

Quality and improvement in Scottish education

trends in inspection findings 2008-2011

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Commentary by Chief Executive

The findings of Education Scotland's sectoral programme of inspections, which sample the providers of education at every stage from the early years to adult learning, provide a key source of evidence on how effectively one of our core public services is performing.

The value of this evidence was recognised in 2007 when the Scottish Government introduced the National Performance Framework. It provided, for the first time, a comprehensive view of the progress being made towards achieving the government's national purpose through driving improvement across a range of key national outcomes. Two of the set of 50 national indicators and targets which were included in the National Performance Framework are based on evidence from the inspection programmes we run, in pre-school settings and in schools. The whole suite of measures is available on the [Scotland Performs](#) web-site.

It has taken around three years to build up a sufficient number of inspections, to provide a fully secure baseline for these measures, but we have now reached that milestone. Summary of Quality Indicator Results from Education Scotland Inspections, National Performance Framework Baseline Summary results also publishes at the same time as this report. This data will inform the Scotland Performs website.

To complement that statistical account of our inspection findings, I thought it would be valuable to provide a richer, more qualitative summary of some of the key findings which have been emerging from these programmes, and from our activities in the other sectors where we have inspection or review programmes. This report provides that richer analysis.

The last published summary of inspection findings was produced in 2009 when HM Inspectorate of Education published *Improving Scottish Education 2005 to 2008*. Since then, the fast moving pace of change and challenge across the world and in society at large has been reflected in a continuing ambitious agenda for change in Scottish education. Developments that the HMIE report highlighted three years ago have gathered pace as we seek to promote the innovation, flexibility and creativity needed to support our young people for this ever changing world.

The evidence summarised in this report indicates that much progress has been made in embedding new, improved approaches in every-day educational practice. This report describes, for example, steady progress in the implementation for Curriculum for Excellence in all sectors, over the course of the three years it covers.

The picture that our inspection evidence paints is consistent with other sources of evidence that have appeared since 2008. In international studies between 2008 and 2011, Scottish children's achievement in science, mathematics and English language were similar to or slightly better than other UK students in England, Wales and N Ireland¹. Against countries worldwide, Scottish children remain in the middle ranking of achievements in these subject areas. Recent results for the Scottish standards for numeracy assessments reflect levels of achievement we have evaluated in this report over 2008 to 2011. In particular, focus is still needed in the first years of secondary to maintain the earlier gains in primary school. We must remain determined in moving Scottish children to even better achievements, nationally and internationally.

Looking forward, we will continue to gather and report on the evidence gained from our routine inspection programmes and publish updates on the messages emerging from them on a regular basis. We will also continue to publish occasional reports on the findings of more targeted, thematic reviews of specific areas or aspects of provision.

In the meantime, I hope you will find this summary of emerging trends useful, whether you are an education practitioner considering how to target your plans for improvement or a user of services or a member of the general public interested in understanding the extent to which progress is being made in any or all sectors.

Bill Maxwell
Chief Executive
Education Scotland

¹ Pisa 2009

Section one

What progress has been made across the sectors in the last three years?

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The last comprehensive summary of findings from inspections was reported in [Improving Scottish Education 2005 to 2008](#), published in 2009 by HMIE. That report highlighted a number of priorities for improvement within six key areas. This section uses that structure of six key areas to provide a summary of the progress made in addressing these priorities since that report was published.

Achievement

Priorities from 2005 to 2008 report:

- recognise that achievement and attainment are not alternatives; both are the outcome of a rich and challenging educational experience;
- use curriculum reform to find fresh ways of engaging learners in deep and challenging learning, to increase levels of achievement for all learners and in particular to improve standards in literacy, numeracy and science; and
- develop ways of recognising achievement, including formal qualifications, which reflect the purposes and expectations of the curriculum.

Improvements across educational sectors are evident since 2008. Increased engagement of pre-school children in their learning, and young people making decisions about their learning in schools has become embedded. College learners have greater involvement in and influence on enhancing their own learning. Teaching staff across sectors are making more use of relevant contexts for learning, particularly in applying skills in literacy and numeracy. It is promising to see the recognition in special schools for a broader range of certifications, and across mainstream, independent and community learning raised expectations of achievement. Overall, however, much work still needs to be done to close the gap of inequalities in opportunities and achievement for children and young people across Scotland.

Curriculum, learning and teaching

Priorities from 2005 to 2008 report:

- ensuring challenge and progression in learning through imaginative, well-judged teaching, leading to the achievement of high levels of understanding and skill;
- devising curriculum structures which reflect the design principles of Curriculum for Excellence and enable all learners to benefit from the experiences and achieve the outcomes described in guidance on the curriculum;
- planning to ensure that all young people achieve the outcomes which comprise a broad general education and that they have suitable opportunities for choice and specialisation;
- working collectively to ensure that children, young people and adult learners make successful transitions between stages or establishments and from education to the world of work, building upon their prior learning;
- enabling all learners to apply learning in active and creative ways; and
- putting in place arrangements to support teachers in their assessment of learning, so that they and society can have confidence in their judgements and that assessment plays a central role in tracking and facilitating progress in learning.

Over the last three years, continuing improvement in the curriculum across the pre-school, primary and secondary sectors has resulted in the pattern of quality judgements made by inspectors being broadly consistent, despite raised national expectations as a result of the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. Detailed information shows steady improvement by pre-school centres and schools in embracing the principles. Inspection evidence highlights that most staff are

engaging positively with Curriculum for Excellence. They have become more confident and innovative in using the experiences and outcomes to plan learning which is stimulating and challenging and makes links across areas of learning. There are emerging instances of positive cluster planning, including with local community partners, to maximise learning opportunities. In best practice, staff are working across stages and across sectors in order to plan experiences which provide continuity, progression and appropriate challenge. Nevertheless, progress has been slow, overall, in developing more effective partnership working between primary and secondary schools to ensure continuity and progression 3 to 18. In special schools, more progress is needed in planning coherently for a broad general education for all children and young people. For the college sector, teaching and programme design are responsive to learner and employer needs. In teacher education, in the way new teachers are prepared to deliver Curriculum for Excellence, more focus is needed to improve the ability of new teachers to teach literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. In prison education, improved literacy and numeracy skills for prisoners is an ongoing need.

Vision and leadership

Priorities from 2005 to 2008 report:

- establishing clear direction, securing commitment, fostering partnerships and encouraging initiative while constantly focusing on the impact on learners;
- tackling weak teaching and underachievement wherever it is found;
- ensuring that future leaders are identified and nurtured in their professional development;
- ensuring strategic planning and effective leadership by local authorities to bring about improvement; and
- establishing and sustaining a climate of high aspiration by putting Curriculum for Excellence into practice successfully.

A continued focus on the importance of leadership and clear direction is clearly reflected in the evidence for 2008 to 2011. Strengths in leadership are noted across sectors: pre-school, schools, learning communities, colleges and teacher education. In pre-school education, there is better understanding of leadership and how to develop staff teams. An encouraging trend is emerging of managers in private and voluntary nurseries improving their qualifications. In primary, headteachers demonstrate a clear vision for their school with a focus on improving learning. Improvements are still needed in leading and managing change and communicating this to all stakeholders. Secondary school heads are taking an increasing role in motivating teachers to share in leadership. There is scope for more effective development at the faculty and principal teacher level in leading whole school developments. The strength of leadership in the independent sector is shown in the clarity of their aims and goals for continuous improvement. In best practice, learning communities and their associated schools share values and direction, supporting active engagement of young people in their communities. Colleges have effective leadership from principals and senior managers, with clear and comprehensive aims. For teacher education, there is now recognition that leadership skills need to be developed from the outset of a teacher's career.

Partnerships

Priorities from 2005 to 2008 report:

- strengthening partnerships across sectors and services in ways which create a unified learning and support system that eases progression for learners;
- ensuring that education plays its full part in taking forward the *Getting it right for every child* (GIRFEC) approach, actively seeking and embedding the behaviours which will sustain effective partnership working; and
- enabling parents to play a stronger role as partners in their child's learning and development.

Partnership working has developed and progressed since the 2005 to 2008 report. Staff across sectors continue to work alongside parents, agencies and other professionals in supporting children and young people. Positive partnerships have been developing and influencing the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence in teacher learning communities and associated school groups. While productive partnerships have developed, there is still room for schools and departments to broaden young people's experiences and improve their skills. Improvements are noted in independent and grant-aided special schools in their partnership with local authorities and appropriate agencies. Improved and innovative partnership working between independent and local authority run schools has been a growing trend. Across Scottish education, there is considerable scope to develop shared approaches further to support the learning of children and young people in care. Skilled and committed individuals are making a significant difference to the communities that they live in. However, joint self-evaluation and planning for improvement amongst CLD providers, voluntary organisations and schools is an area with scope for improvement. Examples have been shown of close, productive partnership working between colleges, universities, education authorities, schools and centres but this is still an area with headroom for improvement.

Professional freedom and responsibility

Priorities from 2005 to 2008 report:

- fostering a culture in which individuals see themselves as members of a professional community which takes responsibility for its own learning;
- making the best use of both time and expertise in planning for essential continuing professional development, including the sharing of good practice;
- adopting open and objective approaches to self-evaluation in establishments and services, taking full account of the views of learners, and planning and implementing improvements based directly on these approaches;
- engaging constructively with other professionals to ensure children and young people are supported to be successful; and
- increasing teachers' capacity to operate confidently and competently within a less directed environment.

The developing culture of professional dialogue is leading to better appreciation that self-evaluation should focus on improving the quality of learning and teaching and outcomes for children and young people. Well-focused CPD continues to grow, sharing effective practice, ideas and developments with colleagues within and across schools and establishments. Most schools in the independent sector still need to consider how to involve children and young people more in evaluating the success of the school in meeting its aims. Teachers in special schools and residential care workers are now leading and involved in school and service improvement priorities,

including those related to Curriculum for Excellence. Although there is improvement in pre-schools' and schools' ability to build their capacity for improvement, a significant number continue to experience difficulties in knowing how best to use information that they gather to improve the service they provide. In colleges, staff are engaged in quality systems and are taking responsibility to ensure successful learning takes place. Teacher education providers have developed and increased the range and focus of CPD they offer to practising teachers.

Success for all learners

Priorities from 2005 to 2008 report:

- identifying and tackling barriers to learning before they become entrenched;
- finding new ways to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse population of learners, including newcomers to Scotland for whom English is an additional language; and
- personalising learning and support to take account of individual needs, choices and circumstances while relentlessly reinforcing high expectations.

In pre-school centres, most children requiring additional support with their learning are identified early and a programme of staged intervention is put in place. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of confidence and skill in pre-school unpromoted staff in their assessments of children and how to plan for support to individuals. Primary schools are building their knowledge and skills in more effective support for vulnerable children and their families. Continued work in monitoring progress, particularly outwith the classroom, is needed. In secondary schools, improvements are still needed in the way teachers use information from learning support and pastoral care colleagues, and in communication at times of course choices. In independent schools serving children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, individualised support was a relatively strong dimension of school effectiveness. A strength in special schools is the increasing opportunities for young people to have their achievements recognised, including through accreditation. Less successful is coordinating support for groups of learners, including those children and young people who are looked after, young carers and those with mental health difficulties. Community Learning and Development has had a positive impact where family learning includes supporting children at home. This has demonstrated increased adult employability, reduced offending and enabling people to take a greater role in the development of their own community. Colleges have developed their work in conjunction with other national initiatives, such as Skills for Scotland, 16+ Learning Choices and Curriculum for Excellence. Overall, there is still much to be done to close the gap in achievement in Scottish education.

Section two

Sectoral summaries of findings from 2008 to 2011.

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1 Pre-school

Background

From April 2008 to December 2011, we inspected 1154 pre-school centres which included local authority nursery classes, nursery schools, nursery special schools, and family centres, private providers, voluntary providers and independent school nursery classes.

Summary of key findings from 2008 to 2011

How well do children learn and achieve?

Evidence from the period 2008 to 2011 shows that, overall, centres work well to engage young children in their learning through play, and children respond by showing enjoyment and enthusiasm. Children's thinking is best challenged and they develop their ideas and concepts well when they are involved in making decisions about what they will learn. They also benefit from interaction with adults who listen closely to them and use open-ended questioning in discussions. These children are well motivated to learn and take increasing responsibility for selecting tasks and activities. They begin to make connections across their learning and their interest levels are sustained for extended periods of time. The 2009 report noted that staff interactions to extend and challenge children's learning required further development. Evidence for this report shows that, in less positive situations, children still spend too much time in routine or overly structured activities which do not challenge or extend their thinking. As a result, children are not meaningfully engaged in their learning. In a significant number of centres, children are not involved enough in activities which promote deep levels of thinking and problem solving.

Overall, children progress well in their learning, with 95% of centres showing satisfactory or better improvements for children. Performance in local authority nursery schools was better overall with 96% achieving satisfactory or better evaluations, compared to 92% in private and voluntary establishments. However, 8% of private and voluntary centres were evaluated as weak or unsatisfactory. In most centres, most children are making good progress in early language and literacy development. Where this is most effective, staff provide well-planned experiences for children both inside and out-of-doors. Where this is not positive, activities are often too easy for children and they need more extension and challenge to develop their skills in other aspects of the curriculum such as science. Similarly, in early mathematics and numeracy, most children are developing appropriate skills. These skills, however, are not being developed enough in real life contexts and when children are playing outdoors.

How well does the pre-school support children to develop and learn?

In best practice, staff use experiences and outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence to plan a broad and balanced range of experiences across children's learning which also provides progression over time. In most centres, staff are using the design principles to evaluate how well the curriculum they provide is meeting the learning needs of children as individuals and as groups. Programmes of activities are stimulating, enjoyable and challenging overall, and show links across areas of learning. Where children are continually involved in, for example, the development of the curriculum, it is resulting in high motivation and engagement in learning. However, there are still centres where literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing are not well embedded into meaningful, real life contexts for children. Staff need more help and guidance in gaining a clear understanding of the contexts for learning through Curriculum for Excellence. Opportunities for outdoor learning are improving across all types of sectors with almost all children being able to access outside activities more regularly. Outstanding examples were noted in forest kindergartens. Staff would benefit from a clearer understanding of how outdoor learning allows children to experience more challenge through investigation and exploration of the natural world.

Almost all staff observe children and record their progress in individual profiles. In the best practice, documentation of children's learning relates to continual development of knowledge and understanding and skills over time. Staff show skill in fully involving children in planning and discussing their learning effectively. They support children's learning through well-timed questioning and discussion. However, in the majority of centres, observation and assessment information is not used well to inform planning and build progression in children's learning. In a few centres, it is unclear from evidence in children's profiles exactly how much progress children are making, despite staff recording children's achievements. Staff need to build their skills and confidence further in consulting with children about their interests and how to use information more productively to promote learning. Most children requiring additional support with their learning are identified early and heads and managers ensure that a programme of staged intervention is in place. Staff make good use of the advice and guidance from a range of external agencies and work in partnership to support children's learning and development when required. They work alongside parents, outside agencies and other establishments to set appropriate targets for individual children. These are reviewed on a regular basis. In a few centres, unpromoted staff are less confident in their assessments of children and are unsure of what to plan for individual children. Some staff still have limited awareness of their role in implementing additional support for learning legislation or taking forward major national initiatives such as the Early Years Framework.

How well does the pre-school improve the quality of its work?

Variability across sectors continues to impact adversely on the overall quality of provision nationally. Frequent changes to management and staff teams do not help to provide an effective base for sustained improvement. In most centres, there is an increasing awareness and better understanding of what makes effective leadership. There is strong commitment by heads to developing teamwork. The most successful leaders encourage innovation at all levels and staff are encouraged to take individual

responsibilities. Examples include centres where staff form working parties to review and improve aspects of their work and monitor the impact of improvements for children. In a significant number of centres, heads and managers need to develop the leadership capacity of staff within their centre. Recent inspection evidence shows that managers and leaders within partner provider nurseries are improving their qualifications to address the increased expectations of the Scottish Social Services Council's (SSSC) requirements for registration. They are extending their qualifications, in particular, to gain the BA in Early Childhood Practice.

Evidence shows that there is an increasing culture of self-evaluation but it still remains an area for continued improvement. Staff are more aware of the purpose of self-evaluation and, overall, are becoming more professionally reflective. There is better appreciation that self-evaluation should focus on improving the quality of learning and teaching. Across most centres, staff meet regularly to evaluate and plan together. In the best examples, staff and all stakeholders are involved in and fully committed to the ongoing improvement of the centre. Where effective experiences for children were noted, staff had access to continuing professional development of suitably high quality. Professional development opportunities and helpful feedback from a skilled manager to other staff can help to improve experiences for children on a more sustained basis. However, the impact of such professional development opportunities is variable. This is more notable in partnership centres, where it can be limited by availability of courses, funding, staff time for reflection and professional dialogue with colleagues, within and beyond their centres. Staff still require more guidance and support in their understanding of how to implement innovations. In such centres, staff need support to access training that has a focus on curriculum, learning and teaching. Good practice needs to be shared in ways which allow equality of access across centres and sectors. Cluster groups run by the local authority need to be mindful to include all pre-school centres, including those from the private and voluntary sectors.

Key strengths

- Children who are enthusiastic and motivated and enjoy learning experiences which challenge their thinking.
- The increased engagement children have in making choices about their learning is helping to increase their motivation.
- Improved access for children to well developed outdoor play is extending and enhancing their learning experiences.
- Pre-school centres have developed more effective partnerships with their parents and the local community, involving them in children's learning.
- Children's increased opportunities to experience early language and mathematics through play is developing their understanding of the context for using these skills.
- Pre-school centres are developing a better understanding of leadership and teamwork with staff, particularly through improved professional development.

Aspects for improvement

- More effective use of observation and assessment information is needed to plan for children's progress in learning experiences. Staff also need to develop children's individual profiles to show more depth and personalisation for children.

- Staff need training and support in order to improve their understanding of and engagement with self-evaluation. This will ensure a higher emphasis is placed on evaluating the quality of learning, teaching and children's progress.
- Continued development of the curriculum is needed, especially to improve the balance between planned learning and responding to children's interests.
- Improved staff qualifications now need to show impact through improvements on experiences for children.

2 Primary

Background

Education Scotland inspects a sample of between two and three hundred primary schools each year. The sample is representative of the type of schools to be found across the country. It includes schools of different sizes in both rural and urban settings across education authorities. The following sample consisted of 901 local authority primary schools.

Summary of key findings from 2008 to 2011

How well do children learn and achieve?

Overall, the quality of learners' experiences has improved since the 2009 report. In most schools, the quality of learners' experiences is good. In 42% of schools, it is very good or better, and children engage in active learning and take responsibility for planning and evaluating aspects of their progress. In best practice, staff are using a wide range of strategies to support children in developing skills to review their learning and progress realistically. This is helping them to develop a better understanding about how they learn as well as what they are learning. In some schools, children's awareness of their strengths, progress and next steps in learning mathematics is increasing. Children are engaging increasingly in collaborative learning across curricular areas.

In almost all schools, children continue to achieve well. The number of schools where outcomes for children are very good or better has increased since our 2009 report. Children's achievement and progress in English language and literacy remains variable. While children are benefiting increasingly from planned opportunities to apply and develop literacy and numeracy skills across learning, their ability to use literacy skills to help them learn in different curricular areas is not well enough developed. Overall, children are articulate in expressing their views and responding to questions. Children are being provided with opportunities to collaborate with each other in pairs and groups. As a result, they are becoming more confident in participating in discussions which are not led by the teacher. Inspection reports continue to highlight the need to improve children's Gaelic language writing skills. Children are beginning to take a problem-solving approach across mathematics and use their skills in real-life contexts in many schools. In the early stages of primary, children are progressing well in their knowledge and understanding of number processes. They learn increasingly through engaging and active contexts. In science, children have gaps in their knowledge, understanding and skills. As yet, children have insufficient opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning across curricular areas.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

The extent to which learners' needs are met is good or better in most schools. In most schools, teachers are planning tasks and activities that provide most children with appropriate levels of challenge. As yet, staff do not always take sufficient account of the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, including personalisation and choice, in order to ensure that higher-attaining children are sufficiently challenged in their learning. Staff are using questioning increasingly well to help children to reflect on and understand how they learn. Schools often meet the needs of children requiring additional support well and staff are developing their understanding of additional support for learning legislation. In taking forward the *GIRFEC* approach, staff are developing a range of knowledge and skills which are helping them to provide effective support for vulnerable children and their families. Most schools are still at the early stages of monitoring children's progression effectively in learning outwith the classroom. Achievements may be recorded in profiles or personal learning logs but the information is not yet used effectively to ensure development of attributes, capabilities and skills. As schools introduce profiles, staff are providing personal support increasingly to help children reflect on and evaluate their work. Parents are becoming increasingly involved in the life and work of the school through, for example, attending curriculum information evenings and offering their views on aspects of the school's work. There is scope to involve parents to a greater extent in their own child's learning in partnership with the school.

Most schools continue to provide a curriculum of a good standard. As staff continue to develop confidence in planning, using experiences and outcomes, they are beginning to gain an understanding of progression in different curricular areas. In most instances this is helping them to plan tasks and activities which ensure an improved pace of learning. Children are benefiting increasingly from planned opportunities to apply and develop literacy and numeracy skills across learning but better partnership working is needed across the primary/secondary school interface to develop more effective continuity and progression across all curricular areas for all learners. Approaches to learning and teaching of Gaelic language skills have developed significantly over time. In the best examples, schools have agreed and well thought-out approaches for developing children's knowledge and use of language, but more needs to be done to develop skills in writing Gaelic. Across schools, teaching and learning in mathematics has benefited from being developed in real-life contexts, such as in running enterprising events. In the sciences, there is an improvement with more effective use of direct teaching, questioning and involving children in collaborative approaches. This is partly due to the national improvements in pedagogy arising from Curriculum for Excellence. As schools develop their curriculum using Curriculum for Excellence, staff are improving their courses and programmes individually and often with their associated nursery and secondary schools. Although, associated schools need to work together more effectively to ensure continuity in methodology from pre-school to primary and from primary to secondary school. In a number of schools, there is now a need to take a more strategic view when planning the curriculum. In particular, too many schools are not yet developing the attributes and capabilities which children need for their futures in a systematic or planned way. As a result, all too often these key skills for learning, life and work are being missed, or are not being developed effectively in a progressive way. Many schools now need to look again at these skills, which are

specified in Curriculum for Excellence, and build them into the core of learning and teaching approaches at all stages.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

Most primary schools are led well. Staff at all levels are increasingly taking responsibility for developing aspects of the work of the school. Taking forward priorities in the improvement plan in this way is having a positive impact on learners' experiences. The number of schools that are making very good or better progress in improving the quality of their work has increased. Most headteachers work effectively with staff, children and parents to develop a shared vision for their school. They identify accurately strengths of the school and areas for improvement. These are then shared through school improvement plans and standards and quality reports. Staff continue to develop skills in monitoring the quality of learning and teaching. Teachers are increasingly participating in continuous professional development which is supporting them to develop the curriculum. In evaluating the impact of curriculum development, schools are at different stages in tracking and assessing children's progress. Children are developing confidence in assessing their own learning. In best practice, this is helping them to develop a better understanding about what and how they learn. This often involves peer assessment or the use of a traffic lighting system so that children can indicate how secure they feel in aspects of their learning. Schools are increasingly finding creative ways in which to involve children in evaluating the work of the school.

Key strengths

- Children are confident in their learning and well-behaved.
- Children are being provided with more opportunities to be active in their learning and to make decisions about how they learn.
- Schools have developed positive partnerships with parents and involve them more in the life and work of the school.
- Schools are increasing the number of links with businesses and organisations in order to enhance learners' experiences.
- Staff are developing more effective ways of providing support for vulnerable children and their families.

Aspects for improvement

- Many schools now need to review their curriculum structure to ensure that appropriate account is taken of the principles of curriculum planning and tasks and activities are planned across the entirety of the curriculum, with the attributes and capabilities built into the core of all learning and teaching.
- Tracking and recording learning and achievement in order to ensure continuity and progress in learning, with a stronger emphasis on gauging progress in attributes and capabilities.
- Children need more meaningful involvement in planning their own learning.
- ICT needs to be used more effectively to support learning across the curriculum.

3 Secondary

Background

Education Scotland inspected 166 local authority secondary schools between April 2008 and December 2011. The sample is representative of the types of school to be found across the country. It includes schools of different sizes in both rural and urban settings across education authorities.

Summary of key findings from 2008 to 2011

How well do young people learn and achieve?

The quality of learning continues to be good in almost all schools with examples of very good and outstanding teaching. Day-to-day learning experiences are benefiting from an increasing range of methodologies and more active engagement of learners. Teachers are helping young people to see the purpose behind their learning through well-focused learning intentions. Whilst there is not yet consistently effective practice, young people are clear that having an awareness of the context for their learning and which skills they are developing helps them learn better. Teachers are increasingly engaging young people in relevant contexts for their learning, using topical issues to increase interest and motivation. The quality of relationships is high overall with environments which encourage learning. Where teachers are using the design principles of Curriculum for Excellence in their planning, learning is more vibrant, for example young people carrying out investigations and personal research to reach their own conclusions. These kinds of activities are allowing young people to take more responsibility for their learning and make progress. Across all stages, young people are developing and applying enterprise, citizenship and leadership skills through a range of school and community activities. Young people need more help to set appropriate learning targets and next steps in their development, based on their strengths and prior learning. More needs to be done to make this a feature of all learners' experiences and to promote independence and creativity. For many schools, improving the consistency of the quality of learning and teaching remains a top priority. Overall, there is still work to do to share good practice effectively to help raise standards.

Overall performance in examinations continues to be good. In the period 2008 to 2011, the percentage of young people achieving five or more qualifications at SCQF level 5 continued to improve. Those gaining three or more qualifications at SCQF level 6 also continued to improve. There are still concerns about inappropriate levels of presentation for some young people. The need to raise levels of attainment remains a priority. On the basis of evidence prior to August 2010, S1/S2 continued to be the phase which added least value to the progress and achievements of many young people.

How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

Many schools recognise that personal support, regular conversations about progress and an understanding of what motivates young people to learn, remain vital ingredients to success for each and every learner. Monitoring and tracking against attainment targets continues to be an improving aspect across schools, with tracking often being well-linked to effective mentoring of young people. Tracking learning across all year groups for timely and coherent intervention remains an area for development. While teachers are working hard to present young people with many opportunities to develop new knowledge, skills and attributes, young people are not benefiting from coherent arrangements to track their achievements or discuss the impact of their achievements on their learning as a whole. Young people continue to need more help in setting relevant and challenging learning targets, including identifying and planning opportunities for personal achievements.

Evidence shows that schools are increasingly sharing responsibility for meeting the needs of all learners, including those with additional support needs, across all staff. The quality of support for learning given by specialist staff continues to be a strength. There remains scope for subject teachers across the school to improve the range of suitable tasks and activities they provide to meet the needs of all learners in all aspects of their learning. This includes providing young people with appropriate levels of challenge and support to ensure they make progress in their learning. Improvement needs remain in the ways teachers use information provided by learning support and pastoral care colleagues. There is still work to do to improve aspects of partnership working at times of course choices, for example communication between and across partners and agreeing levels of expectation.

Schools are developing their curriculum to include a wide range of experiences and new courses, awards and qualifications. This includes more skills-based courses such as Skills for Work and ASDAN² provision, and most young people in S4 benefit from well-planned work experience. Understanding how to support progression for all learners remains central to the work of all schools as they take forward improvements as part of the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. Developing curriculum links across sectors continues to be an area that staff are actively working on to help young people build on their prior learning and support progression in learning. The use of experiences and outcomes in curriculum planning and teaching has become a significant feature of early secondary stages. Schools are also increasingly providing opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, alongside subject learning, at these stages. There is evidence of good partnership working, particularly with regard to meeting needs. However, there is still a need for stronger leadership of partnership working, including working within clusters to improve curricular transitions, and to extend and enhance the curriculum.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The leadership of the headteacher continues to be a strength, overall, and in most cases, the leadership of the senior management team. Almost all headteachers have a clear vision for their school and have shared this with the school community.

² Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network

Most have high expectations and know their school well. Increasingly, headteachers are motivating teachers to share in leadership across the school. In some cases, there is scope for deputy headteachers to work more effectively with subject departments to have a greater impact on improving learning. In most schools, principal teachers or faculty heads lead learning well within their subject areas. This remains variable within schools, however. There is still scope for principal teachers and faculty heads to become more involved in leading whole-school developments and for headteachers to develop leadership more effectively at this level.

In-house, school and departmental continuing professional development continues to grow, based on sharing good practice and cascading developments. This is helping to develop a culture of professional dialogue and moving department meetings away from routine matters. Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs) are also proving influential in supporting this culture. Most headteachers have used self-evaluation effectively to decide upon improvement priorities. There is a clearer focus on improving learning. Headteachers are becoming more collegiate in their approach and are involving staff, parents and young people more effectively in school improvement. Most have good links with the local community. However, there is still a need for a clearer strategic approach to leading and managing change and a need to communicate this more clearly to all stakeholders. Improvements are needed in the leadership of the curriculum to drive forward the high expectations of a broad general education for all our young people. Self-evaluation for improvement remains an area of relative weakness in the sector's profile. Whilst the processes for self-evaluation continue to become well embedded in the work of schools, this does not always lead to significant improved outcomes for learners.

Key strengths

- Young people who are polite, courteous and friendly and show a positive attitude to learning.
- Teacher-pupil relationships which are high quality and ensure learning takes place in a positive climate.
- Young people who are gaining achievements in a range of activities both in and out of school.
- Young people's learning and achievement is being supported through a wide range of partnerships with schools.
- Schools provide high quality support, care and welfare to young people.
- Staff demonstrate commitment to the life and work of the school and in improving the outcomes for young people.
- Headteachers and senior managers show quality of leadership and have high expectations for their schools and young people.

Aspects for improvement

- Approaches to self-evaluation need to impact on young people's learning and achievements, including their attainment.
- Schools now need to ensure high quality and consistency in learning and teaching, and ensure that good practice is shared.
- Develop the curriculum with better progression pathways in order to meet the needs of all learners.

- Schools' approaches to meeting learning needs in order to improve support and challenge in learning should be developed further.
- There is room to improve tracking and monitoring of young people's progress and achievements to ensure improved attainment, particularly for those young people who are at risk of missing out.

4 Independent schools

Background

Education Scotland inspects a small sample of independent schools each year. The inspection sample covers schools from large independent boarding schools, prep schools, all-through schools, Steiner schools, faith schools and schools serving groups of children and young people with particular needs. We also carry out professional engagement and quality improvement visits, and inspections of newly registered schools. A total of 34 inspections and visits were made over the period from 2008 to 2011.

Summary of key findings from 2008 to 2011

How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

In most of the independent schools inspected, the quality of learners' experiences is at least good; and in the majority of cases very good. In the best practice, children and young people enjoy a very good variety of learning experiences in a wide range of aspects of school life, including well-planned learning in the evenings and at weekends for those in residential settings. As a result, they engage very well and demonstrate commitment and independence in their learning. In a minority of schools, teachers need to provide more opportunities for young people to think carefully about what they are learning and work together to find solutions and develop their own ideas. Young people also need more opportunities to have increased responsibility for how they learn. The use of ICT as a medium of learning is very variable, ranging from exceptional to very limited.

In almost all cases, young people in the larger independent secondary or all-through schools learn and achieve well. Almost all of these types of school have major strengths. Patterns of attainment in certification, which include GCSE and A level as well as SQA qualifications, are strong overall. The range of personal achievements in these schools continues to be very strong, a characteristic of the sector as a whole. Attainment in faith or Steiner schools is more variable, although the emphasis on personal development is very high.

How well does the school support children and young people to develop and learn?

The degree to which learners' needs are met is good or better in almost all schools. In more than half of the inspection sample, this dimension is very good or excellent. Overall, schools meet the full range of their learners needs in flexible ways. Often specific support for children and young people with particular needs is very well focused and personalised. In schools serving children and young people with social

and emotional difficulties, this was a relatively strong dimension of school effectiveness.

Overall, the holistic nature of the curriculum in almost all independent schools is a relative strength of the sector. Most curricula are judged to be good or better. The need for better progression and continuity tends to be a recurrent issue in those judged to be less effective. The curricula offered within the independent sector are diverse and tailored to meet the aims of individual schools. The pattern of certification between those schools following Scottish qualification examinations and those offering English examination board courses is very variable. In Steiner or faith schools, the selection of examination courses undertaken is usually very particular to the school and the interests of young people.

The aims of individual independent schools affect the degree to which they wish to follow the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, directly or indirectly. An emerging issue is the need for those schools which do not follow Curriculum for Excellence, to be aware of the developments in the maintained sector, to allow them to build on the progress and experiences of children and young people who come from schools where Curriculum for Excellence is central.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

Leadership in independent schools is a strength. Most senior management teams set clear goals, and consistently, for improvement, particularly in examination results. They develop clear aims for their schools. Children, young people and staff take on leadership opportunities such as leading pupil or staff groups very successfully. In almost all schools, there are effective approaches to ensuring teachers continue to develop and improve their practice. In over half of the inspection sample, improvement through self-evaluation is good or better. In a quarter of the sample, it is satisfactory, with strengths just outweighing weaknesses. Most schools are aware of the principles of self-evaluation. Most have a school improvement plan, although these vary significantly in structure and focus. In some cases, the plan is essentially a business plan rather than a clear identification of improvement priorities involving staff and pupils.

A critical issue is the relative importance accorded to the monitoring of learning and teaching and the tracking of young people's progress and attainment. Most schools monitor and track the progress of young people very well. In a few schools, the progress of young people is not monitored carefully enough. A recurrent need across the sector is to identify a systematic strategy for evaluating the extent to which the school is meeting its declared aims. Most schools should consider how to involve children and young people in evaluating the success of the school in meeting its aims.

Key strengths

- Most children and young people engage well in a variety of learning experiences and gain a wide range of quality achievements.
- Almost all schools in the sector offer a broad curriculum which also supports the holistic nature and aspects of school life.

- Schools provide flexible and often personalised support to meet the individual needs of children and young people.
- Leadership and creativity demonstrated by staff and young people ensures they achieve as well as possible.

Aspects for improvement

- Schools need to continue the development of improvement through self-evaluation, focusing on the impact of the school's work on meeting its declared aims.
- More rigorous use of school development planning is needed which supports improvement in learning and teaching.
- Young people are now ready to be given more responsibility in their learning and in how the school improves.

5 Special schools

Background

The inspection of special schools included day special schools, special units in primary and secondary schools, residential special schools³ and secure units. We inspected a total of 112 schools and 93 units. The following paragraphs provide a summary of our inspection findings across these provisions.

Summary of key findings from 2008 to 2011

How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Across special schools, the quality of teaching and learners' experiences continues to improve. Positive relationships between staff and learners are a strong feature. Children and young people are more involved in their learning by having responsibility for reviewing their own progress and in setting personal targets. Staff are gaining confidence in using the experiences and outcomes in Curriculum for Excellence to provide children and young people with engaging and relevant activities. This is having a positive impact on learners' motivation. In residential special schools and secure care services, these improvements are assisted by the availability of suitably qualified teachers and schools' ability to attract and retain teachers and other specialist staff.

In a number of special schools, children are making very good progress from previous levels of attainment across primary stages. Overall, at secondary stages, young people's attainment is improving. Many young people are achieving well in SQA qualifications, extending the number and range of Access units achieved. A few young people, including those in secure care, are now undertaking and achieving awards at Intermediate and Higher level. Children and young people now have a range of opportunities to have their achievements recognised through a broader range of accreditation. Many achieve accreditation through ASDAN, Caledonian awards and The Duke of Edinburgh's Awards Scheme. A few schools and services provide outstanding opportunities for young people to develop appropriate vocational skills and relevant qualifications. However, there is still considerable scope to increase expectations and raise attainment for some children and young people, particularly those with social, emotional and behavioural needs, and those who are looked after.

³ Residential Special Schools include those run by local authorities, those grant aided and those independently managed.

How well does the school support children and young people to develop and learn?

In most special schools, children and young people are experiencing a broader curriculum as staff continue to develop the curriculum in line with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence. There are some very good examples of curriculum planning where young people are involved in creating their own curricular pathways. Most residential special schools and secure services plan opportunities to develop the skills and attributes of the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. In many residential special schools, curriculum planning needs to take more explicit account of the care context.

In a significant minority of schools, learners are not yet experiencing a coherent, broad general education. Residential special schools show a varied pattern of progress in implementing a coherent curriculum from 3 to 18. This is partly the result of shorter placements and the impact of interrupted learning experienced by many of these children and young people. Literacy and communication, numeracy and health and wellbeing are beginning to be embedded throughout the curriculum. In residential schools, care and education staff are working together to develop more relevant and progressive approaches to promoting health and wellbeing. These approaches include those that focus on positive attitudes and nurturing. At the secondary stages, the curriculum gives appropriate attention to developing young people's skills for life and work. Most schools are beginning to develop interdisciplinary learning that is helping children and young people to see the links and relevance of different areas of learning. Schools are giving children and young people extended opportunities for personal achievements through a wide range of sporting and cultural activities, including well-planned residential and experiences at home and abroad. Where appropriate, children and young people are benefiting from undertaking some of their learning with their peers in mainstream schools and colleges. However, there is considerable scope to improve partnership working between mainstream and special schools to help ensure that children and young people can access a broad general education. The length of the school day in a small number of special schools and units is still not in line with that of mainstream schools. In these schools and units, young people's expected entitlement to education is not being met fully.

In almost all special schools, staff use a range of suitable approaches to meet the needs of learners with a wide range of additional support needs. Overall, programmes and activities meet the varying needs of learners well. In the best examples, schools integrate a range of therapeutic programmes within the curriculum. Others are making innovative use of the outdoor environment to support children and young people to learn. Support assistants continue to make important contributions to the learning and progress of individuals and groups of learners. Most residential special schools, and almost all secure care services, have now developed initial assessment which involves the use of comprehensive baseline data and careful planning to take forward young people's learning and care needs. In residential special schools, care and education staff jointly support children and young people to achieve their learning targets, but there is considerable scope to develop further shared approaches to supporting the learning of children and young people in care settings.

Partnerships between schools, local authorities and appropriate agencies are improving. There is an increasing understanding of the importance of multi-agency working and using *GIRFEC* approaches to ensure that children and their families get the right help at the right time. Most independent residential special schools are beginning to develop better links with placing authorities to establish agreed outcomes for young people. Genuine learning partnerships with parents continue to be challenging to maintain, particularly for secure care services and schools for young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Education authorities and special schools are not yet achieving consistency in the provision of coordinated support plans for children and young people who meet the relevant criteria for having one. Particular consideration needs to be given to children and young people who are looked after, are young carers, or have mental health difficulties.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The leadership and management of special schools continue to improve, with several examples of outstanding and inspirational leadership. In the best examples, senior managers have a very clear vision for their school and its development. They are empowering staff to take on leadership roles in developing and implementing Curriculum for Excellence, bringing about important changes to children and young people's learning experiences. In a few schools, senior managers have not provided a clear sense of direction and there needs to be a better focus on improving learning, teaching and the curriculum.

Special schools have shown an increasing commitment to using self-evaluation as an important tool in improving provision. However, around a fifth of schools are still not making effective use of the information gathered about their school to bring about positive changes to the quality of its work. In particular, staff need to ensure that relevant data and information are managed effectively to help children receive, and benefit from, appropriate support. Most schools have developed systems which give young people a say in improving the school.

Key strengths

- Special schools have developed high quality relationships among children, staff and parents.
- Continuing improvements have been made in the quality of learners' experiences.
- Young people are gaining better levels of attainment and have increasing opportunities to have their achievements recognised.
- Almost all schools are very effective in meeting the wide range of children's and young people's learning and support needs.
- Strong leadership and management is developing in an increasing number of special schools.

Aspects for improvement

- Special schools should continue to implement Curriculum for Excellence with a view to maximising learners' achievements and preparing them well for life beyond school.

- Staff need to increase expectations and continue to raise attainment, particularly for children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- Partnership working between mainstream and special schools needs to be strengthened to help ensure that children and young people can access a broad general education.
- More effective use should be made of the information gathered through self-evaluation activities to drive up standards and improve provision for all learners.

6 Learning communities

Background

In September 2008, HM Inspectors made a significant change to the way we inspect Community Learning and Development (CLD). This was in line with the findings of *Improving Scottish Education, 2005 to 2008* which noted the need for CLD to link its work with that of other providers, including schools. The Learning Community inspection model now includes the work of a range of publicly funded CLD providers within the geographical areas surrounding non-denominational secondary schools. The secondary school and its learning community are inspected at the same time. Inspection teams in denominational secondary schools, all-through schools and secondary special schools also consider the impact of learning in the community.

Significant additional funding provided by the Scottish Government since 2009 for upskilling the CLD workforce has enabled CLD providers in the public and voluntary sectors to develop the knowledge and skills needed to address the new agendas successfully.

Summary of key findings from 2008 to 2011

Over the past three years, 132 learning communities have been inspected across Scotland. This has provided a national overview of young people's and adult learners' experiences of learning, and how communities are being supported to develop and increase their own capacity. The programme has focused more strongly on the essential relationship between learning in school and the contribution that learning in the community provides for young people.

HMIE published a report *Learning in Scotland's Communities* which summarised our findings of those learning communities we had inspected until March 2011. The report focused on five key areas: improvements in performance, impact on young people, impact on adults, impact on the community, and how well the learning community improves its work. It also signalled strengths in learning communities and those areas where improvement is still needed. More inspections have been carried out since that report was published: its messages still stand and are incorporated in the summary which follows.

How well do participants learn and achieve?

Over the past three years, in most learning community inspections, the impact on young people and adults was good or better. This represents consistently strong performance. Inspectors highlighted a wide range of benefits from learning community work such as the impact of family learning on supporting children's learning at home, increased employability and improved mental health and

wellbeing. Increasing numbers of people, including young people, are able to take a greater role in the development of their own community and many now play a key role in helping to regenerate and develop local communities. Opportunities for accredited achievement using award programmes have significantly improved over the last three years. The use of awards to recognise achievement and learning outwith a classroom or school environment is now increasingly common across Scotland. More young people and adults are having their contribution recognised through accredited achievement awards. While the impacts of CLD are overall very positive, providers are still less able to offer clear data and measurable evidence to indicate progress against outcomes. Only a few partnerships are able to demonstrate their effectiveness very well. Nevertheless, this is an improving area.

How well are communities developing and achieving?

In most learning community inspections, HM Inspectors found that the impact on the community was good or better. Inspectors found active communities in urban, rural and urban settings. Groups and individuals were making a significant difference to the communities in which they live. Most communities have notable numbers of adults and young people who give significant amounts of their own time to helping others through volunteering. There is an increasing focus on supporting communities to develop social enterprises and to develop and manage their own services. There is a breadth of very high quality social and community enterprises which deliver important learning opportunities for learners and communities. This is also a significant improvement over the last three years. However, across Scotland, there is notable variability of local people's engagement in local community planning and other decision-making processes. The young person's voice is often too limited. There is a specific need to involve more young people in local decision making. There is considerable potential to build upon successful and innovative approaches to develop citizenship activities to help achieve this.

How effective are providers in improving the quality of services?

The need to improve self-evaluation, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and professional reflections in the CLD sector was recognised in the *Improving Scottish Education, 2005 to 2008* report. The Scottish Government responded to this need by providing two additional support programmes for the CLD sector in 2010 and 2011. The successful start made by the CLD Standards Council has considerably increased the focus on the need for effective CPD for the profession. Core competences and a Code of Ethics for workers and volunteers have now been developed for the sector.

Using self-evaluation as a means of supporting continuous improvement is becoming increasingly more embedded within the culture of learning communities. In just under half of all learning community inspections, this aspect was evaluated as good or better. Whilst this is an improvement from the 2009 publication, there is scope to improve the pace of development. A few partnerships are using joint self-evaluation very effectively, and joint planning leading to improvement is very well developed. Where CLD providers are working well together in partnership, they are clearly making a difference to the quality of the service. An improving understanding of Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes is helping partnerships to

adopt a more outcomes-focused approach to planning. Increasingly, strategic partnerships are being formed round agendas such as *GIRFEC* and [More choices more chances](#) (MCMC). HM Inspectors have found that this approach is often very effective in improving service planning. However, in too many learning communities, joint self-evaluation and joint planning for improvement amongst CLD providers, voluntary organisation and schools are areas needing further improvement.

In another significant improvement since the 2009 publication, other council services such as libraries, sports and cultural services are playing an increasingly important role in delivering learning outcomes in communities. These services regularly feature in learning community and school inspections in support of vulnerable learners and across the broader curriculum. The work of these services has been recognised with the development of *How Good is our Culture and Sport*, a self-evaluation tool for use by these services.

Do learning communities have a clear sense of direction?

Across Scotland, the majority of learning communities have a clear sense of direction, and in most learning communities leadership is effective. In many cases, this is set in a context of complex partnerships made up of very different agencies, departments and services trying to work together towards common goals. Government policies and strategies, such as Curriculum for Excellence, *GIRFEC*, MCMC, Skills for Scotland and Adult Literacies 2020, are effective drivers for change and help partnerships to clarify priorities and direction. In many cases, these are complemented well by specific priorities identified locally. In a few cases, the learning community, including schools, has a very good shared sense of values, and direction and leadership are very strong. There is a need to develop this area further through CPD that brings together the range of professions involved in delivering learning in our communities. This will further support professional dialogue, learning and the exchange of good and effective practices.

Key strengths

- CLD providers have developed and use important skills and experience that support young people to achieve, including those with additional support needs.
- Opportunities for accredited achievement of young people are now developing very well and are helping to provide more opportunities for all.
- Schools and early years centres are becoming increasingly active in working with partners to support learning for parents and carers.
- Increasing numbers of secondary schools are active in supporting young people to engage with their communities. CLD providers are important partners in supporting this development.
- In a few examples, CLD partnerships are very well focused on achieving significant outcomes and demonstrating, through very effective self-evaluation, how well these are being achieved.

Aspects for improvement

- Community practitioners and teachers need more opportunities to learn together, to engage in professional dialogue and in the exchange of effective

practice. This will help to develop a shared understanding about their roles and responsibilities in successfully implementing Curriculum for Excellence.

- Volunteering and other motivating learning activities need to be developed further across partnerships to provide all children and young people with rich learning experiences in both the school and community. This will extend their skills and develop their capabilities and attributes, and so help them prepare better for life and work.
- CLD providers and schools still need to continue to develop the range of accredited achievement awards they use, and to extend accreditation to a wider range of learning programmes
- CLD providers, working with early years centres and schools, should continue to build the confidence of parents to engage as learners themselves and to support their children's learning.
- The young person's voice is too limited in many communities. CLD providers and schools should continue to build a wider range of mechanisms that allow young people to contribute effectively to local and national decision making processes.
- Partnerships within learning communities need to continue to improve their capacity to measure shared outcomes across the full range of their impacts, and to use performance data more effectively to plan together for improvement.

7 Colleges

Background

In September 2008, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) introduced new arrangements for the external review of Scotland's colleges: *External quality arrangements for Scotland's colleges*. These arrangements represented a significant change in the way that HM Inspectors review colleges, including a move from the expression of the outcomes of external review through grades, to expression through statements of confidence.

Inspectors summarise their evaluations through confidence statements. They express confidence, limited confidence, or that they are not confident, with regard to each of four high-level questions. Since 2008, the number of colleges in Scotland has reduced from 43 to 41, through merger activities.

The new quality arrangements introduced the confidence statement relating to *Learner engagement*. Over the last three years, colleges have grasped the concept of empowering learners with enthusiasm. HM Inspectors review two aspects of learner engagement: learners' engagement in enhancing their own learning; and their engagement in enhancing the work and life of the college. This has required colleges to re-examine the ways in which they solicit, hear and respond to the learner voice. Overall, colleges have addressed these challenges well, with almost all colleges involving learners meaningfully and effectively in the work and life of the college. This includes their ensuring that learners have effective systems for representation at faculty level, as well as on major cross-college Boards and committees. Most colleges have also put in place processes which enable learners to influence and enhance their own learning. However, in some colleges, this aspect could be improved. Over the last three years, we have reviewed 35 colleges. Six colleges have had the confidence statement relating to learner engagement caveated⁴.

Summary of key findings for confidence statements from 2008 to 2011

High quality learning

Most learners continue to experience high quality learning and teaching. Relationships between learners and teaching staff are constructive and purposeful, characterised by mutual respect, and this helps create a positive learning environment. Almost all teaching staff use their professional knowledge and

⁴ Inspectors summarise their evaluations through *confidence statements*. In some cases, Inspectors may express *confidence*, but add a **caveat** to the confidence statement.

expertise well to make lessons interesting. They use a wide range of resources, including the effective use of ICT, that successfully engage learners, stimulate reflective learning and encourage independence in learning. Generally, programme design is well considered, responsive to learner and employer needs and creative, to ensure that learners have the necessary knowledge and skills for employment or further study. In developing this work, colleges have taken good account of national initiatives such as Skills for Scotland, 16+ Learning Choices and Curriculum for Excellence. Most learners are progressing well, developing their knowledge and understanding and a range of useful vocational and personal skills. However, in almost 40% of the colleges reviewed, too few learners are successfully attaining their programme awards, particularly at FE level. Most colleges have now responded well to equalities legislation. However, for a few the pace of implementation is still too slow.

Learner engagement

Most learners are actively engaged in enhancing their own learning. In many instances, learners are involved in planning and evaluating a range of learning activities which helps them to be more effective in their studies and influences their future learning activities. However, in 30% of colleges reviewed a main point for action centred on improving learner involvement in further enhancing their own learning. Positive relationships between learners and staff result in most learners being sufficiently confident to raise issues about their learning directly with teaching staff. They do this through informal engagement during lessons and timetabled guidance sessions. Learners' views are sought and usually acted upon promptly. In almost all colleges, learners play an important role by contributing to internal review and self-evaluation of programmes and college services. Most colleges have good learner representation on programme review committees and key cross-college committees to help inform improvements for learners. In most colleges, the students' association and college management have strong, productive working relationships which enable learners and their representatives to contribute meaningfully to learning and the wider life of the college. However, in around 25% of colleges reviewed, a main point for action related to improving arrangements to enable learners to enhance the work and life of the college.

Quality culture

All colleges are led well and most are enhancing the quality of their services for learners and other stakeholders. Principals and senior managers provide effective leadership and management at both strategic and operational levels. Productive engagement with their Boards of Management or Boards of Governors results in clear and appropriate strategic priorities which are well supported by staff. Partnership working with a range of employers, schools, community groups and local and national agencies is particularly strong and effective. All colleges have clear and comprehensive strategic aims, objectives and key targets that link well to those of both the Scottish Government and SFC. Their strategic plans also take very good account of local and national contexts, including labour market trends. Colleges have a strong quality culture. Almost all have robust quality systems in place through which staff take responsibility to ensure learners have successful learning experiences. There continue to be clear examples of improvement and

enhancement to learning and teaching as a result of self-evaluation and review processes. However, a few colleges still do not have sufficiently effective policies and strategies for improving retention, attainment, achievement and learning and teaching.

Key strengths

High quality learning

- Learners are supported well by college staff who provide practical help and encouragement to assist them achieve their learning goals.
- Where issues of low retention or attainment are identified, most curriculum teams introduce a range of well-chosen interventions to address specific programme issues and improve learner success.
- Almost all colleges have now responded well to their statutory obligations for equality issues.

Learner engagement

- Most learners are actively engaged in enhancing their own learning, and are often involved in planning and evaluating learning activities.
- Class representatives are assisted in their role by taking part in useful training, often in partnership with student participation in quality Scotland.
- Almost all colleges have effective arrangements to ensure that learners obtain feedback on matters they have raised.

Quality culture

- Almost all colleges have a strong quality culture with robust quality systems in place through which staff take responsibility to ensure learners have a successful learning experience.
- Colleges have effective reporting arrangements to ensure that Boards of Governors or Boards of Management are able to exercise a strategic overview of quality matters.
- Colleges have strong and effective partnerships with employers, local authorities and community partners which support well the needs of learners.

Aspects for development

High quality learning

- College-wide attainment rates remain consistent over the last three year period, but there remains room for improvement. Where issues of low attainment exist these are often, but not exclusively, in full-time further education programmes.

Learner engagement

- Many colleges continue to find it challenging to engage their diverse learner population in enhancing the work and life of the college. Generally, colleges that have large numbers of part-time learners do not engage these learners sufficiently in the work and life of the college.

Quality culture

- A few colleges still do not evaluate learning and teaching rigorously enough.
- A few colleges continue to have insufficiently effective policies and strategies for improving retention, attainment and learning and teaching.

8 Teacher education

Background

In the last three years, a number of key publications have influenced developments within teacher education in Scotland. These include:

- *Report on the aspect review of Initial Teacher Education*
- [Teaching Scotland's Future: Report of a review of teacher education in Scotland](#)

Since the publication of *Teaching Scotland's Future* in January 2011, the full continuum of teacher education is recognised as including:

- **the early phase** (initial teacher education and probation/induction)
- **career-long professional learning** (from year 2 in the profession onwards)
- **leadership.**

Improving continuity of professional learning across the continuum is a key priority as we move forward on the journey to excellence.

In the last three years, all universities have re-structured the faculty/schools of education. Six out of seven schools of education now form part of a broader faculty structure. This has led to increased cross-sectoral learning. Changes in the numbers of student teachers, particularly in PGDE primary courses, and changes to the organisation of learning, have resulted in significant staffing reductions in all universities.

The Aspect Review on preparation within initial teacher education for Curriculum for Excellence found that:

- University-based teacher educators have now become fully engaged with Curriculum for Excellence and, in some cases, are leading a range of initiatives.
- Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) are well prepared overall to teach Curriculum for Excellence.
- NQTs are reflective practitioners who engage with relevant, up-to date research and consider how to apply this in practice. Some NQTs continue to take an enquiring approach to their practice as they move beyond the induction year.
- A few NQTs are not secure enough in the basics of the teaching of reading, and a few struggle with their own skills in literacy and numeracy. All providers have increased students' knowledge and skills in teaching both literacy and numeracy.

- The readiness of NQTs to teach those aspects of health and wellbeing which are the responsibility of all teachers is not so well developed. Further work is needed to ensure better outcomes in this area.

All universities involved in teacher education have made progress in the way they are preparing new teachers to deliver Curriculum for Excellence since the publication of *Improving Scottish Education 2005 to 2008*. All have improved, to varying extents, the levels of knowledge and understanding about Curriculum for Excellence of staff and students. Almost all NQTs have the basic skills necessary to teach Curriculum for Excellence. *Teaching Scotland's Future* suggests the consistency of the overall quality of the student teacher learning experience needs to improve further. We are currently working with university staff to support improvements in this area, building on current strengths and approaches to self-evaluation.

Despite examples of close, productive partnership working between universities, education authorities, schools and centres, there is still considerable headroom for improvement. Closer collaboration and joint working by all concerned could lead to more consistent, better learning experiences for all students, including when on placement in schools. The recommendations of *Teaching Scotland's Future* clarify further the high level of partnership between all national bodies across the country to ensure the highest quality of career-long teacher education for all teachers.

The publication of *Teaching Scotland's Future* has enabled teacher education providers to examine and improve further their practices in a wide range of areas. Their response to this report has been very positive. All providers have made a positive start, working in partnership with Scottish Government and key stakeholders to take forward the recommendations of this report. The National Partnership Group and sub-groups, which were formed to take forward the recommendations of *Teaching Scotland's Future*, are due to report in the summer of 2012.

Summary of key findings from 2008 to 2011

How well does teacher education impact on how schools support children and young people to develop and learn?

Teacher education providers are developing the range and focus of career-long professional learning they offer to practising teachers. Innovative examples include working alongside teachers on school improvement projects, modelling and sharing skills in professional enquiry. Teachers are now engaging in a wide range of learning and development activities. This includes an increase in collaborative working through professional networks. A number of teachers are beginning to evaluate the quality of their professional development in terms of its impact on young people's learning. Teacher education providers are reviewing their suite of masters level professional learning. This includes improving access and flexibility in terms of the accreditation of practice-based learning.

How well does teacher education impact on how schools improve the quality of their work?

There has been a wide range of developments in this area. There is increasing evidence of the effectiveness of staff working together, peer observation, cluster and partnership working, staff taking leadership roles and NQTs receiving high quality support from teacher mentors. Schools and education authorities are increasingly offering high quality training and support for mentors. In some cases, this is accredited and may contribute to a masters degree. This, in turn, results in improved experiences for NQTs and better learning for young people. Almost all universities offer PGDE students the opportunity for some study modules at Masters level. This is encouraging more teachers to develop their learning further once they are working in schools.

Key strengths

- The overall quality of initial teacher education in Scotland's universities and the continued entitlement to the induction year.
- The emphasis on reflection and professional enquiry within initial teacher education programmes.
- Ways in which universities are responding to *Teaching Scotland's Future* and refreshing courses and programmes, in particular the undergraduate primary education degree.
- The wide range of continuing professional development activities undertaken in Scotland, including an increase in collaborative working through, for example, professional networks.

Aspects for improvement

- The need to continue to work in partnership to implement the recommendations of *Teaching Scotland's Future*.
- More focus on the needs of learners is now needed when planning career-long professional learning. Teachers also need to consider which aspects of the relevant professional standard they will refresh through engaging in particular professional learning activities.
- The consistency, quality and impact of the implementation of professional review and development needs to improve.
- Although a good start has been made by teacher educators to improving the ability of all NQTs to teach literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, there remains scope for further improvement in this area. National partners are currently working together to develop diagnostic tests and support materials to enable aspiring teachers and NQTs to develop their knowledge and skills.
- The effectiveness of partnership working between universities, education authorities and schools needs to be more consistent across the country.

9 Prison learning, skills and employability

Education Scotland inspects Learning, Skills and Employability (LSE) in Scottish prisons as part of the institutional inspections carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons⁵. Over the period 2008 to 2011, HMI participated in the inspection of 12 prisons.

Summary of key findings from 2008 to 2011

How well do prisoners learn and achieve outcomes

The majority of prisoners who engage in educational and vocational programmes learn well and achieve an appropriate range of outcomes. Many prisoners improve their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Most prisoners who engage in vocational programmes develop appropriate essential skills in work-related activities and programmes.

On arrival at their establishment, prisoners undertake a recently upgraded Scottish Prison Service (SPS) induction tool, a procedure to gauge their level of skills in literacy and numeracy and to help ascertain which programmes they wish to pursue. In most cases, staff from the prison's Learning Centre visit prisoners when they are admitted and carry out the assessment. In most prisons, those prisoners serving six months or more are identified as the priority group in relation to education provision. However, although a growing number of prisons make education classes available to all prisoners, irrespective of their length of sentence, there are many remand prisoners who cannot access education or vocational programmes.

Most of the prisoners who participate in education and vocational programmes are motivated and enthusiastic. Large numbers of prisoners gain employability certificates from the British Institute of Cleaning Science (BICS) and Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS) in food hygiene. Many prisoners also gain National Progression Awards (NPA) in construction and hospitality. However, progression opportunities onto further qualifications are very limited. A growing number of prisoners have gained Sports Coaching Awards through their activities in the gymnasium. However, in most prisons, there are very few opportunities for prisoners to gain certification in the laundry or wood assembly programmes. In almost all cases, the acquisition of these skills and qualifications is geared to improving the employment opportunities for prisoners when they have completed their sentences. In more than a few cases, prisoners successfully enter employment following their release.

⁵ LSE is defined by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) as a range of coordinated activities and interventions that address offenders' needs and develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours for offenders to access education, training and employment opportunity on release. It is delivered in part through contracts with two of Scotland's colleges and in part by prison officers.

How well does the prison support prisoners to develop and learn?

In the *Improving Scottish Education report, 2005 to 2008*, Inspectors found that there was a limited range of education and vocational training programmes in Scotland's prisons. While there have been a few initiatives to ensure that more remand prisoners receive access to education or training since then, the range of programmes is limited, demand outstrips supply and there are constraints on prisoners progressing to higher levels of courses. Overall, there is a limited range of education and vocational training programmes in Scotland's prisons. Most of the provision is allocated to long-term prisoners or those serving sentences of at least 6 months. In most vocational training programmes, demand for places outstrips the number of prisoners who apply and prisoners have to wait to gain access to most training programmes. Prisoners have little access to extension activities to build upon their standard programmes or on the qualifications they gain during their sentences.

For increasing numbers of prisoners, access to education programmes and participation in work parties and vocational training programmes results in certification. However, levels of achievement for prisoners on remand are very low as they generally have restricted access to education or training. Most Learning Centres focus their provision on classes in literacy, numeracy and ICT. A growing number of prisons offer classes in music and art. In most prisons, significant numbers of learners attain individual units of study, mainly for programmes undertaken in literacy, numeracy and ICT. However, there are limited opportunities for prisoners to progress to higher levels of provision.

In almost all cases, staff in the Learning Centres, workshops and in gymnasiums are well qualified and experienced for the programmes they offer. Most staff in the Learning Centres are qualified teachers and deliver their programmes to a high standard. In the workshops, almost all SPS staff who deliver vocational training have experienced formal apprenticeships and worked in the relevant employment sector. Staff use their professional expertise and vocational knowledge effectively to make classes interesting and encourage prisoners to explore the topics being studied. Much of the learning and teaching in the Learning Centres and workshops is based upon demonstration followed by one-to-one support as prisoners work through tasks. Prisoners work independently through course materials and receive support and clarification when they encounter a problem or task where they need advice. This approach serves prisoners well and helps to keep them motivated and engaged in their programmes. Most prisons make good use of peer tutors. These are prisoners in Learning Centres who support their fellow learners on a one-to-one basis in class. This approach enhances the learning experience for prisoners and supports them well in developing their skills and knowledge effectively.

Overall, prisoners have access to a limited range of out-of-cell activities. The most prominent of these activities is the provision of physical education (PE) classes. In general, prisoners have good access to the gymnasiums, and PE staff offer flexible provision for the wide range of prisoner needs. Prison library facilities vary from the majority of prisons which have no library or a poor reading stock, to a few establishments which employ professional librarians with strong partnerships with

local authorities and an up-to-date collection of reading materials. The majority of prisons offer out-of-cell activities for prisoners who wish to pursue creative activities. In a few prisons, these activities have been very successful and staff have gained a well-deserved reputation in the community for delivering high quality creative activities. For example, there are visits from authors and theatre groups, and prisoners have published poetry and short stories as a result of their studies. Prisoners who engage in these types of activities develop appropriate essential skills.

How well does the prison improve the quality of its work?

Learning Centre staff use a range of self-evaluation procedures to identify progress being made and further actions required for improvement. In almost all cases, they use the quality assurance and improvement procedures developed by Motherwell College or Carnegie College⁶. In the majority of Learning Centres, staff make use of prisoner questionnaires and use prisoner focus group meetings to receive feedback on the educational services they provide. In the vocational workshops and gymnasiums, there is little involvement of learners in the self-evaluation of their programmes. Discussions between staff and internal verifiers are the main mechanisms for improvement. Staff keep accurate records of prisoner progress on their individual programmes. However, self-evaluation in learning centres and vocational programmes to ensure consistent improvement in experiences for prisoners is not of a sufficiently high quality.

Overall, since the publication of the 2005 to 2008 report, there has been an improvement in the use of self-evaluation procedures in learning centres in Scotland's prisons. However, the action plans which stem from these procedures are, too often, insufficiently specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. This makes it difficult for staff to demonstrate improvements over time. Quality improvement processes require a stronger focus on identifying and setting targets for improvement. In the 2005 to 2008 report, we identified a need to strengthen the links between Learning Centre staff and the Scottish Prison Service. Since then, links between college staff in the Learning Centre and SPS staff have not improved sufficiently. Opportunities to offer complementary elements of programmes are taken in a few centres but, overall, there is no evidence to suggest that both college and SPS staff are working together in partnership or in a coordinated way. In addition, in most cases, SPS and Learning Centre staff do not communicate effectively enough or work together sufficiently in constructive partnership.

Key strengths

- The majority of prisoners engaging in educational and vocational programmes progress in developing an appropriate range of skills and gaining certification.
- Learners are highly motivated and engaged in their learning.
- The engagement of professional and committed educators to deliver learning and develop skills has helped raise standards of experiences.

⁶ The SPS have a contract with Motherwell College and Carnegie College for the provision of the range of programmes delivered in prison Learning Centres. This excludes the prisons at Addiewell and Kilmarnock which have alternative arrangements.

- The widespread introduction of peer tutors is enhancing the learning experiences.
- Good use is made of effective physical education resources that enable prisoners to gain a range of skills and provide good opportunities for prisoners to keep fit.

Aspects for improvement

- Better links are needed between Scottish Prison Service and college staff to integrate vocational programmes with skills development in literacy and numeracy.
- The range, flexibility and progression of educational programmes needs to improve to develop prisoners' literacy, numeracy and core skills.
- Library facilities and stocks of reading materials should be enhanced and improved to ensure all learners have access.
- Internal review procedures should be developed, along with the associated actions required Scottish Prison Service and college staff, to ensure improvements for learners.

Conclusion

This report offers a substantial baseline of evidence in considering which areas to prioritise in Scotland's continuing journey to excellence for all learners and across all education sectors. The direction noted in this report is firmly focused on the improvement journey. This can be seen in the pace of educational developments, implementation of policies and in how national recommendations are being addressed.

This building momentum will make a further report on progress very relevant in the period 2013/14. Aspects of high interest to report on further and in more depth will include:

- Curriculum for Excellence;
- Teaching for Scotland's Future;
- Closing the gap, particularly for identified groups of young people;
- International and national comparator studies; and
- Impact of key national policies.

Education Scotland's findings from a range of reports to be published in the coming year will contribute significantly to this growing evidence resource. Such reports will include publication of thematic tasks on *GIRFEC*, social sciences, and early years qualifications. Education Scotland's Corporate Plan to be published in the early autumn will provide further detail on priorities.

Appendix

Evidence base

Evaluations in this report are based on the following factors:

- findings from HMI inspections and reviews relating to published reports on individual establishments and services across sectors identified in the report;
- information drawn from the findings of HMI reports on aspects of education and;
- reflections on surveys, interactions and discussion with key stakeholders, local authority personnel, staff in colleges and teacher education, and others taking part in inspection and review processes.

Statistical Information

HMI quality indicator data relating to the inspections and reviews in each sector can be found on the Education Scotland website

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/about/index.asp>.

Table of inspections/review numbers

Sector	Number	Comment
Pre-school	1154	Includes nursery classes, nursery schools, family centres, private and voluntary providers undertaken by HMIE or inspected jointly with Care Commission/Care Inspectorate.
Primary	901	Local authority primary schools.
Secondary	166	Local authority secondary schools.
Independent	34	Includes 25 inspections of prep, junior, senior and all-through schools; 5 registration inspections of new schools and 4 quality improvement and engagement visits (QUIPE). (QUIPE reports do not have QI evaluations allocated.)
Special Schools	112	Includes 77 day schools and 35 Residential Special Schools (RSS). RSS were carried out with the Care Commission/Care Inspectorate. 93 special units were also inspected and their evaluations included with those of the primary and secondary schools to which they were attached.
Learning communities	132	Inspected alongside secondary school inspection programme.
College	35	College reviews with subject areas.
Prison	12	As part of the institutional inspections carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

Qualitative and quantitative terms

The evaluative words: 'excellent', 'very good', 'good', 'satisfactory', 'weak' and 'unsatisfactory' are associated with the six-point evaluation scale introduced in August 2005 and as outlined in:

- *The Child at the Centre* (second edition);
- *How good is our school?* (third edition);
- *How good is our community learning and development?* (second edition);
- *How well are children and young people protected and their needs met?*;
- *Quality Management in Education* (second edition); and
- *Quality Management in Local Authority Educational Psychology Services 1*.

The levels on the six-point scale are described as follows:

excellent:	outstanding or sector-leading provision
very good:	provision with major strengths
good:	provision with important strengths and areas for improvement
satisfactory:	provision where strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak:	provision with important weaknesses
unsatisfactory:	provision with major weaknesses

The following standard terms of quantity are used in all Education Scotland reports:

All:	100%
Almost all:	91% – 99%
Most:	75% – 90%
Majority:	50% – 74%
Minority/Less than half:	15% – 49%
A few:	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms which may be used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.

Bibliography

A bibliography of relevant reports published by HMIE during the period 2008 to 2011 is also available on the website with hyperlinks to each of them.

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/about/index.asp>.

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

Education Scotland
Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Almondvale Way
Livingston
EH54 6GA

Tel: 01506 600 200
e-mail: enquiries@educationscotland.gov.uk

www.educationscotland.gov.uk

