

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

EDUCATION SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTE of MEETING of the EDUCATION SUB-COMMITTEE held in Council Chamber and via Microsoft Teams on Thursday, 10 November 2022 at 10:00am

Present: - Councillors L. Douglas (Chair), J. Greenwell, C. Hamilton, A. Orr, N. Richards, E. Robson, S. Scott, F. Sinclair; A. Hood, M. Docherty (Religious Representatives); N. York, C. Clements, (Teacher Representatives); B. Birchall, G. Scott (Pupil Representatives),
Apologies:- Councillor A. Smart.
In Attendance: - Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, Equity and Inclusion Lead Officer, Senior Lead Officers – Education (C. Brown and C. Robertson), Clerk to the Council, Trainee Democratic Services Officer.

1. **ORDER OF BUSINESS**

The Chair varied the order of business as shown on the agenda and the Minute reflects the order in which the items were considered at the meeting.

2. **WELCOME**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, which included members of the Sub-Committee and those watching via the Live Stream, and outlined how the meeting would be conducted.

3. **EDUCATION BACKGROUND BRIEFING**

The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning gave a presentation covering the following areas:

- Fulfilling our potential
- Priorities
- Education provision
- Organisational structure
- Legislation
- Policies and framework and measures
- SBC response to national agenda

The Chair thanked the Director for the presentation and praised the hard work of the teams in Education. In response to a question regarding digital transformation and the impact this had had so far on closing the Attainment Gap, the Director advised that, although there was as yet no data driven explicit link, the rollout of digital learning had had a positive impact on engagement and skill levels and had provided a level playing field for all learners. It was noted that where there were identified issues with Wi-Fi connectivity in schools, work was currently underway to address this. Any specific issues with wi-fi, pupils leaving iPads at home or not charging them, needed to be reported to the Head teacher and the Director.

DECISION

NOTED the update

4. **ATTAINMENT RESULTS 2021/22**

- 4.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, the purpose of which was to inform the Education Sub Committee of the progress schools were making in the Broad General Education for P1 to P7 and Senior Phase S4–6 Scottish Qualifications Examinations for session 2021-22. The report explained that the 2020/21 pandemic had contributed to a reduction in the number of primary pupils achieving the expected levels in literacy and numeracy; however pupils in the Scottish Borders were achieving around

the national average. Data from 2021/22 showed an increase of between 1.4 and 2.3 percentage points on the previous year had been achieved in all elements of P1, P4, P7 literacy and numeracy.

- 4.2 For the Senior Phase, pupils had sat 13,000 exams across the Borders in May 2022, which remained in line with the previous years. Overall pass rates for S4-6 learners also remained in line with 2019. Of the 1318 appeals submitted, 366 had resulted in upgrades and 1 downgrade. This year, entries onto Foundation Apprenticeship courses were the highest ever for Borders young people. Scottish Borders remained in line with other comparators with 95.49% of young people achieving a positive and sustained destination for session 2020-21. A number of next steps for both the Education Service and Schools were listed.
- 4.3 In response to a number of questions, it was confirmed that with regard to adult learners, there was some family learning in Primary/High Schools which linked into adult literacy and numeracy. Some adult learners did attend schools and a specific response on this would be sought from the Community Learning and Development team. In terms of results trends, a close eye was kept on these to see what changes/interventions were required. However, teachers were striving to support all young people to reach their potential no matter what that level was, whether academic or vocational.

DECISION

AGREED to note progress that schools had made in maintaining standards of attainment in the Broad General Education and Senior Phase in terms of attainment and the identified areas for improvement since the pandemic.

5. **STANDARDS AND QUALITY REPORT 2021/22 AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2022/23**
There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, the purpose of which was to inform the Education Sub Committee of the progress made by the Education Service and schools during 2021-22 and to note the improvement priorities for session 2022-23. The 2021/22 Standards and Quality Report provided a high level summary of the performance of schools in line with the Education Service Improvement Plan and acknowledged the ongoing challenges faced by schools as a result of COVID-19. It also highlighted a number of successes and achievements across all sectors. The Improvement Plan provided a statement of objectives for academic session 2022-23 (Appendix B). This Plan had a strong focus on raising attainment for all and accelerating progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap. There were 3 key aims: everyone was attaining, everyone was achieving and everyone was having a good experience. The inclusion of Inspire Learning as a key driver for improvement in schools was noted, along with the #oneteam approach being used to drive attainment. While it was a statutory duty to submit the Improvement Plan to Scottish Government, no feedback had been received on this to date, although the Plan was shared with the local team. In response to questions, it was advised that for those pupils – including refugees – where English was not their first language, good results had been achieved. With regard to new guidance issued to Head Teachers on Inclusion, it was explained that this related to the practical application of the existing policy, and was in response to national concern regarding distress in children, likely as a result of Covid and the changes to the delivery of schooling over the previous two years. The importance of providing a hybrid model of reliable digital and face to face learning was discussed. The rural location of pupils and the availability of courses posed challenges in accessing a broad range of subjects. Digital learning helped pupils to access courses provided at other schools while in-person lessons were still needed for some subjects. The difficulty in recruiting teachers for maths/physics was a national issue and the Department was taking positive steps to “grow our own” with the University of the Highlands and Islands.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the ‘Standards & Quality Report 2021-22’ and the ‘Education Improvement Plan 2022-23’.

6. **EQUITY STRATEGY, CLOSING THE GAP**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, the purpose of which was to inform the Education Sub Committee of the development of the Education Equity Strategy 2021 - 2026. The Education Equity Strategy was developed in session 2021-22 with the vision of increasing excellence, accelerating progress and embedding equity in schools to reduce the poverty related attainment gap and improve outcomes for care experienced children and young people. The Strategy set out the short, medium and long term outcomes and roles and responsibilities of education staff and partners to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty. Following the refresh of the Scottish Attainment Challenge in March 2022, local authorities were required to submit stretch aims which were shared annually with the Scottish Government as part of statutory plans and reports. Scottish Borders Council's stretch aims were included in the Education Improvement Plan 2022-23. Funding was received in the form of annual government grants through the Attainment Scotland Fund each financial year until end of year 2025-26; Pupil Equity Funding, Care Experienced Children and Young People Funding and Strategic Equity Funding. The Chair thanked the team for their excellent work. There followed a brief discussion on the frequent use of acronyms and an agreement that a glossary would be produced in future and the Strategy reviewed before publication. The Attainment Fund was specifically linked to deprivation and could not be used elsewhere. In response to a comment on the effect of the cost of living crisis on household energy bills, it was confirmed that advice around the cost of charging iPads and conserving battery life had been sent to parents and that charging hubs were available on campus throughout the school day.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) to approve the Education Equity Strategy; and**
- (b) to include a glossary of acronyms with future reports.**

MEMBER

Councillor Hamilton left the meeting.

7. HEALTH AND WELLBEING SURVEY RESULTS

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, the purpose of which was to inform the Education Sub Committee details of the Scottish Borders Health and Wellbeing Census Data Reports for 2022 and the Executive Summary. The Health and Wellbeing Census was carried out in March 2022 by all schools (P5-S6). This was a census directed by Scottish Government and undertaken by 16 of the 32 Local Authorities. Four key areas were identified: Bullying; Caring Responsibilities; Body Image and Loneliness, Stress and Worry. Following consultation with both Elected Members and parents, it had been agreed to remove the sexual health and relationships questions before issuing to our children and young people. Scottish Government had planned to publish the national level analysis in December 2022, however national level statistics would now be published in February 2023. Following the census it was noted that March was not the ideal time in the academic year in which to conduct the survey; November was proposed for any subsequent census and that it should be conducted on a bi-annual basis. In response to questions, it was confirmed that a multi-agency group which included young people was looking at bullying to refresh the policy "Respectful Relationships". The Director confirmed that it was important that incidents of bullying were reported to establish their extent, where they were happening, in what age groups, and what form they took, so negative experiences could be targeted and lessened. Further work was also underway on body image in tandem with Fife Council which already had done some work in this area. In terms of the removal of the sexual health questions, the Director explained that the level of concern expressed by parents on the explicit nature of some of the questions, given the age range of pupils answering and holding the information anonymously, was strong enough that the previous Council had agreed not to ask these questions. Further work would be carried out on the future sourcing and gathering of sexual health data e.g. using national data, the type of support provided by the School Nurse Service, information from Health, etc. Young people's views would also be sought on future questionnaires' contents.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) to note that national level statistics would be published in February 2023, which would allow comparison of Scottish Borders data with other Local Authorities and national information;
- (b) the Health and Wellbeing Census would be undertaken on a bi-annual basis, allowing us to track improvement overtime, using the 2022 Census as a baseline; and
- (c) to change the time of year the census was carried out in future from March to November, making this easier for schools to undertake.

8. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

The Chair provided a brief explanation of how the Education Sub-Committee was formed and its remit, which combined the education functions from the Executive Committee and those of the Education Performance Sub-Committee, which had now been disbanded. This had been agreed at Scottish Borders Council's meeting held on 25 August 2022.

9. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Sub-Committee noted the next two meetings would be held on Thursday 2 March 2023 and Thursday 18 May 2023.

Meeting concluded at 12 noon.