

**The Choices Programme
Clydebank
West Dunbartonshire Council
24 January 2006**

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1. Background

The Choices Programme was inspected in October 2005 as part of a national sample of provision for pupils with additional support needs. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the programme. It evaluated pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the programme, the environment for learning, the programme's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English, mathematics, pre-vocational skills and personal and social development.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed pupils and staff. A member of the inspection team also met with parents¹.

The Choices Programme is an alternative secondary school provision for pupils at S3/S4 who have experienced difficulties in mainstream schools. It serves the whole of the West Dunbartonshire area and is a joint initiative between the Department of Education and Cultural Services and Social Work. At the time of the inspection the roll was 20. Most of the pupils currently attending had joined the programme in August 2005. All pupils had experienced significant interruptions in learning in their previous placements. They all received free school meals.

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all young people, parents and carers and to all staff. Members of the inspection team also interviewed parents.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The calm, positive ethos and very good relationships among staff and pupils.
- The development of the market garden and its use to successfully promote pupils' skills in enterprise.
- The good attention to pre-vocational skills and the quality of pupils' learning experiences in music.
- The very positive partnership with parents and carers and productive links with the community and support agencies.
- The commitment of the educational co-ordinator and staff to the pastoral care and well-being of pupils.

¹ Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends

3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?

Overall, parents were positive about The Choices Programme. They felt that staff made them welcome and gave them regular and helpful information on their children's progress. They also felt that staff showed care and concern for pupils and treated them fairly. They appreciated being consulted about decisions affecting their children and the effectiveness of staff in responding to their concerns. Pupils were very positive about most aspects of The Choices Programme. They felt that they were treated fairly and had a say in deciding how to improve aspects of the programme. They thought that staff gave them good support and encouragement with learning. All staff enjoyed working at Choices. They thought that the programme was well led and had a strong sense of teamwork.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The curriculum was adequate. It focused appropriately on promoting pupils' skills in English, mathematics, personal and social development and pre-vocational experiences. Pupils also had opportunities to participate in music, drama, art, information and communications technology (ICT) and digital photography. Coursework enabled pupils to work towards achieving National Qualifications in English, mathematics, ICT, music and drama. Pupils could also gain certification from local colleges for undertaking vocational courses in motor vehicle maintenance and painting and decorating. In the current session, The Choices Programme was extending the range of college certificated courses to include practical craft skills, hospitality and personal presentation. However, pupils attending The Choices Programme had a shorter school week than their peers in mainstream schools. They had restricted choice and opportunities to continue with their studies of subjects chosen when in mainstream placements. Overall, staff did not make sufficient use of ICT to promote and support pupils' learning. There was considerable scope to make more productive links across the curriculum and to give pupils regular opportunities to apply their skills in real life contexts.

The quality of the teaching was good. Staff worked effectively with pupils in individual and small group situations. They gave clear directions and explanations and made good use of questions to engage pupils in learning activities. Staff listened to pupils and encouraged their contributions. They rarely worked with larger groups of pupils and this limited the use of discussion as an effective teaching approach. The quality of pupils' learning experiences was good. Overall, pupils were motivated to work well. In pre-vocational skills classes, they responded positively to opportunities to take responsibility and to be active in their learning. Individual timetabling arrangements gave pupils too few experiences of working collaboratively.

English language

The quality of pupils' attainment and achievements in English was adequate. In session 2004-5, six pupils had achieved Standard Grade English at General or Foundation level. Some pupils had successfully completed units towards National Qualifications at Access 3 and at Intermediate 1 levels. Overall, the majority of pupils were making steady progress with coursework in the time available. Pupils demonstrated understanding of different types of writing. A few pupils had produced thoughtful written responses to a piece of text they had read. Weaknesses in the school's approaches to planning and assessment, coupled with the length of the school week, hampered the rate and extent of pupils' progress.

Mathematics

Overall, the quality of attainment in mathematics was adequate. At S4, five pupils had achieved Standard Grade mathematics at Foundation level and a majority had completed units at Access 3 and Intermediate 1 levels. Pupils attending regularly had made a good start to coursework. Overall, they were competent in written number work but lacked confidence in carrying out mental calculations. A few pupils could carry out more complex calculations involving algebra and measurement. Most applied skills in practical measurement effectively to their work in pre-vocational studies. Pupils did not have well-developed skills in problem-solving and enquiry.

Personal and social education

Pupils were making good progress in developing their personal and social skills. They demonstrated positive and respectful attitudes towards staff and each other. Through a well-delivered programme of activities, pupils were gaining skills for effective citizenship, responsible relationships and healthy living. They responded positively to opportunities to be involved in decision making about aspects of school life. Pupils participated well in daily meetings and some played an active role in the gardening committee. Overall, pupils lacked confidence in their own knowledge and skills. Staff had not set suitably specific targets for pupils' personal and social development within individualised educational programmes and there were no planned approaches to recognising pupils' achievements.

Pre-vocational skills

Pupils were making good progress overall in developing pre-vocational skills. They had made very good progress in activities involving The Choices Programme's market garden. Over a relatively short period of time, they had worked very effectively with staff to establish an attractive and productive garden that supplied produce to the community café. The success of the project in helping pupils to develop enterprise skills had been widely recognised. Pupils continued to participate in decision making about the next phase of garden development. Those involved in a college course, and those working in the café kitchen, were developing a good range of food preparation skills. Through preparing a well-chosen range of dishes, pupils working in the café kitchen showed a good knowledge of the importance of healthy eating and of basic hygiene practices. Pupils also showed good understanding of the importance of

responsible behaviour in the workshop and gave appropriate attention to rules for health and safety. They were developing skills in woodwork through making bat boxes and planters for the garden as well as small tables, and were able to carry out some tasks independently. Overall, pupils were developing important skills for future employment.

Wider Achievements

Pupils were gaining good skills in aspects of digital photography and followed instructions well during tutorial sessions. They were competent in word processing and were gaining confidence in the use of a variety of computer applications. Pupils benefited greatly from the excellent music activities provided by the Cultural Co-ordinator and his team. Most were making very good progress in music. They showed skills in playing keyboard, guitar and drums and composed and performed pieces of music confidently and enthusiastically. Pupils' self-esteem and sense of achievement were greatly enhanced as a result of their participation in music.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The Choices Programme had very good arrangements for ensuring the care, welfare and protection of pupils. There were consistent and effective approaches to dealing with any incidences of bullying, racial incidents and drugs misuse. Staff were clear about their roles and responsibilities in relation to child protection issues. They showed high levels of care and dealt sensitively with pupils' concerns and individual needs. Pupils were encouraged to develop positive attitudes towards healthy eating through the range of food provided at break and lunchtime.

The programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) was suitably broad and placed an appropriate focus on developing pupils' skills in citizenship, responsible relationships and sexual health. The Child Care Officer coordinated the delivery of the PSHE programme very effectively and involved a range of external speakers, including health workers and staff from the voluntary sector. She worked directly with pupils in small groups and gave very good attention to providing focused support to meet the specific personal and social needs of individual pupils. The Choices Programme did not have sufficiently well-planned approaches to promoting pupils' personal and social development across all aspects of school life.

Arrangements for curricular and vocational guidance were good. Staff gathered pupils' views about their areas of interest and took generally good account of these in planning their timetables. There were effective links with the careers adviser and pupils had good opportunities to consider future choices as part of the PSHE programme. The well-planned programme of work experience enabled pupils to develop an understanding of the world of work and of specific employment opportunities, as well as enhancing their personal and social development. The Choices Programme did not have sufficiently structured approaches to preparing for and following-up work experience placements to ensure that pupils' achievements while on placement were recognised fully.

The quality of The Choices Programme's approaches to meeting pupils' needs was adequate. Staff made good efforts to obtain information on pupils' prior achievements from their previous schools and to provide them with suitably challenging tasks and activities. On entry to The Choices Programme, pupils undertook assessments in English and

mathematics to help identify their levels of attainment. However, overall, staff did not make sufficient use of assessment information to plan pupils' next steps in learning. Approaches to planning pupils' learning experiences, and to assessing and recording their progress, were inconsistent and lacked detail. Pupils did not yet have specific learning targets, or targets for personal and social development, set within their individualised educational programmes.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of accommodation was weak. The Choices Programme was accommodated within Skypoint Community Centre. Pupils had access to a number of the Centre's facilities, including the café, ICT suite and the library. Staff had made very good use of an area of the centre's grounds to establish a very successful market garden to promote pupils' skills in enterprise. However, teaching areas were limited in number and size. There was no additional facility for staff to use to support pupils who may have experienced distress. Fixtures and fittings were functional but not in a good condition. Pupils had no social area. Staff facilities were also limited. One room was used to provide office and storage space as well as work and social areas for staff. There were no designated staff toilets.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The Choices Programme had a very positive and calm atmosphere. There were very good relationships between staff and pupils and morale was high. Pupils appreciated being members of The Choices Programme. Overall, they responded well to staff and cooperated with them. Individual members of staff gave good attention to encouraging pupils to attend regularly and to recognising their achievements. However, The Choices Programme had not yet established agreed approaches to promoting high expectations of pupils' achievements, attendance and behaviour. Pupils were treated equally and fairly. They had good opportunities to discuss equality issues within the PSHE programme. Staff were not sufficiently aware of the education authority's approaches to promoting race equality. The Choices Programme should implement its plan to introduce monthly opportunities for pupils to participate in religious observance.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	Partnerships with parents and the wider community were very good. Parents received regular information on their children's progress at review meetings and by telephone. They appreciated the support and advice provided by staff to help them support their children's education. The Choices Programme had established very productive partnerships with other schools and colleges to secure a range of valuable learning experiences for pupils. It also maintained important links with the education authority through the Steering Group. The chef in the community café played a key role in helping pupils to develop skills in food preparation and cooking. The local community was consulted and actively involved in the development of the market garden.

7. Improving the school

Appendix 1 provides HM Inspectors' overall evaluation of the work of the school.

The Choices Programme provided a positive and supportive learning environment which helped to rekindle pupils' interest in learning. The education coordinator and staff showed strong commitment to the pastoral care and well-being of pupils. In the past three years, The Choices Programme had steadily extended its curriculum to provide pupils with better opportunities to develop valuable pre-vocational skills and to gain National Qualifications. In order to meet pupils' needs more effectively, staff should address weaknesses in approaches to planning, assessing and evaluating pupils' learning experiences.

The education coordinator gave good leadership to The Choices Programme. His open management style had helped to establish very good relationships with pupils, parents and staff. He had played a key role in building strong and productive partnerships with other agencies that had broadened and enhanced pupils' learning experiences. He needed to provide clearer strategic direction and involve staff more fully in quality assurance and planning. A new principal teacher had been appointed very recently to assist in the management of The Choices Programme. Staff met frequently to discuss and make decisions about key issues. However, approaches to self-evaluation and planning for improvement were not sufficiently systematic and lacked rigour. Senior managers needed to involve staff in evaluating all aspects of the work of The Choices Programme, with particular focus on the quality of pupils' experiences and achievements.

Main points for action

The Choices Programme and education authority should take action to improve approaches to meeting pupils' needs and self-evaluation. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- develop clear approaches to assessing and evaluating pupils' learning experiences and use the information to plan effectively for pupils' next steps;
- involve pupils more in the process of identifying suitably challenging targets;
- continue with plans to provide opportunities for pupils to achieve a wider range of National Qualifications; and
- implement more systematic and rigorous approaches to monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision made by The Choices Programme.

What happens next?

The school and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. Within two years of the publication of this report parents will be informed about the progress made by the school.

Norma Wright
HM Inspector

24 January 2006

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

The sections in the table below follow the order in this report. You can find the main comments made about each of the quality indicators in those sections. However, aspects of some quality indicators are relevant to other sections of the report and may also be mentioned in those other sections.

How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	
Structure of the curriculum	Adequate
The teaching process	Good
Pupils' learning experiences	Good
Pupils' attainment in English language	Adequate
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	Adequate
Personal and social development	Good

How well are pupils supported?	
Pastoral care	Very Good
Meeting pupils' needs	Adequate

How good is the environment for learning?	
Accommodation and facilities	Weak
Climate and relationships	Very Good
Expectations and promoting achievement	Adequate
Equality and fairness	Good
Partnership with parents and the community	Very Good

Improving the school	
Leadership	Good
Self-evaluation	Weak

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	excellent
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below. Where any one group had five or less respondees then, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

The most positive responses from pupils included the following.	What pupils would like to see improved.
<p>All thought that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• teachers explained things clearly and helped them when they were having difficulties;• they got on well with other pupils and had a say in deciding how to improve the school;• teachers let them know when they had done something well and were good at telling them how their learning could be improved; and• all pupils were treated fairly and they were helped to keep safe and healthy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There were no significant issues.
The most positive responses from staff included the following.	What staff would like to see improved.
<p>All thought that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• they liked working in the school and felt that they had good opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes;• the school was well led and there was effective communication amongst staff;• there was mutual respect between teachers and pupils and standards set for pupils' behaviour were consistently upheld.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There were no significant issues.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education and Cultural Services, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, Ground Floor Suite, Unit 7 Blair Court, 5 North Avenue, Clydebank Business Park, Clydebank, G81 2LA or by telephoning 0141 435 3550

If you wish to comment about inspections of provision for pupils with additional support needs

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of inspection of provision for pupils with additional support needs, you should write in the first instance to Frank Crawford, HMCI, at HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG.

Our complaints procedure

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to Hazel Dewart, Business Management Unit, HM Inspectorate of Education, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600258 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4-6 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. You can also telephone 0870 011 5378 or e-mail enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk

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