

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Educational Services

Educational Services Committee: 03 September 2014

Subject: Accounts Commission Report on School Education Published in June 2014

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to inform members of the Educational Services Committee of the report "School Education", which was published by the Accounts Commission in June 2014 and included as Appendix 1 to this report (available at the web location http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2014/nr_140619_school_education.pdf).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** Members are asked to note the contents of this report and to discuss the position of West Dunbartonshire.

3. Background

- 3.1** The report was produced by Audit Scotland because school education accounts for a significant proportion of local government spending, and a number of important education policy developments have taken place in recent years, such as the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). However, there has been no independent evaluation of how much councils spend on education and what this delivers in terms of improved attainment and wider achievement for pupils. The report provides an assessment of attainment over the last decade and identifies how effectively councils made improvements during this time. The report has been produced at this time because comparisons could still be made with previous years. 2014 is the first year in which pupils are sitting new qualifications introduced as part of Curriculum for Excellence CfE which means comparisons with previous years will not be possible for some time.

4. Main Issues

Key Messages from Audit Scotland's Report

- 4.1** The key messages in the report are as follows:
- In 2012/13, councils spent £4.8 billion on education services, of which £3.8 billion was spent on primary and secondary education. Around two-thirds of this expenditure (68 per cent) was on staff costs.

Councils' spending on education fell by five per cent in real terms between 2010/11 and 2012/13, largely as a result of employing fewer staff. Councils' education services are likely to continue to face budgetary pressures, and they need to be alert to the potential impact of increased workloads on remaining staff.

- Performance has improved against all ten of the attainment measures examined over the last decade. However, there is significant variation in attainment between individual councils, schools, and groups of pupils; and there is a considerable gap between Scotland and the top performing countries. Current measures at both national and council level focus on the attainment of secondary pupils at S4-S6 level. There are no comparable measures available at a council and national level on wider achievement, or the performance of pupils from P1-S3.
- Levels of deprivation have a large influence on attainment. Some schools have achieved better attainment results than their levels of deprivation would indicate, suggesting that the gap between the lowest and highest performing schools cannot be wholly attributed to different levels of deprivation. Closing the gap in performance between schools is likely to be critical to improving overall attainment levels.
- Councils that have made the most improvements have focused on areas such as developing leadership skills, and improving both teacher quality and systems for monitoring and tracking pupil data. There are also increasing opportunities for pupils to develop a wide range of skills for living and working in the wider world. Councils are starting to target resources to improve both attainment and wider achievement but there is scope to improve strategic planning and strengthen the role of elected members in holding education services to account.

Key Recommendations in Audit Scotland's Report

- 4.2** The main recommendations of the report accompanied by a brief narrative from Audit Scotland are outlined below. Curriculum for Excellence represents a significant shift in the way education is delivered in our schools. This has important implications for the economic wellbeing of Scotland, and the future prospects of young people. The recommendations outlined below are intended to support further progress and will involve councils working with key stakeholders.

Councils should:

- ensure they fully understand why levels of attainment vary between their schools and different groups of pupils;
- develop and implement strategies to reduce the gaps in performance between the highest and lowest performing schools;
- continue to work with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to develop a suite of agreed performance measures which would provide an overall picture of educational attainment and achievement across Scotland;

- review the sufficiency of information provided to education committees on attainment at S4-S6, pupil performance between P1-S3 and wider achievement; they should also ensure committees have the time and support to adequately challenge and hold to account education services;
- develop more coordinated approaches to gathering and recording information on the range of wider achievement activities offered in schools, including the levels of pupil participation and the outcomes they achieve. This will help councils to scrutinise performance and ensure resources are being used as efficiently as possible;
- ensure education strategic documents contain clear priorities and actions that set out what is to be achieved in the short, medium and long term. Performance management arrangements should monitor outcomes and report regularly on delivery against strategic objectives, such as raising attainment among the lowest performing pupils;
- consistently use the Scottish Local Government Benchmarking Framework to compare their performance against other councils, and share good practice to improve educational attainment and wider achievement;
- fully assess the potential long-term impact on attainment and wider achievement of budget reductions; and
- monitor and act on the impact of revised working practices and staff reductions across all affected groups (eg, teachers, administrative staff, classroom assistants) on staff wellbeing by, for example, monitoring sickness absence levels, and through specific questions in staff surveys.

Specific References to West Dunbartonshire in the Report

4.3 West Dunbartonshire Council is specifically referred to three times in the report:

- In 2012/13 West Dunbartonshire is noted as having the highest annual spend per pupil of the "urban councils", while Renfrewshire, one of our HMIE Comparator Authorities, has the lowest (£5,899 compared to £4,782 – £1,117 difference).
- The School Education report details that our Educational Services Committee receives a progress report at each meeting and mentions the activities under way to raise attainment. It acknowledges that West Dunbartonshire's attainment has improved in the last five years across the ten attainment measures, particularly at S5 and S6.
- West Dunbartonshire is presented as an example of where resources have been specifically targeted for the purpose of raising attainment.

Key Issues for West Dunbartonshire

4.4 West Dunbartonshire's high annual spend per pupil is an issue for the council. The primary school estate has many C-rated buildings which are not considered suitable for teaching Curriculum for Excellence and are operating under their pupil capacity. At this time only 59% of our school estate is occupied.

4.5 It is pleasing that an independent external body recognises the scrutiny the Educational Services Committee gives to the issue of raising attainment and the improvement in attainment this authority has made in the last five years.

4.6 It is also pleasing that the STAR programme has been recognised as an example of good practice.

5. People Implications

5.1 There are no personnel issues related to this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications arising as a result of this report.

6.2 Educational Services Committee is aware of the annual spend per pupil.

7. Risk Analysis

7.1 Failure to address the school estate issues will disadvantage young people who are learning in environments not fit for purpose and further pressure will be placed on Council's budgets.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 This report is for noting and there is no impact on equalities issues.

9. Consultation

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

10. Strategic Assessment

10.1 The detail of this report and appendix are supportive of the Council's aspiration to improve life chances of children and young people:

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Appendices: Appendix 1: June 2014 Accounts Commission report "School education" prepared by Audit Scotland and available from web location http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2014/nr_140619_school_education.pdf

Background Papers: None.

Wards Affected: All.