

Scots Language in Curriculum for Excellence:

enhancing skills in literacy,
developing successful learners and
confident individuals

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1. Introduction

In April 2017, Education Scotland commissioned an expert Scots Language practitioner to visit three primary and three secondary schools to observe good practice in Scots as part of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). The visits included lesson observations and discussions with teachers, children and young people. There was a particular emphasis on the role Scots can play in helping learners to develop their literacy skills. In addition, we wanted to look at how Scots can help some children and young people become more engaged in learning, and increase their confidence and self-esteem. This report sets out our findings. A list of the schools visited can be found at Appendix A.

2. Background

Published in 2008, [Building the Curriculum 3](#) stated that: ‘throughout (the) curriculum it is expected there will be an emphasis on Scottish contexts, Scottish cultures and Scotland’s history and place in the world.

In 2009, [Literacy and English: Principles and Practice](#) stated that: ‘the languages, dialects and literature of Scotland provide a rich resource for children and young people to learn about Scotland’s culture, identity and language. Through engaging with a wide range of texts they will develop an appreciation of Scotland’s vibrant literary and linguistic heritage and its indigenous languages and dialects. This principle suffuses the [Literacy and English] [Experiences and Outcomes](#) and it is expected that practitioners will build upon the diversity of language represented within the communities of Scotland, valuing the languages which children and young people bring to school.’

Also in 2009, the Scottish Government established a Ministerial Working Group on the Scots Language. This group published a [report](#) in 2010, with a number of recommendations relating to education. In making these recommendations, the group highlighted the potential benefits of Scots for: literacy; social inclusion; creativity; learning across the curriculum; and Scottish identity.

The Scottish Government’s policy, [Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach](#) aims to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn a language other than English (known as L2) from P1 until the end of the broad general education (S3). Additionally, each child is entitled to learn a second language other than English (known as L3) from P5 onwards. The policy provides a good opportunity to strengthen the place of Scots as part of CfE. Recent returns from local authorities indicate that a quarter of them are including Scots as part of their implementation of 1+2.

Four Scots Language Coordinators were seconded to Education Scotland for a two-year period from 2014-2016. One of the four Coordinators has continued to work for Education Scotland up

to the present date. The Coordinators have successfully raised awareness of Scots as part of Curriculum for Excellence through establishing partnerships and networks; creating a wide range of learning and teaching resources; and providing professional learning for teachers and student teachers. Appendix B provides more information on the work of Scots Language Coordinators since 2014, and on the resources available for teachers and other practitioners in education.

In 2015, the Scottish Government and Education Scotland launched a [Scots Language Policy](#) recognising Scots as one of the three indigenous languages of Scotland. The policy stated: 'The Scots language is an essential element of the culture and heritage of Scotland. For many of us, it is a familiar aspect of our song, poetry and literature and a recognised feature of how we express ourselves in our community life. Scots language is only spoken within Scotland and it is not used anywhere else in the world by a community of significant number or extent. Therefore steps need to be taken within Scotland, to ensure its preservation. The 2011 census indicated that over 1.5 million people identified themselves as Scots speakers. It is, therefore, right that Scots should continue to be reflected in education, arts, media and more. The Scottish Government will promote and support Scots and encourage its respect and recognition in order that, what for many is the language of the home, can be used in other areas of Scottish life.'

Education Scotland's [3-18 Literacy and English Review](#) (2015) provided early evidence of the extent to which Scots was featuring in the Literacy and English curriculum in early learning settings and primary, special and secondary schools, and its impact on learners' experiences and achievements.

This report aims to build on the evidence in the 2015 Review and to illustrate the extent to which the good practice in the schools visited is delivering on our aspirations for Scots as part of Curriculum for Excellence.

3. Scots as part of the curriculum

In most of the schools visited, Scots was included as part of the Literacy and English curriculum. In one secondary school, Scots was delivered through courses leading to the SQA Scottish Studies and Scots Language Awards in the senior phase. In one of the primary schools visited, Scots was taught as part of expressive arts.

In primary schools and from S1 to S3 in secondary schools, Scots was included in a range of areas of the Literacy and English curriculum. Examples included the following.

- In listening and talking, learners used Scots when participating in group discussion, and listened to and analysed other speakers' use of Scots.
- In reading, learners were developing strategies for working out the meanings of unfamiliar Scots words and texts; identifying genre in fiction written in Scots; and demonstrating understanding of character, setting and theme in fiction written in Scots.

- In writing, learners used Scots to create texts for different purposes including conveying information and writing creatively, including the creation of characters.

The compulsory Scottish texts studied as part of National 5 and Higher English examinations may include Scots language, Scots syntax or themes relating to Scottish culture. As a result, ensuring learners have some knowledge and experience of Scots prior to the senior phase level was considered important by the secondary schools visited.

In the senior phase, examples of Scots in the Literacy and English curriculum included in writing, choice of language to engage the reader and enhance creative writing as part of the externally-assessed Writing Portfolio in National 5 and Higher English.

Where Scots featured in the Scottish Studies Award at the senior phase in one secondary school, young people were reading complex Scots texts and writing with technical accuracy in Scots.

In one of the primary schools visited, Scots was included in the expressive arts curriculum as follows.

- In drama, children demonstrated their confidence in using a script, and used their expression and voice to perform roles in Scots.
- In music, children expressed the emotions of their characters through singing songs in Scots.

4. Learning and teaching in Scots

Most teachers observed spoke in Scottish Standard English whilst speaking to the whole class. They also used occasional Scots words and phrases. A small number of teachers spoke extensively in Scots to the class, for example when giving directions or asking questions. Where this occurred, most children and young people spoke Scots in response, demonstrating their understanding of the teacher's use of Scots and their own proficiency in using the language. Repeated use in lessons of Scots words initially unfamiliar to pupils helped them increase their Scots vocabulary and their confidence.

In discussion groups set up as part of the visits to schools, most learners indicated that they thought the use of Scots in the classroom raised the status of the language and encouraged them to use it themselves. Young people at one secondary school stated that they felt comfortable using Scots in class discussion. They also felt that the use of Scots improved relationships in the classroom, as a result of learners feeling their language was valued.

Most teachers observed used Scots in teaching resources such as worksheets and PowerPoint slides. This often stimulated discussion about the vocabulary, its meaning and connotations. In discussion groups, most learners indicated that they found written Scots more challenging to understand than spoken Scots. However, there was evidence from lesson observations that

learners were developing and using strategies, some of which had been formally taught, to determine the meaning of unfamiliar Scots words.

5. The role of Scots in enhancing skills in literacy

5.1 Exploring language in depth through reading: analysing the writer's style

Lesson observations provided evidence that Scots can assist learners in the senior phase develop the skills required for success in national qualifications in English. Examples were noted of the use of Scots to help learners develop their skills in understanding and analysing the writer's style, through studying features such as word choice, characterisation and setting, and developing an understanding of inferences and shades of meaning. In a lesson observed in one secondary school, young people were translating newspaper articles, originally written in English, into Scots. Through this activity, they were developing their skills in understanding and summarising the main ideas contained in the article, and in analysing the inferences and connotations of the chosen vocabulary.

5.2 Developing reading strategies

There was evidence from visits to primary schools that Scots can help children to develop strategies to read and analyse unfamiliar texts. In one primary school, children in P2/P3 spoke about how they were developing their confidence and independence in working out the meanings of unfamiliar Scots words. In another primary school, the use of Scots in learning was helping children in P7 to develop their skills in using dictionaries and online reference resources. It was clear that they were developing their independence in selecting strategies and resources to aid their comprehension of unfamiliar texts.

5.3 Developing creative writing skills

In primary and secondary schools visited, children and young people were drawing successfully on the Scots vocabulary they had developed through reading to enhance their creative writing. Use of Scots was increasing their skills in creating convincing characters and settings, and achieving particular effects through language. Young people in two of the secondary schools visited felt that the use of Scots made their writing more interesting. Scots helped with description, providing a rich choice of vocabulary to which they could readily relate.

6. The role of Scots in developing successful learners and confident individuals

Most teachers interviewed during the visits agreed that the use of Scots can help to engage reluctant learners. At the primary school where Scots was included in the expressive arts curriculum, staff were clear that this was increasing the confidence of some learners to a notable extent. In particular, the use of Scots gave some lower-attaining children the confidence to take on leadership roles for the first time.

One secondary school visited provided evidence of reluctant learners who were confident speakers of Scots being motivated to support their peers in determining the meanings of unfamiliar Scots words. The use of Scots was allowing these young people to participate in class discussions and complete written tasks much more successfully than usual. A visiting Scots author had provided a particularly motivating experience for lower-attaining young people who greatly increased their confidence as a result and went on to perform well in national qualifications in English.

Teachers interviewed in another secondary school felt that allowing pupils to use Scots removed the barriers to learning experiences for some, and created opportunities for them to access the curriculum. There was evidence that the use of Scots resulted in improvements in some lower-attaining pupils' writing skills, motivation and behaviour.

5. Conclusion

There is clear evidence to confirm the educational benefits of including Scots in Curriculum for Excellence. Scots can support children and young people to develop a range of important skills in literacy, including advanced reading and writing skills required for success in national qualifications. Scots as part of Curriculum for Excellence can support young people in developing their confidence and a sense of their own identity. It can help to engage learners whose mother tongue is Scots by making them feel more valued and included, and therefore more motivated to take part in lessons, to lead learning, and to achieve more highly.

Early Learning settings and schools across Scotland are encouraged to consider the findings of this report, refer to the information in Appendices B and C, and to consider how they might include Scots in their curriculum to enhance children's and young people's experiences and achievements.

Appendix A: List of schools visited

Primary Schools

Balbardie Primary School, Bathgate, West Lothian

Boghall Primary School, Bathgate, West Lothian

Comely Park Primary School, Falkirk

Secondary Schools

Morgan Academy, Dundee

St John's RC High School, Dundee

Smithycroft Secondary School, Glasgow

Appendix B: Information on the work of Education Scotland’s Scots Language Coordinators since 2014, and on the resources available for teachers and other practitioners in education

Education Scotland’s Scots Language Coordinators have delivered professional learning on Scots in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in 23 local authorities across the country. Scots Language Coordinators have also delivered lectures and seminars for Initial Teacher Education students at the University of Aberdeen, the University of Highlands and Islands, the University of Strathclyde and the University of the West of Scotland. Strong links have been formed with universities and colleges across Scotland, as well as with acknowledged Scots academics, linguists and writers as new support materials for use in schools have been created and published.

A suite of new materials for teaching Scots at all levels of CfE has been created and can now be found on the [National Improvement Hub](#). This includes a ‘History of Scots’ animation which has been particularly popular. A Glow network called the ‘Scots Blether’ has over 300 members, forming a vibrant online community for supporting Scots in schools. Organisations which host resources created in partnership, or with whom Education Scotland has collaborated on events and sessions, include; Scottish Book Trust, Scots Language Dictionaries, Scots Language Centre, Scottish Poetry Library, Scottish Film Education, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, the Association for Scottish Literary Studies, Historic Scotland, as well as the Creative Scotland-funded, National Library of Scotland-hosted post of ‘Scots Scriever’.

An in-depth partnership was formed over the two years in which inaugural Scots Scriever, Hamish MacDonald, has been in post. This included the new website created as part of the Scriever role: [Wee Windaes](#) where newly digitised texts from the National Library’s archive are available to read. Partnership work with the Scots Scriever also included delivering sessions in Shotts Prison, as requested by the Scottish Prison Service, to introduce adult offenders to the SQA Scots Language Award.

Collaboration with BBC Scotland and National Library of Scotland has resulted in previously unavailable material from the BBC Scotland archive being released for education purposes, with clips from television and radio programmes featuring Scots now being hosted on the NLS [Scotland on Screen](#) learning page. A new Learning Journey exploring clips from Scotland on Screen featuring Scots was launched at the Kelvin Hall Museum in May 2017. In collaboration with the British Film Industry-funded charity ‘Into Film’, 16 events promoting and celebrating Scots language and film have been held with over 2,500 children and young people attending. The events were hosted in partnership with cultural venues across Scotland.

An in-depth course on Scots Language will be made available for free online use by Open University Scotland at the end of 2017. The course has had significant input from Education Scotland and is aimed at teachers and tutors in schools and colleges, including within the Scottish Prison Service.

Appendix C: SQA Scottish Studies and Scots Language Awards

Details of the [Scottish Studies](#) and [Scots Language Awards](#) can be found on the SQA website

Scots Language Coordinators have worked in partnership with the SQA since 2014 to promote the Awards. They have given extensive support to individual schools and clusters of schools, including class visits to work with learners; hosting conversation days in partnership with SQA; contributing to Glow networks and staff meetings to advise and support teachers on how to best develop the Awards for the benefits of learners in different areas of the country.

Materials to support schools offering the Awards can be found on the [National Improvement Hub](#). These materials include the 'Keen tae Ken yir Kin' project which has been used by schools at all CfE levels, and with particular success in the senior phase. 'Keen tae Ken yir Kin' puts Scots language at the centre of learning in a context where two classes from different parts of the country are paired together to exchange written and recorded examples of the Scots language used in their area.

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