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Effectiveness of Education Authorities

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Commentary from HM Senior Chief Inspector

HM Inspectors, working in partnership with Audit Scotland, conducted a first programme of inspections of all 32 education authorities in Scotland, including 18 follow-up inspections, in the period 2000 to 2005. This report draws together the findings from those inspections along with evidence from school and pre-school inspections over the same period and considers some of the significant issues facing education authorities in Scotland today. It sits alongside *Improving Scottish Education,*[1] setting out the education authority perspective. It highlights key strengths and areas for improvement and is designed to promote continuous improvement in Scottish education.

The evidence from our inspections shows that education authorities can and often do make a significant contribution to providing high quality education in Scotland. Despite many and varied challenges, schools are generally well run, with education authorities meeting the basic requirements to provide the necessary services to deliver statutory education. Many authorities go well beyond that. In the most effective authorities a clear vision and aims for the education service are communicated effectively. Pupils, parents and staff have been engaged in shaping the priorities for education in a way that reflects the distinctive needs of their local area. Sound leadership, coupled with clear governance, provides the right balance of support and challenge for schools and encourages well-judged innovation. Such authorities achieve improvement across establishments and demonstrate tangible benefits to children.

It is encouraging to find that many authorities are seeking ways of working in partnership across a council's services and with other statutory, voluntary and private services to provide more integrated ways of addressing the needs of children, young people and their families. This work is still at the early stages of development and more needs to be done, nationally and locally, in identifying and sharing good practice and expertise. In particular, we need to ensure lean, well-focused approaches to joint planning which command the confidence of those delivering services and relate directly to positive outcomes for children.

However, we found wide variations in performance across the 32 education authorities. Some have much to do to match the standards of the best. Achieving the right balance between intelligent challenge and effective support requires continuing vigilance and review. The touchstone must be that the work of senior staff and quality improvement officers leads clearly to improvement for pupils. Few authorities are as yet very good in this key area of their work.

A clear relationship exists between the quality of leadership and the effectiveness of an authority. The leadership challenges facing authorities are considerable and, in many ways, becoming more demanding. Increasingly, difficulties are emerging in recruiting for, and sustaining, high quality leadership across the 32 councils in Scotland. Whilst this report finds that the size of a council does not necessarily impact directly on its effectiveness, the vulnerability of small councils to changes or loss of staff, particularly at senior levels, is evident. Identifying and supporting future leaders will be essential to sustaining and enhancing the value which local authorities can add to the work of schools.

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[1] *Improving Scottish Education*, a report by HMIE on inspection and review 2002–2005 published 2006.

A debate about the role of local authorities and about nature of the relationship between national and local government intensified over the period covered by our inspections. Our evidence highlights ways in which different authorities are rising to the challenges posed to them and provides many examples of effective practice. Where education authorities have a clear and compelling understanding of their role, sound leadership, a positive approach to collaborating with others to meet children's needs, efficient working practices and rigorous self-evaluation, they invariably add real value. The challenge remains to achieve these high standards across Scotland as a whole.

Contents

Introduction

1.1 The inspections

Under the terms of the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000*, HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) is charged with the inspection of the education function of local authorities. The first cycle of inspections of all 32 Scottish education authorities, undertaken from 2000 to 2005, was governed by a Code of Practice[2] which was agreed with Scottish Ministers.

Each inspection team included at least one senior member of staff from a different authority to the one being inspected, to act as peer assessor. HM Inspectors worked with authorities and Audit Scotland on the inspection framework which included a set of 11 quality indicators used in all inspections. The quality indicators and advice on self-evaluation were published in *Quality Management in Education*[3].

A Memorandum of Understanding[4] was drawn up between HMIE and the Accounts Commission for Scotland. Thus each inspection during the first cycle was planned and implemented in partnership with Audit Scotland.[5]

The scope of inspection for the first cycle was broad, covering the leadership, management and impact of the work of the education services. Building on the education authority's self-evaluation, inspectors analysed key written evidence and interviewed staff at all levels in the council, including the chief executive and elected members as well as officials in the education authority. Visits to schools were carried out and inspectors met with representatives of parents' groups, senior staff in school and groups of teachers and pupils. In addition, the inspection team interviewed senior officers of the council in other services such as social work and other partners to evaluate partnership working. The findings of local school inspections in the three years leading up to the education authority inspection formed a key source of evidence.

1.2 Scottish education authorities in context

The *Education (Scotland) 1980 Act* requires education authorities to secure provision of education and specifically to ensure that there is adequate and efficient provision of school education in their area. *The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000,* redefined the responsibilities of education authorities for fulfilling the right of every child to be *'provided with school education'* which is *'directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential'.* The Act further required education authorities to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education and to ensure that National Priorities in Education are addressed.

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[2] Code of Practice available on HMIE website.

[3] *Quality Management in Education* (HM Inspectors of Schools, 2000) is a framework of self-evaluation for Local Authority Education Departments.

[4] *Memorandum of Understanding for co-operation between HM Inspectors of Schools and the Accounts Commission for Scotland within the context of inspection and other forms of external scrutiny of the education functions of local authorities in Scotland (2000).*

[5] Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the *Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000.* It provides services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland. Together they ensure that the Scottish Executive and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Education authorities are responsible for ensuring that statutory requirements are met and that they pay due regard to national policies and guidelines. They are also responsible for ensuring that direct government funding, council tax and other funding, particularly specific grant schemes, are used appropriately. They have the important responsibility for developing services to meet the needs of their local communities.

The challenges facing authorities in addressing their statutory requirements differ depending on the local circumstances. Across Scotland, local authorities adopt different service structures. Increasingly, education is part of a wider department which typically also includes services such as leisure, culture, sports, arts, community learning and social work services.

1.3 Variations across local authorities

The geographical size and location of councils has a very significant effect on the nature of the challenges they face in delivering education services. For example, the Highland Council serves widely dispersed communities. It is the largest authority in terms of land area and is ranked seventh in the number of school children but second in terms of the number of schools with 184 primary and 30 secondary schools. By contrast, the City of Glasgow is by far the largest in terms of school children with just under 70,000 pupils and has 180 primary schools and 29 secondary schools. These two councils have similar numbers of schools but very different local circumstances.

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION
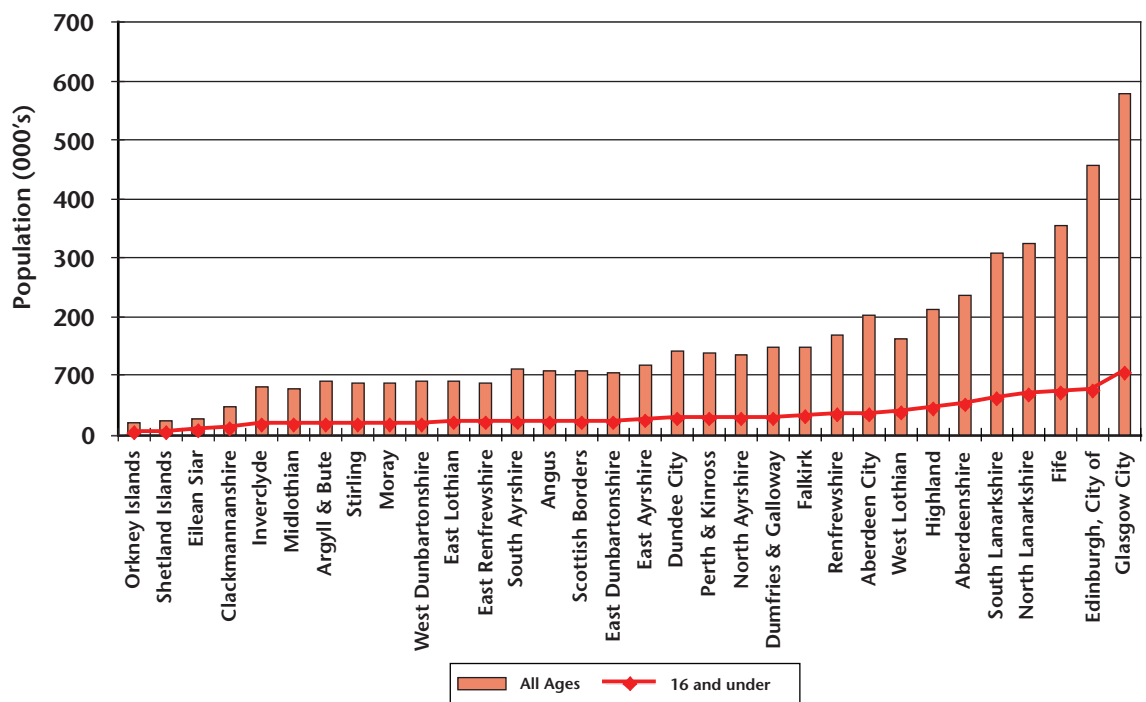
Mid-year population estimates (2005). General Register Office for Scotland.

Introduction 1

The large variations in socio-economic factors across and within Scottish councils present a major challenge for education authorities. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2004) provides a very clear picture of the areas of disadvantage in each council. For example, over half of Glasgow's population live within the most deprived 15% of areas in Scotland. Also, at least a quarter of the areas in Dundee City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire are in the 15% most deprived areas nationally. Relatively advantaged areas, such as Clackmannanshire, Edinburgh and South Lanarkshire also have pockets of significant levels of disadvantage.

Councils varied greatly in the extent to which their populations were changing. Projected and actual increases in the numbers of children and young people under the age of 18 presented councils with challenges in ensuring effective and efficient provision of education. For example, the populations of East Lothian and West Lothian had grown by over 6% in the last ten years while those in Eilean Siar, Aberdeen City, Inverclyde and Dundee City had decreased by more than 6% and were predicted to fall further. Councils with increasing rolls were generally working well to meet demand.

PROJECTED POPULATION CHANGE BETWEEN 2004-2010
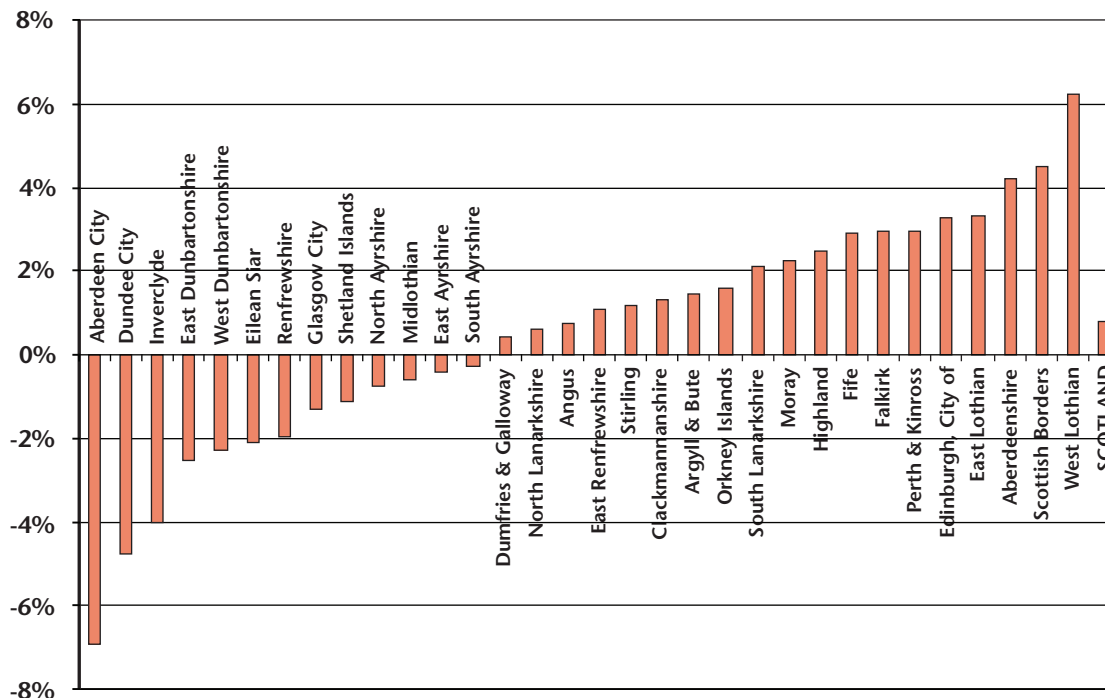
Projected percentage change in population to 2010 (2004-based). General Register Office for Scotland.

Inspections also identified factors affecting the performance of education authorities arising from their history. The most common feature was the quality of the school estate inherited at the formation of the unitary councils in 1996. Some had inherited surplus capacity in schools and buildings in a very poor state. A report[6] by the Accounts Commission in 1995 found that at the time of local government reorganisation mismatch between available school places and pupils was diverting increasingly scarce resources from key elements of education provision and that over a third of primary schools and a quarter of secondary schools could feasibly be considered for rationalisation.

Local government elections took place in the third year of the cycle of the inspection, resulting in changes in the administration of some councils. There was inevitably a period of adjustment as the new elected members took on their brief for education and established relationships with officers. With the introduction of the new single-transferable vote arrangements in the forthcoming elections in 2007 there is the potential for significant change to the political composition and leadership of education across councils.

The differences in these factors and their combination have created widely differing contexts for many councils in Scotland. However, it was possible to identify groups of authorities against which the performance of an individual authority could be benchmarked, recognising the extremes of large cities or very small remote areas. While these comparator authorities were used as guides to expectations of performance, HM Inspectors were careful in probing the extent to which such comparisons were valid in each inspection.

[6] *Room for Learning: Managing Surplus Capacity in School Buildings* Accounts Commission 1995.

Introduction 1

Section Two: Main findings from inspections

Each education authority demonstrated that it was having an impact on improving at least some aspects of pupils' experience. Some were being successful across a range of achievements. However, the degree to which the authority set the direction for schools, identified good practice and supported weaker schools to improve, varied across Scotland. Inspectors evaluated the extent to which education authorities had achieved continuous improvement. Only two authorities were judged to be very good in this area. Twenty-three were judged to be good, six to be fair and one unsatisfactory. The overall judgement included all sectors of pre-school and school education. In each education authority there were variations across sectors. Even within authorities which were adding value overall, school inspections still identified under-performing schools in their areas.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN PERFORMANCE
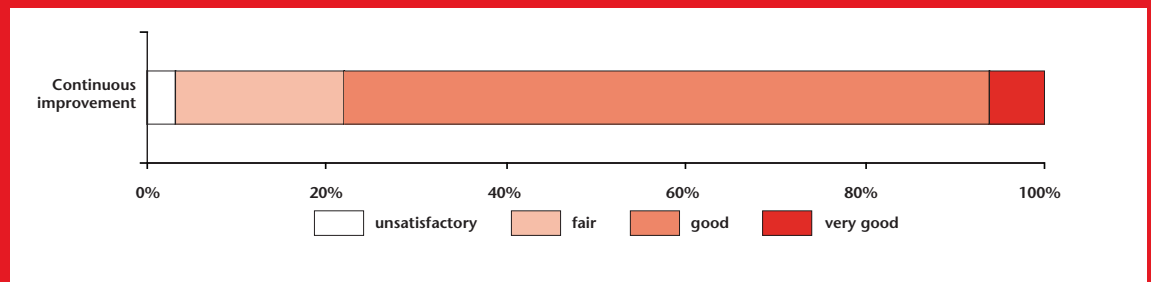
Distribution of quality indicator evaluations, 2000–2005.

2.1 Achievement and Attainment

All authorities were seeking to improve the achievement of all children and young people. Many, particularly those serving areas with high levels of disadvantage, had sought to improve outcomes for learners by raising learner aspirations and increasing their engagement with educational services. The most successful authorities could demonstrate how they were promoting a wide range of pupil achievements.

Positive aspects of attainment and achievement were singled out in 13 authorities. In 19 authorities, aspects of support for pupils were commended. Progress in improving achievement including arts, culture and sport, enterprise education and Gaelic was highlighted in 10 authorities.

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Main findings from inspections

There was some evidence of improvement in the attainment of pupils in Scotland from 2000 to 2005. This evidence is summed up as follows.

- Attainment in primary schools improved nationally and in almost all authorities in reading, writing and mathematics between 2000 and 2004. Increases varied from a few percentage points to as much as 10 percentage points in all three areas. Almost all P3 pupils now attain national standards and more are doing so earlier.

- Levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at S1/S2 in secondary schools improved nationally and in nearly all authorities between 2000 and 2004. The rates of improvement had gone up with many authorities showing increases between 10 and 20 percentage points over the five-year period.

- The percentage of pupils gaining five awards at SCQF[7] level 5 or better by the end of S6 increased from 39% in 2000 to 47% in 2005. Rates varied from over 30% in some authorities to as high as 60 to 70% with an average across Scotland of 47% in 2005.

- The PISA[8] studies of 15 year olds in 2003 show that Scottish pupils are performing significantly above the OECD average in reading, mathematical and scientific literacies.

Evidence also pointed to lack of progress in some aspects of attainment.

- The proportion of pupils attaining one or more, three or more, or five or more awards at SCQF[9] level 6 by the end of S6 had not increased.

- In some authorities, the attainment of the lowest performing 20% of S4 pupils had not improved significantly.

- The attainment of 16 and 17 year olds leaving care (looked after and looked after and accommodated children) had increased only slightly from a very low base. In 2004-05, approximately 45% achieved at least one qualification at SCQF level 3[10] or above, compared to 42% in 2003-04.

Some authorities could demonstrate that they had raised attainment through specific projects, particularly those implemented consistently over time. One notable example was the early intervention programme introduced across authorities in the late nineties. There are indications that this improved the rate of progress of pupils from P1 to P3.

Authorities were making good, and some authorities very good, progress in raising attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the early and middle primary stages, although further improvements were required in the upper stages. Raising the attainment of all pupils in secondary schools was proving to be challenging for most authorities, despite efforts to improve attendance, reduce exclusion and provide an extensive range of support.

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[7] Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5: Intermediate 2 at A-C; Standard Grade at 1-2.
[8] Programme for International Student Assessment 2000 and 2003 (OECD: Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development).
[9] Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 6: Higher at A-C.
[10] Scottish Credit and Qualitification Framework (SCQF) level 3: Access 3; Standard Grade at 5-6.

Main findings from inspections 2

Despite a wide range of support initiatives across education authorities, the impact on pupils' attainment was variable. Inspection evidence showed that the strategies employed had contributed to clear improvement in attainment in seven authorities. In five other authorities, rates of overall improvement were found to compare well with similar authorities and the national profile. There were still some areas where continued effort was needed to tackle difficult issues such as raising the attainment of underachieving pupils, notably those who were leaving school without any qualifications. In the majority of cases, inspection reports contained direct recommendations for further action to improve attainment.

Several authorities were able to demonstrate impact on pupils in terms of levels of participation, for example, by increasing the opportunities for pupils to engage in music, arts and sports activities both in and out of school. There were many very good examples of education authorities expanding opportunities for pupils through arts, music, sports, culture and enterprise. A number were making progress in promoting pupils' understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens.

2.2 Meeting the needs of all learners

The *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* placed a legislative duty on education authorities to secure the development of the *'personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential'* and to endeavour to secure improvement. To achieve this end the Scottish Executive set out a vision for Scotland's children placing the child at the centre of service provision. The vision recognises the need for all children to be safe, nurtured, healthy, achieving, active, included, respected and responsible. It requires agencies and services to collaborate in information sharing, joint planning and effective coordinated delivery. It brings together local authorities, police forces, National Health Service Boards and other local partners in planning services for children and families at a local level. The delivery of high-quality services will have an increased emphasis on outcomes achieved for the child and family. During the period of inspection councils and their partners were increasingly working together to address this emerging agenda.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Ensuring that the needs of all children are met is central to the work of education authorities and they have a particular duty to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people are met. The nature and quality of the implementation of inclusive approaches remains variable across the country. Many local authorities have developed and strengthened their approaches to improving diversity, equality and fairness and significant progress has been made towards developing a more inclusive education system. However, this is another area which differs from council to council. In particular, education authorities face very different challenges in addressing the effects of social, economic and health deprivation in order to create circumstances in which vulnerable children and young people can benefit from education. One of the greatest tasks facing education authorities is meeting the needs of lower attaining pupils who are not achieving their potential. This is particularly marked for children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and those who are looked after. Too many in this group, and including those 16 to 19 year olds who are not in education, employment or training, do not develop sufficiently the competences, capabilities nor gain the qualifications vital to their future success. Other key priorities relate to improving the health and safety of children and young people and helping them to adopt healthy lifestyles. Councils can only address these challenges if they work constructively in partnership with other services and agencies.

In early years provision, authorities successfully achieved the Government's targets of providing pre-school places for all three and four year olds whose parents wished such provision by entering into partnerships with voluntary and private providers.

In 2005, the rate of attendance in Scottish schools was 95.0% in primary schools and 90.2% in secondary schools. The percentage attendance ranged widely across local authorities. In primary schools attendance ranged from 96.2% to 92.9%, and in secondary schools from 94.0% to 86.6%. Authorities in areas of disadvantage had differing and sometimes innovative strategies for improving school attendance. One authority which had piloted the Educational Maintenance Allowance had found that this had improved the attendance of older pupils but was having to use other strategies to ensure that other pupils attended well.

Across Scotland the performance of the lowest 20% of pupils has remained disappointingly static. Only six authorities have managed to achieve a 5% increase, or more, in the average tariff score of their poorest performing 20% of S4 pupils between 2002 and 2005. More needs to be done to ensure that other authorities make a greater impact on those pupils with the very lowest levels of attainment. The report *Missing Out*[11] sets out some further approaches which schools and education authorities have taken to raise the attainment and achievement of vulnerable pupils.

Many authorities had approaches in place to support pupils who were looked after and looked after and accommodated. Some had well-developed and imaginative approaches. As yet, these were not impacting significantly on raising the attainment of many of those leaving school. The attainment of pupils aged 16 and 17 leaving care in 2004-05 was too low. Addressing the needs of these pupils remains a challenge for most education authorities.

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[11] http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/hmiemoeo.pdf

Main findings from inspections 2

There were wide variations in the proportions of pupils excluded from school between 2000 to 2005 within and across authorities. Inspections indicated that in the earlier period authorities had adopted different approaches to recording exclusions. The overall rates had increased in primary schools from 10.4 to 13.4 exclusions per thousand pupils (between 2000 and 2005). Exclusions at secondary schools had initially been reduced from 105 to 98 per thousand pupils over the period 2000 to 2003. However, exclusions have now increased again to 112 per thousand pupils in 2005. Rates varied markedly across authorities with the highest rates in areas with high levels of disadvantage. Addressing the needs of pupils who are likely to be excluded from schools continued to need a more determined effort by schools and local authorities.

Education authorities had worked with partners to promote and support the inclusion of pupils with the wide range of additional support needs. Some authorities were demonstrating great improvements in developing inclusive practices. Further work was needed to meet the needs of vulnerable children in a more integrated way. Allied to this were weaknesses in strategic planning and management, as well as a lack of effective approaches to monitoring the quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs and its impact on improving pupils' achievements. Staff in schools were not always clear about their roles in implementing the education authority's inclusion agenda. All education authorities were facing the challenge of implementing the legislation in relation to the *Additional Support for Learning Act.*

2.3 Consultation and communication with parents and carers

Consultation was a key strength in 12 reports and communication in 14. In ten authorities, issues relating to consultation and communication were main points for action. Often, education authorities needed to ensure that, having consulted with a wide range of stakeholders, they gave feedback on the outcomes.

MECHANISMS FOR CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION
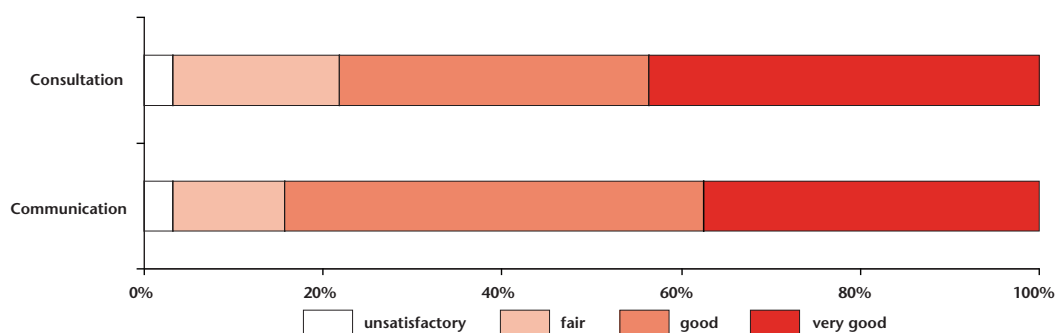
Distribution of quality indicator evaluations, 2000–2005.

During INEA inspections the views of parents were collected through pre-inspection surveys of School Board chairs and those who were interviewed on visits to schools. The majority of parents were positive with 80% stating that they had opportunities to meet with other parent groups and to hear from authority officers about developments. They were also aware of the main aims and values set by the education authorities for education.

Sixty-nine percent believed that education authorities were good at letting them know about their policies and plans for education. Forty-five percent felt that they could influence the aims and plans for education through consultation. While 87% knew how to channel views and complaints, only 53% thought that they got speedy and helpful responses to complaints. When interviewed, chairs of School Boards indicated that they often felt overwhelmed by the amount of information they received from authorities and from the Scottish Executive. Some education authorities were successfully tackling the issues by providing newsletters and well presented websites and holding regular showcase events.

2.4 Support and challenge

A notable feature of developments over the period of the inspections was the emergence of systems within education authorities to provide support and challenge to schools. Some authorities had put such systems in place from the time of the setting up of the unitary authorities, but others have been slow to do so. In the best authorities there were effective systems for monitoring school improvement and the information gathered was used to intervene quickly to provide the necessary support to underperforming schools.

The work of centrally-deployed staff was rated as good or very good in 72% of authorities. In the most effective authorities centrally-deployed staff knew schools well, understood the strengths and weaknesses of individual establishments and provided high quality support for improvement.

Staffing difficulties and continuing changes in the structure of individual authorities often resulted in a lack of continuity in support to schools in all sectors and to services. More effective authorities targeted the scarce and expensive resources of centrally-deployed officers to support schools in greatest need for improvement, to support new headteachers, to take forward major initiatives, to follow-up an inspection, or to address a specific problem. In the best practice, authorities drew on the skills and expertise in high performing schools to support less successful establishments.

EFFECTIVENESS OF CENTRALLY-DEPLOYED STAFF
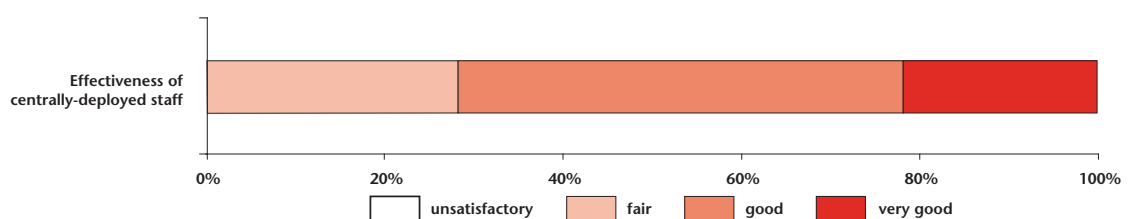
Distribution of quality indicator evaluations, 2000-2005.

Main findings from inspections 2

Officers were almost always perceived as committed and hardworking. Administrative staff were praised for their helpfulness. Aspects of the work of centrally-deployed staff were key strengths in 11 reports. Surveys indicated that heads of establishment generally found officers to be prompt and helpful in their contacts with schools.

In authorities where there were important weaknesses they often related to:

• the ways in which the roles and functions of Quality Improvement Officers (QIOs) were configured, particularly with regard to providing the right balance of support and challenge;

• the need for greater consistency in the performance of QIO teams;

• the capacity of the QIOs to fulfil their roles and in particular to give appropriate levels of support to underperforming schools; and

• the need to introduce or improve staff development and review of centrally-deployed staff.

Education authorities challenged the performance of schools and services in a number of ways. They were most effective when the challenge was based on well-founded evidence about the performance of schools as groups and individually. Measuring, monitoring and evaluating performance were key processes in education authorities' approach to improvement. Just over one in five authorities was very good in measuring, monitoring and evaluating performance, while one third of authorities had important or major weaknesses in this area.

MEASURING, MONITORING AND EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

Distribution of quality indicator evaluations, 2000-2005.

Effective authorities had taken steps to provide support on the curriculum and learning and teaching to pre-school establishments, and primary, secondary and special schools. Where these approaches had been most effective and valued, they had been linked to advice on appropriate learning and teaching approaches and supported by high-quality training.

Support for pre-school education was a strength in almost all education authorities. It was often linked with effective early intervention provision which covered pre-school and early years of primary schools. Support for pre-school, early education and intervention was identified as a key strength in 21 authorities.

Overall, education authorities were being systematic and thorough in striving to improve primary education. Most authorities provided well-designed materials and training on aspects of the primary curriculum. Impact on staff and pupils was most successful when backed up by effective in-school support, conferences, events to share best practice and other targeted development opportunities. There was a need to ensure that evaluation was undertaken to

determine whether or not improvements for pupils had been secured. The major challenge now for education authorities was to demonstrate improvements in learning and teaching and increase attainment in the upper stages of primary schools, building on the good start at earlier stages.

Secondary schools were generally positive about the helpfulness of guidance, policy statements and advice documents provided by authorities. In almost all authorities, support for secondary subjects was provided in part or whole through subject networks, generally led by a coordinator. The effectiveness of networks set up to provide curricular support was highly variable both within and across authorities, often depending on the quality of leadership and this affected capacity for curriculum development.

In authorities with weaknesses in consultation and communication, heads of establishments reported that they were sometimes confused about whether policies and associated guidelines were current or in final versions. Interviews with staff in establishments in some authorities indicated that key policies had not been effectively disseminated.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT
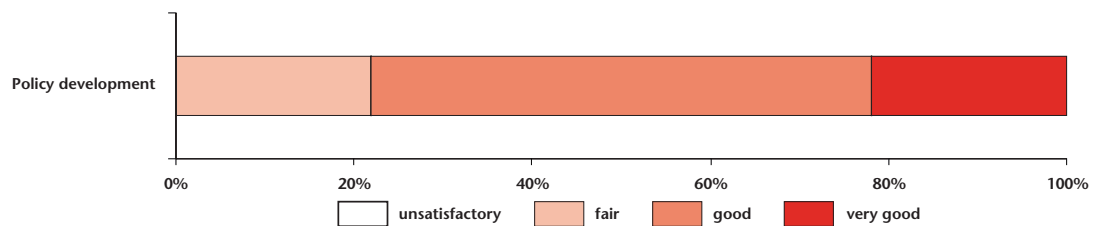
Distribution of quality indicator evaluations, 2000-2005.

Headteachers had a key role in ensuring that the authorities' vision, values and aims and policies were well understood. Some did not regard themselves as having the role of senior members of the authority and as a result were less effective in promoting the education authorities' key priorities to staff, pupils and parents. Some authorities were highly successful in communicating with key stakeholders even in very remote and dispersed areas. Information and communications technology (ICT) was playing an important role in providing links through e-mail and some very effective websites where all policies, guidelines and support materials were easily accessed.

2.5 Staff management

The most effective authorities gave high priority to reviewing the performance of heads of establishments to hold them accountable for the performance of their schools and ensuring that they had the staff development and support to fulfil their remits. However, a number of authorities, even towards the end of the cycle, still did not have in place robust and consistent arrangements for reviewing the work of headteachers. This deficiency was also reflected in the responses from pre-inspection surveys. Only 63% of respondents agreed that they were confident that the authority had a good knowledge of their performance as head of establishment through the staff review and development scheme. These weaknesses in staff development and review for heads of establishments are all the more surprising given the high priority that many authorities gave to programmes of professional development for staff at all levels. Whilst leadership is a strength in many Scottish schools and early years establishments there are significant numbers of establishments, around one in five, where this is not the case.

Main findings from inspections 2

Given the central importance of leadership in delivering effective learning many education authorities still needed to ensure that they had appropriate arrangements for reviewing regularly their heads of establishments and for supporting them with appropriate programmes of staff development.

Overall, authorities made good provision for staff development. Very few authorities had significant weaknesses and around 25% had major strengths in this area. Continuing professional development (CPD), either overall or aspects of it, featured as a key strength in almost 60% of reports. Most heads of establishments agreed that the authority assisted staff in accessing appropriate staff development and training to improve their work. However, only a few authorities had developed strategies for evaluating the longer-term impact of CPD in improving learning and teaching in classrooms or on pupils' achievements. Given the considerable investment of £53m made available nationally (2001-06) for CPD linked to the Teachers' Agreement[12], it is becoming all the more essential for education authorities to evaluate the impact on pupils' learning.

Only in the inspections carried out in the later years of the inspection cycle was it possible to discern change resulting from implementation of the Teachers' Agreement. Some authorities had appointed business managers for schools or groups of schools in order to free up time for senior managers to focus on the curriculum and learning and teaching. Although headteachers reported on the potential benefits of this approach, there was as yet no conclusive evidence about impact. Authorities varied greatly in the extent to which they used the opportunities afforded by the Teachers' Agreement to address issues of improving provision for pupils. Few authorities had been rigorous in setting out expectations of improvements resulting from the Agreement. A detailed report on the impact of the Teachers' Agreement will be published by HMIE in late 2006.

2.6 Resource and financial management

Seventy-eight percent of authorities were very good or good in financial management with 72% good or very good in resource management.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
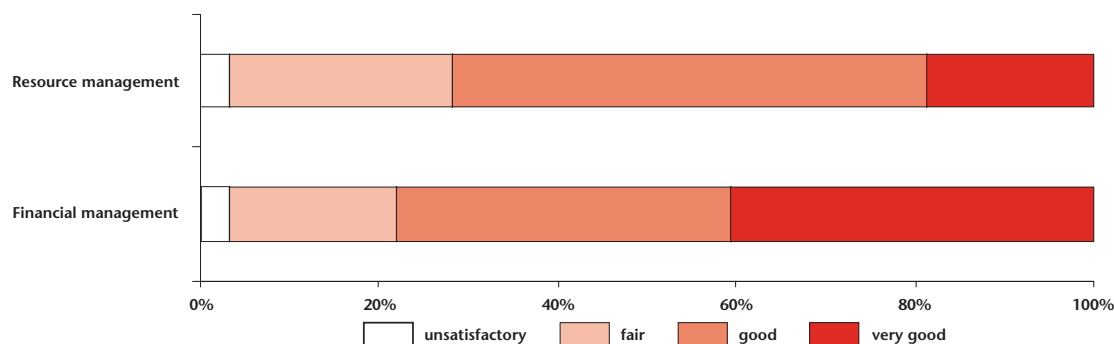
Distribution of quality indicator evaluations, 2000-2005.

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[12] In September 2000, following a series of meetings with teacher organisations and COSLA, Ministers established a tri-partite Implementation Group to examine the recommendations in the McCrone Report and to consider detailed proposals for the implementation of those recommendations. The Implementation Group reached its conclusions and reported in January 2001 in a document entitled *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century* (referred to as the Teachers' Agreement in this report).

Aspects of financial management figured as a key strength in 14 reports and resource management in six reports. However, aspects of both financial and resource management required improvement as a main point for action in 22 reports. These improvements related to the need to:

• ensure that Best Value reviews are followed through and impact on improving education provision;

• relate plans to budgets and monitor better the use of resources;

• improve aspects of ICT, particularly in supporting schools to use it better to support learning and teaching and in the quality and use of management information systems by schools and centrally-deployed staff;

• undertake further rationalisation and improvements in the education estate to provide accommodation fit for purpose and to take account of changes in demography;

• put in place tighter financial controls as part of sound governance; and

• put in place revised schemes of devolved management and support them by appropriate training for staff at the centre and in schools.

One of the major challenges facing many councils was that of school rationalisation. Falling rolls, changes in the age profile of communities and over-capacity in schools, combined with a school estate in a poor condition, have presented many councils with seemingly intractable problems, particularly in recent years. Some councils have, with foresight, tackled the issues on an incremental basis, boosting confidence by demonstrating the advantages of new accommodation and allaying fears about loss of quality when schools amalgamate. In these councils, elected members have worked with officers to develop, support and implement plans which are in the best interests of children and young people now and in the future. They have also had proper regard to the role that a school may play in the life of its community and the effect that closure may have on that community. They have exploited the availability for resources through Public Private Partnership initiatives and other forms of public funding. In a few authorities, senior officers in educational services have expended a very high level of resource to prepare plans for reorganisation, often in consultation with elected members, only to find that when unpopular decisions are to be taken, elected members are no longer willing to support them. Where there is no alternative plan, there is continuing loss of resources invested in unoccupied places in schools and the remaining problems of deteriorating accommodation that cannot be tackled.

The most recent survey data from the Scottish Executive's school estates strategy indicates that despite the significant progress made to date in improving Scotland's school estate, in 2004, over 40% of Scottish schools were considered to be in an unsatisfactory condition - that is nearly 1,200 schools. Two hundred of these were so bad that that they were at risk of imminent failure. The rationalisation of schools provision is a sensitive and complex issue. The apparent slow progress in some areas cannot be attributed to signal weaknesses in planning for education provision or from failures of authorities to identify the opportunities for improved management. Rather it reflects the difficulties inherent in a process set firmly in a local political context. Generally, parents and the wider local community do not wish to see the loss of a

Main findings from inspections 2

community resource. Elected local councillors, individually and corporately, may see the educational and financial benefits of rationalisation, but they are also acutely aware that such proposals can arouse considerable opposition and see the case for maintaining existing schools.

2.7 Leadership

Education authorities varied markedly in the quality of strategic leadership and the impact that it had on children and families. Ten high performing authorities had sustained high-quality leadership over a number of years and were clearly impacting on children, young people and their families and on all aspects of services. Two authorities were judged to have major weaknesses and another seven to have important weaknesses.

EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP
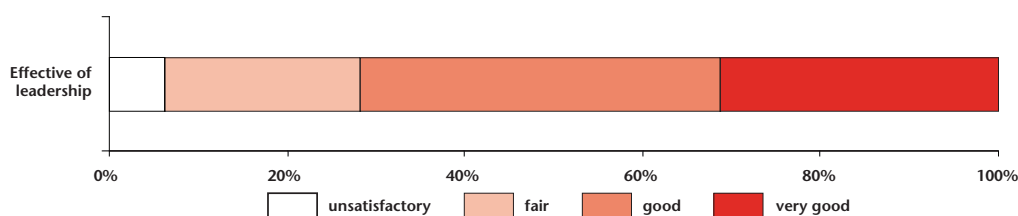
Distribution of quality indicator evaluations, 2000-2005.

Follow-up inspections have demonstrated the extent to which more determined and focused leadership and direction can improve some weak authorities, in some instances dramatically. Overall, there was room for improvement in leadership and direction in many authorities, in particular as councils moved further towards providing more integrated services for children, young people and their families. Common themes included the need for professional development for senior officers and elected members and to taking forward strategic approaches to quality assurance.

The quality of leadership in authorities depended very much on the collective contributions of the elected administration, the chief executive, the director of education or equivalent and the members of the education senior management team. Findings from follow-up inspections indicated that often there was a strengthening of commitment to education on the part of elected members. However, elected members in some councils did not always play a sufficiently active role in supporting and challenging the work of educational services to ensure that education was of high quality.

One of the main obstacles to the effectiveness of leadership, particularly in small authorities, was the limitation on officers to carry out their full remits. In small authorities the loss of a key member of the senior management team with responsibility for educational services could lead to loss of direction, disruption to implementation of key policies and uncertainty for centrally-deployed staff and ultimately for schools. Another potential difficulty was disruption caused by frequent reorganisation, although well-considered restructuring could be the catalyst for positive change.

There was a clearer sense of direction in those authorities in which the vision and values related clearly to those of the council as a whole and where education was regarded as being central to achieving the aspirations for all people in the council area. Aspects of vision were identified as key strengths in 18 authorities particularly in the priority given to education and inclusion.
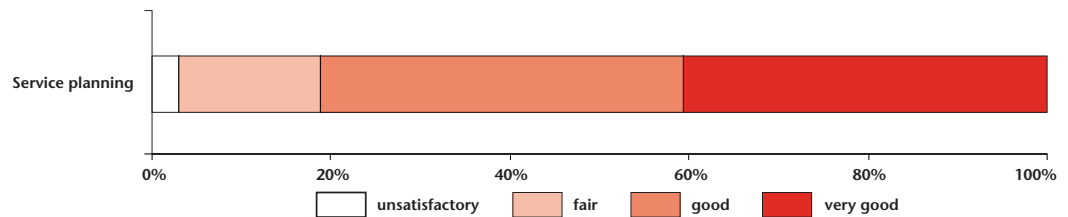
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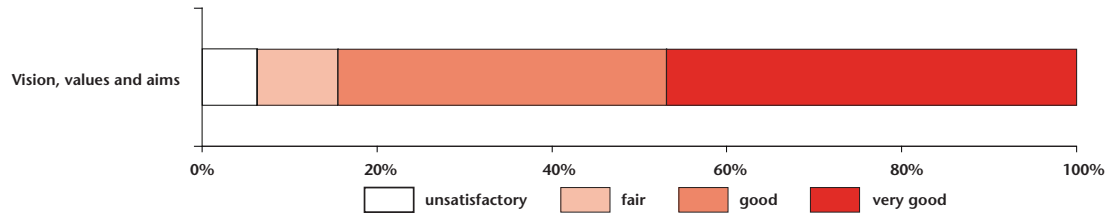
Distribution of quality indicator evaluations, 2000-2005.

Service planning was central to ensuring that the vision, values and aims were translated into practice. Service planning was a key strength in 12 authorities. However, almost one in five authorities was rated as fair or unsatisfactory in this key area.

SERVICE PLANNING

Distribution of quality indicator evaluations, 2000-2005.

Effective educational services used service plans as a means of mediating the many competing priorities for development stemming from national priorities and from local needs. However, even very effective senior officers in education authorities reported feeling overwhelmed at times by the number of competing demands and looked for a reduction in the number of new national initiatives. They welcomed the move to simplify the many plans required of them by the Scottish Executive.

The first cycle of inspections of education authorities coincided with the moves to bring educational, health, social work and voluntary services together to provide more integrated support for children, young people and their families. Some councils had responded by reconfiguring their services to promote a more integrated approach and achieved this in very different ways. Throughout the period of inspection there was evidence of an increase in joint working at both strategic and delivery levels across Scotland as councils and their partners sought to streamline service delivery and undertake joint planning. Levels of cooperation and joint planning had increased between council and other services, such as health and the police, particularly in relation to community planning and children's service planning.

Where councils had reconfigured their services to bring services for children together this had, in some cases, led to improved planning, decision making and better quality of services to children and families. However, not all councils who had done so had been able to deliver

better outcomes for children and young people. Conversely, there had been marked improvements in joint working leading to tangible benefits for stakeholders in some councils where services were managed separately but worked together in a highly effective way. What impacted more than the structural arrangements was the clarity of vision and aims, quality of leadership and the focus on joint service delivery for stakeholders. Overall, the quality of such coordinated working was still highly variable, but a number of aspects of good practice were already impacting on the lives of children and young people.

Inspections found some examples of councils working together to share aspects of educational provision which could be delivered more effectively and economically through a partnership. The most prevalent example was providing school places where it was more reasonable for pupils to attend a school in another authority rather than travelling to the authority school which was at a distance from their home. A number of authorities in central Scotland had joined together to provide training in leadership. As yet, few examples existed of authorities sharing expertise to develop or evaluate provision.

Over the period of the inspections the number of examples of joint projects between education authorities and independent or voluntary organisations has increased. Towards the end of the cycle of inspection, there was increasing evidence of education authorities entering into partnership with voluntary and commercial services, to assist schools in providing extended curricular packages for pupils, where those participating services were better equipped to ensure that pupils' needs were being met.

2.8 Capacity to improve

Central to all evaluations made by HMI during inspections of education authorities was an assessment of the extent to which they could sustain and improve performance. Only two authorities were rated as very good against the quality indicator *Continuous Improvement*. Those authorities were able to demonstrate the capacity both to sustain high quality and to improve across all sectors. Seventy-eight percent of authorities were evaluated as having very good or good capacity to improve. Just over one fifth of authorities had weaknesses. However, most follow-up inspection reports found that education authorities which had important weaknesses were making progress in improving in this area. The first steps in the improvements in these education authorities was the acceptance by all that there were issues to address, and that elected members, chief executives, heads of educational services and headteachers all accepted their responsibility to secure improvement.

As part of each inspection, authorities evaluated their own performance against the quality indicators in *Quality Management in Education*. At the time of the inspections, authorities differed markedly in their capacity to evaluate their own performance, a capacity that is essential to securing improvements. The self-evaluation of half of the authorities was closely aligned to the judgements made by the inspection teams. Seven authorities seriously overestimated their performance sometimes by as much as two levels. Two underestimated their performance. Over the period, it was evident that councils were addressing the need to improve self-evaluation across the range of council services.

The inspections showed that education authorities were committed to developing approaches to improvement, raising achievement and addressing the National Priorities for Education. Whilst some aspects of continuous improvement were reported as key strengths in 31 reports, almost all authorities had main points for action related to the need for continuous improvement. Weaknesses in leadership and direction, problems related to economic and social factors and the lack of necessary expertise in key staff, affected the capacity of some authorities to achieve sufficient improvement. While inspections did not find direct correlations between size of authority and capacity to improve, there were very heavy demands on small teams to address all of the issues in education.

Main findings from inspections 2

Section Three: Looking forward

This section draws on inspection evidence from the inspection of education authorities and the findings of school inspections published in *Improving Scottish Education*. It highlights a number of key issues and significant factors for authorities in supporting educational improvement.

3.1 Transforming public services and joint service delivery: working in partnership and building capacity for improvement

One of the most important requirements of the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980* was that education services should work with health and social work services to ensure that children and young people with special educational needs receive integrated support to meet their needs. This unambiguous recognition of the vital contribution that professionals other than teachers can make to the education of vulnerable children and young people gave impetus to the movement towards more integrated services.

Inspection teams have reviewed the working relationships between the education service and other council departments including social work services. A number of developments have influenced local delivery and joint working of services. These included:

- The *Local Government Act (2003)* which places a duty on local authorities to work with other service delivery partners, particularly health and the police, to undertake joint Community Plans.

- The guidance for Integrated Children's Service Plans 2005-2008, issued in November 2004 stated that: *'integrated plans should help agencies rationalise existing planning activity and agree consistent improvement objectives and delivery strategies across universal and targeted services for children and young people'.*

- The outcomes for Scotland's children which requires better partnerships by service deliverers to ensure they are safe, nurtured, healthy, achieving, active, included, respected and responsible.

- The *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004* which requires practioners to work together to provide the best support for children and families.

- The proposals set out in *Getting it Right for Every Child*[13] which promote improved assessment and information sharing.

Over the past five years there has been a more focused look at the impact of those relationships and a wider look at the working arrangements between the education service and other key providers of children's services. These partnerships included social work, health, the police and the private and voluntary sectors. However whilst there is evidence of joint working at all levels within councils and between councils and their partners, much of this is at an early stage and has yet to fully realise the potential benefits to children and families.

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[13] *Getting it Right for Every Child, Proposals for Action,* Scottish Executive 2003

Looking forward 3

The reform of public services in Scotland and the move towards a greater focus on joint service delivery will continue to require greater flexibility in the way education services are delivered and how they work in partnership within and outwith each council. In particular, joint working needs to be developed in a way which reduces rather than increases bureaucracy, simplifies access to services by stakeholders, makes best use of technology and provides efficient well-targeted services. Education, in partnership with services providing care, needs to be increasingly focused on the individual child. A number of critical factors for success in achieving more integrated working that have been identified through inspection including:

- high level of commitment by elected members and senior managers to work across council services;

- very clear strategic leadership;

- a clear vision of what joint services should result in for children and young people;

- communicating this vision effectively to all staff across services in preparing practitioners to work together; and

- a commitment at local level to joint working across services.

The clarity and effectiveness of joint planning across services within a council and with other partners is fundamental to ensuring delivery of joint aims and to make most efficient use of resources. In very good practice, the following features are present.

- Educational improvement planning linked into the community plan, corporate plan and children's services plan.

- Plans giving high priority to national priorities and other outcomes for children and young people.

- Tasks in the education improvement plan making clear the nature and extent of funding and other resources required.

- Responsibilities for implementing planning specified along with accountability in respect of timelines and spending.

- Procedures for monitoring the implementation and impact of plans clearly specified along with the arrangements for fulfilling statutory reporting procedures.

- Strategic plans giving clear guidance to establishments and services as to what they should be including in their improvement plans to make a real difference to children and young people.

- An improvement planning process which is well understood by those delivering the service and builds on the views of stakeholders.

- Effective joint staff development which is provided for practitioners from different professional backgrounds.

More recently some councils have jointly agreed partnership arrangements for staff development, sharing good practice and some limited aspects of service delivery. There is significant scope for councils to develop further partnerships of this kind.

3.2 Improving school experiences for children and young people

Improving Scottish Education identified a number of strengths in educational outcomes in both national and international contexts. It highlighted many positive indicators in terms of learners' attainment. However, there is still room for significant improvement. The capacity to raise achievement and attainment across local authorities in councils remains too variable. A key to success in the small number of authorities which have raised attainment relates to sustained work over a period of time, very good approaches to monitoring pupils' progress and enlisting the commitment and support of parents. Some authorities are beginning to be more innovative in tailoring the curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils, notably at the secondary stages. This is an area for further improvement. The developments related to a *Curriculum for Excellence* offer huge potential for change.

Where they had been most successful in raising attainment and achievement authorities had been systematic and consistent in:

- paying close attention to measuring, tracking and evaluating pupils' attainment at authority, school and class levels;

- making effective use of data to provide targeted and sustained support to improve underperforming schools;

- providing targeted support for improving areas of the curriculum and subjects for all schools;

- monitoring the quality of learning and teaching in schools;

- giving support to innovative and creative approaches to improving pupils' experiences; and

- promoting flexibility and supporting teacher development.

3.3 Leadership and leadership development

The findings from the first cycle of inspection showed that the quality of the strategic direction and management provided by senior members of educational services played a major part in determining the quality of education provided and the extent to which it was embedded in a more holistic view of services to children, young people and their families. Effective directors supported by a highly competent senior management team could achieve a great deal, adding value to the work of schools and providing clear direction for improvement. The effectiveness of service delivery was also enhanced by strong leadership by elected members. Among the qualities of effective leaders of educational services were the following.

- Personal qualities: commitment to children and young people; an optimistic vision of what education could achieve for them; openness to consider new approaches; and the ability to motivate and inspire.

- Professional capacities: a deep understanding of educational matters, national requirements and the needs of the council area; a sound grasp of strategic matters coupled with full knowledge of the operation of educational establishments and services; ability to work within the corporate structure and contribute to the corporate team; competence in forging partnership working within the council and with other services and agencies; ability to share responsibilities and delegate effectively; skills in strategic planning, budgeting and ensuring that goals are achieved; well-developed interpersonal and communication skills; and capacity to evaluate objectively and act on outcomes.

HM Inspectors identified the following profile of collective leadership in very effective authorities.

- Clarity of direction based on shared vision, values and aims, a clear understanding of the needs of communities, and effectively communicated with schools and key stakeholders.

- High visibility and ambition to improve the life chances of children and young people.

- Capacity to work flexibly and find creative solutions to long standing problems.

- Initiative taking by elected members, the chief executive and senior officers, all of whom lead by example.

- Capacity to mediate competing national and local priorities and implement them effectively through effective planning and support.

- Commitment to working in partnership with all council services, health services and voluntary agencies to provide more joined up services to children and families.

- Determination to take difficult decisions and embrace changes which are to the benefit of communities and to inspire confidence in those affected.

- Willingness to consult with key stakeholders, to take action flowing from the consultation and to provide feedback to those consulted.

- Positive attitudes to rigorous evaluation as a means of determining the success or otherwise of policies and identifying action points.

- Clarity in identifying funding and resources to deliver key strategic priorities and effective and efficient deployment and management of resources and finances.

At the core of their business, senior staff in education authorities, including headteachers, need to ensure that all teachers, in whatever sector, can work towards improving the quality of the learning which children and young people experience, the teaching which supports it and the outcomes which learners achieve. Expectations need to be clear to ensure that teachers accept responsibility for their own professional development, for the quality of learning in their classrooms, and for their role in self-evaluation and improvement at personal and establishment levels. Local authorities will have a very important role to play in ensuring that high quality professional development and review is in place to ensure this is the case.

A decade after the disaggregation of local authorities, councils have developed a range of structures and arrangements for delivering education. One of the key challenges that has faced education authorities over the last ten years and continues to need to be addressed is that of providing efficient and effective education in very varied circumstances as set out in Section One of this report. Some councils have built capacity internally and others have begun to work together to provide wider access to services that can be shared. Succession planning, including developing the leadership and management skills of officers at all levels in authorities, remains an important factor in planning for the medium and longer-term success in education to ensure the capacity of authorities to carry out their duties effectively and efficiently. Education authorities, at their best, lead and foster innovation and creativity at both service levels and in their establishments. They also look beyond the boundaries of their council both to learn and

Looking forward 3

to contribute to the overall improvement of Scottish education. The increasing focus on multi-agency delivery of services has changed the nature of leadership in education.

3.4 Balancing support and challenge

The most effective authorities are able to balance the levels of support and challenge provided to schools in an effective partnership with headteachers and their senior management teams. Establishing such a balance has proved to be testing. Towards the end of the period covered in this report, authorities were paying more attention to the roles of centrally-deployed officers in establishing key areas for improvement, and in identifying sources of support. In best practice, headteachers themselves, as senior officers of the authority, were proactive in establishing positive relationships with officers and working with them on improvements to the curriculum, learning and teaching and quality assurance.

In general, pre-school and primary schools received good or very good support for the curriculum and, increasingly, for wider aspects of learning, teaching and assessment. There was scope for more support in secondary schools. The roles of QIOs were being clarified and established in most authorities, but sometimes at the expense of support for the curriculum and learning and teaching. In some education authorities, there was a need for greater consistency in the performance of QIOs. Many authorities were becoming more effective in analysing and using data to monitor the progress of pupils and identify the action required to improve provision required for them. However, considerable work remained to be done to embed the systems in authorities and schools. It was a matter of concern that a number of education authorities did not have well-established arrangements for regularly reviewing their heads of establishments and for supporting them with appropriate programmes of staff development.

The following were among some of the effective measures used to provide support to schools.

- Providing support, advice and direction to pre-school centres including partners.

- Ensuring that each new initiative was supported by a full programme of staff development.

- Holding regular events at which good practice was demonstrated.

- Bringing in materials or expertise from other authorities, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Learning and Teaching Scotland and commercial agencies.

- Seconding acknowledged effective practitioners in their schools to be curriculum development officers or staff tutors to produce curricular materials, undertake programmes of curriculum developments and work alongside staff in schools to improve classroom practice.

- Identifying subject coordinators and seconding them for a few days each year to bring together leaders of specific subjects to share expertise and learn from each other.

- Establishing and maintaining well-trained and experienced support teams for pupils with additional support needs and those teaching them in mainstream schools.

- Supporting well-organised resource centres or online services to support curriculum and staff development.

The need for local authorities to monitor their schools to determine their effectiveness remains a key priority. However, that monitoring process is not an end in itself and meeting the duty to secure improvement depends upon the action taken by the authority and its schools to ensure the best possible outcomes for all children. Key to this process is the way in which flexible approaches and innovative practice are developed to improve school provision and in particular to maximise learning.

This report identifies strengths in education authorities alongside areas which are priorities for improvement. In particular, it points to aspects of educational leadership and management which are carried out well by some authorities but where it is variable in others. The drive to raise standards and quality for all learners in all sectors must be sustained and education authorities and their partners have a key role to play in ensuring that this happens. The direction and leadership will come at both local authority and school level and many improvements will require the active engagement of a wider range of bodies and agencies.

HMIE will support national and local bodies as they consider the implications of this report for their work. For our own part, we will ensure that inspection, review and the other activities of HMIE also address the issues raised in the report. Our response will include the following:

- focusing in inspection on impact and outcomes for learners and families;

- being proportionate in our approach to each inspection;

- supporting leadership development;

- focusing on added value;

- evaluating the impact of partnership working; and

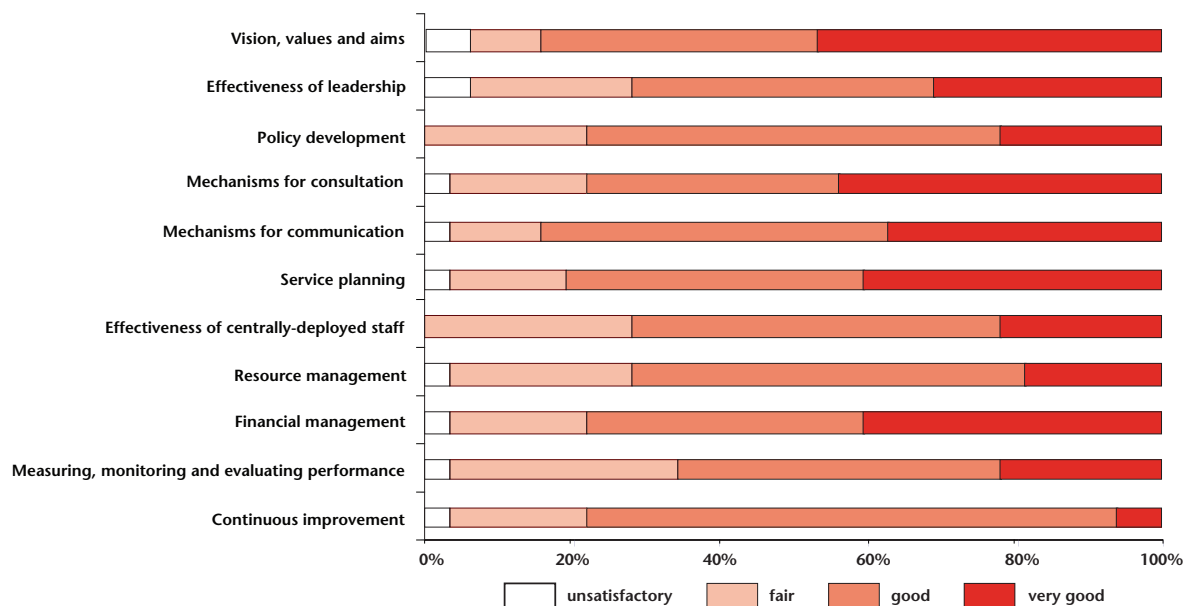- providing support through the district inspector network.

Looking forward 3

Appendix 1:

Distribution of quality indicators evaluated within each Education Authority, 2000–2005
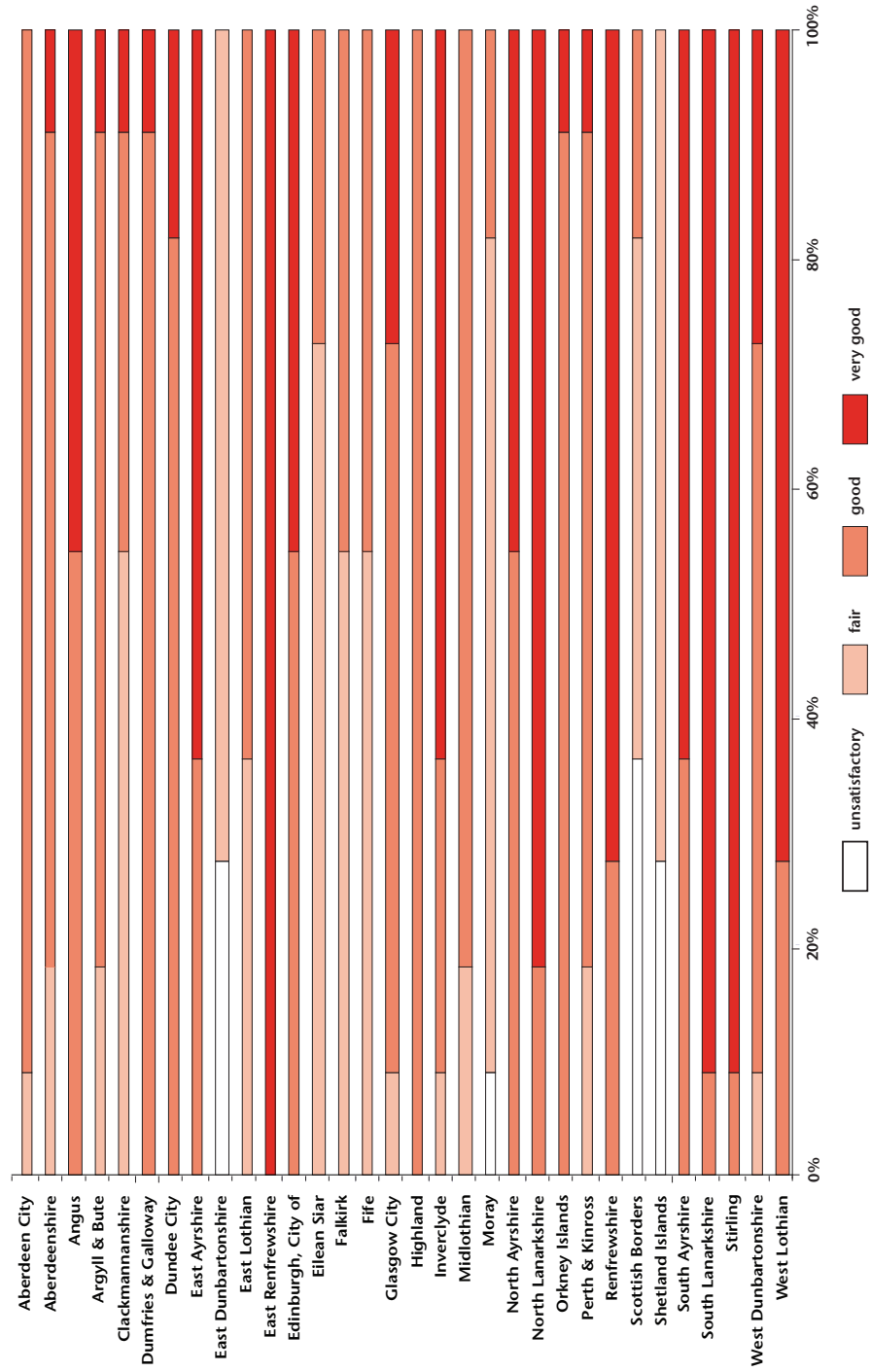
Appendix 2:

Distribution of quality indicator evaluations across all education authorities, 2000–2005

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