the global pandemic but had taken place during the 2023/24 session. The review team identified strengths, areas for improvement and recommended that a refreshed strategy be agreed and implemented to drive the improvements which included the quality of learning, teaching and assessment in literacy and English; the development of real-life skills of pupils, school leavers and adults; and teacher confidence and competence in teaching literacy and English.

In conclusion, the report highlighted that the impact of Covid on literacy and English outcomes for children living in poverty was significant and required a continued focus on tackling the impact of this in relation to attainment with careful and considered use of Strategic and Pupil Equity Funding.

In response to questions, the Heads of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) and (Equality and Equity) advised that meetings between principal teachers of English from all secondary schools took place regularly to compare approaches to teaching; confirmed that there was a focus on professional learning which included support for pupils with Additional Support Needs and also linked closely to bilingual work; and stated that work was ongoing with health visitors as part of the Integrated Children's Services Plan to target literacy development from a young age. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) advised that she would include a spotlight session on literacy with a particular focus on equity at a future Education Committee meeting and added that, although critical thinking was not referenced specifically in the strategy as it was inferred through the holistic way in which children were taught, this could be included to provide additional clarity.

The committee agreed:-

- (a) to note the continued progress of the delivery of literacy as outlined in the report;
- (b) that a spotlight session on literacy, with a particular focus on equity, would be provided at a future Education Committee meeting for consideration; and
- (c) to approve the new draft Literacy and English Strategy for 2024-27 and associated comments.

STANDARD CIRCULAR 57: CHILD PROTECTION

921. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval of the revised Standard Circular 57: Child Protection which provided guidance on child protection in East Renfrewshire Early Learning and Childcare settings and schools.

The report explained that The Scottish Government had revised guidelines on children protection guidance in 2023 to reflect the changed and changing landscape in this field and had provided a framework for local authorities and other agencies. The updated circular reflected these changes; took into account East Renfrewshire Council's Child Protection Guidance which was also being updated; and made reference to current legislation such as the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) and Scotland's Promise.

Although much of the circular's content remained the same, updates included reference to the importance of the child's voice; ensuring links were made to whole family wellbeing; and ensuring that children's rights were embedded in the document, amongst other things. It also highlighted close partnership working with parents/carers and other organisations including Social Work, Health and Police Scotland.

In response to questions, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) advised that management of bullying incidents was included in a separate Standard Circular, and confirmed that the professional learning presentation which had been developed to accompany the circular had been delivered to all staff during the August in-service day. She provided further information on the role of Child Protection Co-ordinators in schools and

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referred to the importance of regular meetings, collaboration and partnership working when dealing with issues relating to child protection.

The committee agreed:-

- (a) to approve the revised Standard Circular 57: Child Protection; and
- (b) that the Director of Education should take appropriate steps to ensure its implementation in all schools and early learning and childcare settings; and
- (c) otherwise, to note the comments made.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT END-YEAR REPORT 2023-24

922. The Committee considered a report by the Director of Education advising of the end-year report on the performance of the Education Department throughout 2023/24. Detailed figures containing the End of Year Performance Data were attached to the report as an Appendix.

It was highlighted that the report related to the 2023/24 organisational year, not the academic year, and as such many of the indicators were linked to the 2022/23 session as the data for 2023/24 was not available at the time of completion. The report summarised the performance of the Education Department throughout 2023/24, focussing on the department's contribution towards the Council-wide Outcome Delivery Plan (ODP) and set out the wide-ranging work undertaken across the department, schools and early learning and childcare centres in seeking to achieve the vision of *Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences*. The report also outlined the intended next steps, detailed through the Local Improvement Plan and building on the strong performance throughout 2023/24, to continue to achieve the best outcomes for all learners and work towards closing the attainment gap between our most and least disadvantaged children and young people.

The Senior Manager Leading Change (Education) referred to key highlights in the report including an increase in the proportion of pupils leaving to a positive destination; continued high performance across a number of indicators; opening of the new Neilston campus; and continued support for families through Adult Learning programmes.

In response to questions, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) confirmed that, although the number of exclusions had increased during the reporting year, East Renfrewshire's exclusion figures remained the lowest in Scotland and mainly related to pupil to pupil incidents. She advised that a working group on Violence to Staff had been established to consider how to further support both staff and pupils. This include ensuring that staff are being supported and schools are supported to reflect on any learning following an incident which could mitigate future incidents. Mr Morris confirmed that he was part of the working group and had found the meetings to be extremely productive and was pleased with the actions taken by the Education Department.

Having heard the Director of Education confirm that a summary of the Education Department's approach to the recent national guidance on behaviour in schools would be provided at a future date, the committee noted the report and comments made.

CHAIR