

## WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Laura Mason, Chief Education Officer

Educational Services Committee: 19 March 2025

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**Subject: Strategy for Excellence and Equity****1. Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to update the Educational Services Committee on the progress of implementing the service plan for excellence and equity, and to highlight future challenges and risks that could impact further progress.

**1.1** This report is for noting.**2. Recommendations****2.1** The Educational Services Committee is asked to note:

- (a) the positive attainment and equity performance of West Dunbartonshire in the Broad General Education compared to the national performance;
- (b) national statutory expectations and outcomes for education;
- (c) the additional funding provision ending in 2026; and
- (d) the range of improvement and development work delivered to support improved attainment and a narrowing of the attainment gap.

**3. Background**

- 3.1** In line with the Strategy for Excellence and Equity the Committee receives regular reports outlining progress against this strategic priority.
- 3.2** West Dunbartonshire's Strategy for Excellence and Equity supported by funding from Scottish Government has improved outcomes in the Broad General Education with West Dunbartonshire performing well compared to national figures.
- 3.3** The approach to improve outcomes has been strongly supported by the Scottish Government's Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) Funding from 2015 to 2022. Since 2022, a revised tapered SAC funding model—the Strategic Equity Fund—has been implemented. However, this tapered model gradually reduces local authority funding, which significantly impacts on the resource available to continue to raise attainment and narrow the poverty-related attainment gap.
- 3.4** The poverty related attainment gap remains a challenge and priority both locally and nationally. The reduction in national funding, coupled with the local budget constraints, exacerbates the challenge of improving equity outcomes for children and young people.

- 3.5** Local authorities have a statutory duty to report on annual performance, plans and outcomes. Scottish Government published in December 2024 the 2025 National Improvement Framework which local planning should align with. The 2025 National Improvement Framework has set new short-term priorities ('ABC'—Attendance, Achievement, Behaviour and Relationships, and the Curriculum) and seven new outcomes: an inclusive curriculum, high achievement, skilled educators, strong partnerships, improved relationships, and the integration of digital technology. See Appendix 1 for a sketchnote of these outcomes.
- 3.6** In December 2024 Scottish Government published statistics on the 2023/24 Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Levels. The statistics provide information on the national performance in literacy and numeracy for pupils in Primary 1, Primary 4, Primary 7 and S3 and for all pupils based in special schools and units.
- 3.7** A summary of the Council's key performance against the national profile in the components of literacy and numeracy at Primary 1, Primary 4, Primary 7, S3 is provided at Appendix 2 to this report.
- 3.7** Local performance data on attainment and equity outcomes, along with the 2025 National Improvement Framework key priorities and outcomes, will be included in the planning for the 2025/26 academic session and reported to the Scottish Government in September 2025.

## **4.0 Main Issues**

### **4.1 Attainment and equity gap.**

West Dunbartonshire's performance in terms of attainment and equity outcomes is positive. The local authority has consistently demonstrated a strong record of improving both equity and excellence. However, the challenge of raising attainment and narrowing the equity gap still persists.

**4.1.1** In December 2024, the Scottish Government published the Achievement of a Level (ACEL) report, which compared West Dunbartonshire's achievements at P1, P4, P7, and S3 to the national level. The attainment gap in primary schools in West Dunbartonshire has increased slightly but remains narrower than the national average.

**4.1.2** Achievement in West Dunbartonshire for our most deprived primary pupils is higher than Scotland's average, with literacy performing 4% higher and numeracy 3% higher

**4.1.3** Attainment in secondary schools for our most deprived pupils is mixed, with literacy performing 10% higher than national figures, while numeracy is 2% lower.

### **4.2 Funding ending in 2026.**

Key workstreams and additional staffing focused on improving attainment and equity outcomes are supported by funding from the Scottish Attainment Challenge, which concludes in 2026. The Strategic Equity and Pupil Equity

Funds have enhanced staffing to support school improvements aligned with the National Improvement Framework outcomes; and provide staffing and resources to deliver targeted and universal wellbeing support for children, young people, and families.

- 4.2.1** The Strategic Equity Fund supports targeted activities and resources to complement local improvement plans. West Dunbartonshire received £851,743 for the 2025/26 academic session. Future funding remains uncertain.
- 4.2.2** The Pupil Equity Fund provides additional funding to schools targeting the poverty-related attainment gap, based on the number of pupils eligible for free school meals. West Dunbartonshire schools received £3,380,835 for the 2025/26 academic session. Future funding remains uncertain. Headteachers are working with officers to manage the transition and reduce additional staff funded by this programme.

## **4.2** Improvement Framework

Key priority activities undertaken to deliver excellence and equity within the Improvement Framework from December to March 2025:

- **Attainment Reviews (Secondary Schools):** Senior officers and West Dunbartonshire's Attainment Advisor from Education Scotland are engaged in a monthly programme of meetings with headteachers to review individual school and departmental performance. These meetings identify areas for focused attention and improvement for individual young people, curriculum areas, and schools. Officers engage in regular reviews to monitor progress with implementing actions agreed at meetings.
- **Attainment Predictions (Broad General Education):** Using assessment evidence, schools have submitted attainment predictions for primary 1, 4, 7, and S3 in literacy and numeracy to be achieved by June 2025. This information is based on teacher judgment using pupil assessment evidence. Officers have reviewed the predictions and are engaged in school visits to discuss areas of success and concern.
- **Data Leads:** In its second year, the Data Leads initiative has focused on more strategic use of data, including using data for improvement and School Improvement Plans in primary schools. This supports establishments in producing succinct, data-led improvement plans. The Data Leads initiative has been extended to include early years centres and private nurseries from January to June 2025.
- **School Inspections:** Between December and March 2025, His Majesty's Inspectorate visited four schools and published the inspection report for St Mary's Primary and Early Learning and Childcare Centre, which received very good gradings. Headteachers have shared positive feedback on the support and challenge provided by central officers when engaged in external inspection process.

- **Enhanced Scrutiny and Collaboration Visits:** Officers visited 15 schools to monitor the quality of provision in learning, teaching, assessment, leadership, curriculum, and attainment. The visits highlighted a strong staff commitment to collaboration within and outside their schools to share practice and moderate standards.
- **Standards & Quality Reports/Improvement Planning:** headteachers attended information and planning sessions on national outcomes and expectations. Headteachers worked collaboratively with colleagues to review the quality of their school planning and act as critical friends identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

### 4.3 Education Development

**4.3.1 Parent and Family Health and Wellbeing:** Educational Psychologists continue to deliver training on the "Seasons for Growth" bereavement support programme, training staff to deliver groups for children and, new for this session, a parent programme. Psychological Services are also supporting the delivery of "Incredible Years" parenting groups through coaching and supervision of staff using an experts-in-action model. Training on nurture-based approaches is also being delivered, with staff offered coaching and modelling support.

**4.3.2 Children's Mental Health Week:** This year's theme, *'Know Yourself, Grow Yourself'*, encouraged children and young people to be self-aware. West Dunbartonshire schools engaged in a wide range of promotional and learning activities, including school assemblies, parent newsletters, social media posts, and story writing. Several schools linked this year's theme to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**4.3.2 Beat the Street:** "Beat the Street" is coming to Dumbarton, commencing on February 12th and continuing until March 12th. This initiative will involve our primary and secondary schools. "Beat the Street" is an interactive initiative that encourages people to get active by walking, cycling, or running. Participants use a card or app to tap 'Beat Boxes' located throughout Dumbarton, earning points for every journey they make. The goal is to inspire physical activity and healthy living while fostering community engagement

**4.3.3 Health and Wellbeing Curriculum:** To ensure consistent health and wellbeing education across all schools a working group has been set up to produce comprehensive core curriculum planners for the Broad General Education ( P1 to S3). These planners will incorporate all six Curriculum for Excellence organisers and provide schools with a refreshed framework for teaching and learning

**4.2.3 WDC Skills for Learning, Life and Work:** West Dunbartonshire's Competencies Framework, introduced in August 2022, aims to develop six key skills: creativity, collaboration, communication, character, citizenship, and critical thinking. The skills are being implemented across all primary schools. A pilot to introduce the skills to early years is a priority for this session.

**4.2.4 1+2 Languages Update:** Modern Languages curriculum leaders engaged in training with Education Scotland to ensure consistency, high standards, and accuracy in the planning and assessment of writing within the Broad General Education, enhancing teacher confidence and student progression.

**4.2.5 Instrumental Music Service:** The service is busy in this period preparing for the Spring Concert on Thursday, 27th March, at Clydebank Town Hall. Additionally, preparations are underway for the West Dunbartonshire Music Service Solo Performer of the Year event, scheduled for Wednesday, 2nd April, at Dumbarton Academy. A major focus of the instrumental music tutors' work from January to March is supporting Senior Phase pupils as they prepare for their SQA music practical exams before the Easter holidays. The Senior Concert Band is also gearing up to participate in the Scottish Concert Band Festival Finals at Perth Concert Hall on Sunday, 16th March. Last year, the band won a Gold Plus award.

**4.2.6 Faifley Campus Joint Learning Projects:** The Creative Learning Officer has been working with St Joseph's and Edinbarnet primary schools to deliver joint dance and creative learning workshops with the children in primary 1 and 2, in preparation for the move to their new school campus

## 5. People Implications

**5.1** As reported to Council in June 2022 the Scottish Attainment Challenge funding enabled the provision of additional temporary (seconded) funded posts within the education service, partner council services and external providers. The annual decrease in funding by 2026 will reduce the number of staff available to deliver in these areas with the seconded staff returning to their substantive posts, and any backfill element will cease.

**5.2** The current budget context and uncertainty regarding future funding commitments for the Strategic Equity Fund and Pupil Equity Fund are reducing the number of central and school staff, thereby straining the service's ability to meet expectations and achieve continuous improvement

## 6. Financial and Procurement Implications

**6.1** Funding from the Scottish Government supports the work of the Strategy for Excellence and Equity. The Education Committee is aware of a tapered reduction of Strategic Equity Funding, announced in 2022, which reduces the annual income to West Dunbartonshire and affects the service's capacity to deliver strategic priorities for excellence and equity

**6.2** Since its inception in 2015/16 to March 2024, the Council received £15,834,008 in funding. Please note that in the financial year 2025/26, the funding available to West Dunbartonshire will be reduced by 26% compared to 2021/22. Table 6 details the annual reduction in funding up to 2026:

Table 6:

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
£2,043,815	£1,745,797	£1,447,779	£1,149,761	£851,743

Reduction of £298,018 (-15%)	Reduction of £298,018 (-17%)	Reduction of £298,018 (-21%)	Reduction of £298,018 (-26%)	
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**6.3** In the financial year 2025/26, West Dunbartonshire schools received £3,380,835 in Pupil Equity Funding, with no future funding commitment confirmed at the time of writing this report.

## **7. Risk Analysis**

**7.1** The reduced funding model will negatively impact the number of staff available to provide universal and targeted support for children, young people and families.

**7.2** The compounded risk of the current budget context and the lack of future funding confirmation may also affect sustained improvement in future academic sessions. These risks are detailed in the risk assessments produced as part of the budget-saving proposals.

**7.3** The risks highlight the impact of removing the Pupil Equity Fund and Strategic Equity Fund on the Council's ability to achieve further local education budget savings.

## **8. Equalities Impact Assessment**

**8.1** A full Equality Impact Assessment was submitted to the Committee in March 2022, identifying that the decrease in funding will reduce capacity. Equality Impact Assessments as part of the budget saving exercise identify the compound risk of local budget decisions and removal / reduced national funding provision on education service delivery of statutory functions and outcomes.

### **Consultation**

a. Legal Services and the Section 95 Officer have been consulted in relation to the content of this report.

## **9. Strategic Assessment**

**10.1** This reports reflects the Council's overarching priority to support our communities to thrive.

Laura Mason  
Chief Education Officer  
March 2025

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**Person to Contact:** Julie McGrogan, Senior Education Officer, Department of Education, Learning and Attainment, Council Offices, 16

Church Street, Dumbarton, G82 1QL  
Email: [julie.mcgrogan@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:julie.mcgrogan@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)

**Appendix:**            1 Sketchnote  
                              2 West Dunbartonshire Attainment v Nationals BGE 2024

**Background Papers:**    Equality Impact Assessment – March 2022

**Wards Affected:**        All wards