

**Inspection of the education
functions of local authorities**

**Summary of evaluation of the
educational psychology service**

West Dunbartonshire Council

23 June 2009

Definition of terms used in this report.

HM Inspectors use published criteria when making evaluations. They are published as quality indicators which relate evaluations to six levels. HMIE began using a six-point scale to make evaluations in August 2005. The table below shows how the six-point scale relates to the four-point scale that we used previously.

Old level	New level	Description
Very good	Excellent	Outstanding, sector leading
	Very good	Major strengths
Good	Good	Important strengths with some areas for improvement
	Satisfactory	Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Fair	Weak	Important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Major weaknesses

This report also uses the following words to describe numbers and proportions:

almost all	over 90%
most	75-90%
majority	50-74%
less than half	15-49%
few	up to 15%

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1. The aims, nature and scope of the inspection

The education functions of each local authority in Scotland were inspected between 2000 and 2005. A second cycle of inspections began in 2006 which incorporates an evaluation of educational psychology services (EPS). Section 9 of the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* charges HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), on behalf of the Scottish Ministers, to provide an external evaluation of the effectiveness of the local authority in its quality assurance of educational provision within the Council and of its support to schools in improving quality.

The inspection of West Dunbartonshire Council included the evaluation of the quality of educational psychology provision on behalf of stakeholders. The evaluation of EPS are conducted within a framework of quality indicators which embody the Government's policy on Best Value. The inspection team also included an Associate Assessor who was a principal educational psychologist (PEP) serving in another Scottish local authority.

This web-based report should be read alongside the report on the inspection of the education functions of West Dunbartonshire Council which sets out the wider context in which EPS are delivered.

The Educational Psychology Service

The West Dunbartonshire EPS is based in Duntocher. At the time of inspection the complement of educational psychologists (EPs) across the service was 9.8 full-time equivalent (FTE). Promoted staff consisted of a PEP, a deputy principal educational psychologist (DPEP) and six senior EPs (SEP). The service had established an assistant psychologist post to support research and development work across the service. This post was vacant at the time of the inspection. In addition, the service was supported by 2.5 FTE administration staff.

2. What key outcomes has the service achieved?

The service had made a number of important contributions to developments across the Council. This included the service's effective corporate role in stress management, and the help and advice provided to other agencies within the Council through the extensive range of interventions and approaches to support wellbeing. EPS staff at all levels were well represented on, and made positive contributions to, a range of strategic and operational working groups across educational services. This included a major role in primary screening and the development of solution orientated approaches across the authority. The EPS had also taken a lead role in supporting practice in relation to the implementation of *The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004*. EPs had been effective in improving outcomes for children and young people through their development of initiatives designed to support children and young people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), those who had suffered bereavement or other trauma, or who were looked after and accommodated by the authority. The EPS was aware that further work was required to improve planning and data management to more effectively measure performance. The service had made good use of stakeholder

evaluations and focus group feedback from schools and partner agencies to improve performance in some aspects of service delivery. For example, the service reviewed their time allocation system following feedback from headteachers. The service now needed to extend the process to include representatives from all stakeholder groups. EPS staff had very good knowledge and understanding of their statutory requirements. The service effectively complied with appropriate guidance and legislation.

3. How well does the service meet the needs of its stakeholders?

The EPS had developed very good working relationships with children, young people and parents¹. EPs were strong advocates on behalf of children and young people and sought to fully include them in planning and making decisions about their future. Children and young people felt well supported by the service and could provide examples of the EPs making a positive difference to their lives. Overall, parents felt at ease meeting with EPs and were happy with the services' contribution to meetings about their child. However, a few families felt that the quality of service across the authority was variable. The EPS had produced a range of helpful leaflets for parents and carers including a *Psychological Service Standards* leaflet which clarified service roles and expectations for stakeholders. Overall, schools and authority staff were positive about the work of the EPS. Nearly all schools felt that the EPS respected the confidentiality of children and young people, parents and staff. However, greater clarity regarding the expectations of the EPS in undertaking assessment and supporting research and strategic development was required by some schools and services to enable them to better meet the needs of all children and young people. The service was outward looking in seeking best practice to adopt in West Dunbartonshire, it now needed to better disseminate its own good practice nationally particularly in the area of wellbeing.

All staff in the EPS felt respected and well supported by senior managers and their peers. Teamwork across the service was very effective. The contribution made by administrative staff was valued by EPs and the service management team. Administrative staff reported feeling included as part of the EPS team. EPs were highly motivated and participated in a wide range of personal development opportunities which improved their skills and knowledge. They collaborated well on a number of initiatives and research projects including nurture groups, solution orientated approaches and Post School Psychological Services (PSPS). EPs also contributed significantly to the on-going development of other professionals in areas such as attachment theory, thinking skills and formative assessment.

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

4. How good is the service's delivery of key processes?

The EPS was delivering a broad and balanced range of services with regard to consultation and advice, assessment, intervention, professional development and training, and research and strategic development. A collaborative consultation model that included parents, carers, children and young people was well embedded in service practice. High quality consultation and advice was provided to, and valued by, schools and partner agencies including colleges and the Reporter to the Children's Hearing System. Across the service, consistent use required to be made of the collaborative consultation process.

The assessment policy was clear, based on best practice and linked to the service vision and aims. EPs demonstrated effective contextualised assessment skills in multiagency meetings. Well considered joint approaches to assessment had been developed to better support the needs of children and young people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and ASD. A wide range of appropriate assessment approaches and tools was available within the service. Assessment information and practices require to be more clearly evidenced within case files and should be clarified for schools and early years centres.

School staff reported highly effective interventions which had been negotiated and progressed by the EPS. These included resilience building in secondary schools and interventions for children and young people experiencing loss or bereavement. Solution oriented approaches were promoted across the authority by the EPS and have been positively adopted by schools and other agencies. There was evidence of emerging positive impact as a result of interventions focused on children and young people who were looked after and accommodated by the authority or required more choices more chances. The EPS had established opportunities for focused reflection on service-wide interventions in the Therapy Intervention Group (TIG) and full team discussions. Impact and outcomes for children and young people require to be systematically evaluated and shared with schools and early years centres.

Appropriate and relevant training had been delivered to a wide range of stakeholders across the authority, often in partnership with others. The evaluation feedback indicated a high level of satisfaction with the training provided. The service should begin to evaluate the impact of training on practice and raise awareness of this role across stakeholders. Significant support and encouragement to undertake research was provided by the SEP with this responsibility. The service made effective use of its website to disseminate research. Research and strategic initiatives were linked to local and national agendas and priorities. The EPS should explore alternative approaches to highlighting the research role of the service to schools and other stakeholders. Equality and fairness was very well embedded in individual practice and within the service as a whole.

Features of good practice: Promoting emotional well-being

The EPS has developed a broad range of effective strategies to promote emotional well-being in children and young people in West Dunbartonshire, in partnership with the local authority and other stakeholders. These approaches include group work with children and young people, enhanced individual support, stakeholder training, the use of specific curricular resources and the development of practice guidance.

- Coordinated additional support to **young people looked after at home**.
- **Nurture groups** aimed at children at the early stages of primary school.
- **Attachment and resilience** training for secondary school staff and partner agencies.
- Interagency guidance and training for responding to **self-harm and suicidal behaviour**.
- Group support targeted at children and young people who have experienced **loss and bereavement**.
- Training in **inclusive communication approaches** for schools and early years centres.
- Curricular approaches to developing the **emotional competence** of children in schools and early years centre.

More detailed report is available at www.hmie.gov.uk.

5. How good is the service's management?

Partnership working was a significant strength within the service and aspects of this were excellent. The service worked in a highly successful way with a broad range of partner agencies to improve services to children and families. Strong partnerships with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and The Social Work Department (SWD) had developed over a number of years, both strategically and operationally. These had led to significant benefits for children and young people. External agencies were highly satisfied with joint working with EPS, describing them as enthusiastic partners who were often the catalysts for positive change. Cooperative working with the Reporter had resulted in changes to protocols and EP involvement in training panel members. An effective joint assessment framework was in place. Both the PEP and DPEP were involved in innovative strategic partnership working.

The EPS developed and evaluated its improvement plan as a whole service. The service had made efforts to link its work to the key priorities of the education department and the Council. The planning landscape within the service was, however, overly complex. Efforts should be made for greater transparency in the planning process to demonstrate how improvements in performance impact on local and national priorities. The policy framework requires to be reviewed to reflect service priorities, and monitored in terms of implementation and effectiveness. The time allocation system currently in operation was being reviewed in consultation with stakeholders, including possible allocation of consultation time to SWD. Communication and active consultation at the point of service delivery, or through working groups and initiatives, was well developed. There was not as yet a well-planned and systematic programme in place to enable active participation of stakeholders in the work of the service. The EPS plans to consult more formally with stakeholder reference groups in the future around service developments, policy issues and initiatives.

6. How good is leadership?

Managers at authority level and PEP show a strong commitment to continuous improvement. Communication between the authority and the EPS is clear and effective. Strategic planning required to be clearer and more effectively linked to council and departmental priorities. The PEP led and managed change well. Her personal and professional contribution to authority developments was regarded highly by the service and the educational managers. The DEP had a positive impact on service delivery at strategic and operational levels. She effectively provided clear vision and direction to team members. Senior psychologists had clear roles and responsibilities and provided effective leadership in their areas of responsibility. Promoted staff worked well together with the PEP to influence the future direction of the service. Succession planning was well managed and the PEP had been very successful in retaining and developing staff. All members of the service demonstrated a strong commitment to reflective practice and continuous improvement. Well developed management and peer supervision and support systems had been established to improve practice and support practitioners. Senior managers encouraged innovation and creativity and provided a range of opportunities for distributive leadership. Staff across the service demonstrated leadership in relation to their specific remits within the service. EPs, for example, chaired service working groups and led on aspects of research. Approaches to self-evaluation were well developed and now need to be formally embedded in daily practice.

Key strengths

The service had:

- developed strong and in some cases excellent partnerships with key services and agencies;
- developed a broad and balanced range of services with a well developed research and development programme;
- delivered innovative methodologies and approaches to support the wellbeing of children, young people and families;
- well motivated staff who work effectively in a team; and
- provided effective leadership opportunities for staff across the EPS.

Main points for action

The service should:

- develop a more robust and systematic way of collecting data to evaluate the impact of its services at all levels, including corporate levels;
- establish more formal relationships with stakeholders and partners and engage them further in service planning; and
- review planning and policy arrangements to more effectively meet strategic and corporate objectives.

As a result of the very high performance, and the effective leadership of this service, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. The service and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report.

Annette Bruton
HM Chief Inspector
Directorate 5
23 June 2009

Appendix 1

Quality Indicator	Evaluation
Improvements in performance	Good
Fulfilment of statutory duties	Very Good
Impact on children and young people	Very Good
Impact on parents, carers and families	Very Good
Impact on staff	Very Good
Impact on the local community	Good
Impact on the wider community	Good
Consultation and advice	Very Good
Assessment	Good
Intervention	Very Good
Provision of professional development and training for other groups including parents, teachers and health professionals	Very Good
Research and strategic development	Very Good
Inclusion, equality and fairness	Very Good
Policy development and review	Good
Participation of stakeholders	Good
Operational planning	Satisfactory
Partnership working	Very Good
Leadership and direction	Good
Leadership of change and improvement	Very Good

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If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management and Communications Team, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

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