

Education Executive
31 March 2009

IRVINE, 31 March 2009 - At a Meeting of the Education Executive of North Ayrshire Council at 1.00 p.m.

Present

John Bell, Tom Barr, Reverend David Karoon, Margaret McDougall, Very Reverend Matthew Canon McManus, Peter McNamara, David O'Neill, John Scott and Gordon Smith.

In Attendance

C. Kirk, Corporate Director, J. Ward, J. Leckie and M. Docherty, Heads of Service, F. Rodman, Quality Improvement Officer and F. Dunlop, Headteacher (Educational Services); J. Montgomery, General Manager, M. McKeown, Team Leader - Committee Services and A. Clarke, Team Leader - Communications (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed Mr Gordon Smith to the meeting. Mr Smith is the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers representative on the Education Executive.

2. The Early Years Framework

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the Scottish Government's Early Years Framework and seeking approval for a pilot initiative at Springvale Early Years Centre, Saltcoats.

The largest influences on children in the early years are their parents, with the wider family and the community often also playing a significant role. Improvements in outcomes for children therefore depend crucially on developing a partnership with parents and communities so that all the influences on the child are contributing towards positive outcomes. What happens to children in their earliest years is key to outcomes in adult life.

In December 2008, the Scottish Government published the Early Years Framework. The Framework aims to give all children the best start in life. It sets out the actions the Scottish Government and local partners involved in early years services need to take to achieve better outcomes for young children and their families.

For the purpose of the Framework, early years is defined as pre-birth to 8 years old. At the heart of the Framework is the recognition of the right of all young children to high quality relationships, environments and services, which offer a holistic approach to meeting their needs. This approach is important for all children but is of particular benefit in offering effective support to those children and families requiring high levels of support. The Scottish Government and COSLA have worked with a wide variety of partners to develop the Framework and local partners will have a great deal of flexibility in implementing it to ensure that local needs are appropriately addressed. Implementation of the Framework requires a commitment from all partners to integrated planning and working.

The Education Executive was presented with an overview of the Early Years Framework. The Framework identifies four principles which are key to early intervention. It recognises that no one programme of work or action will be successful in turning around the lives affected by complex and ingrained social problems, and that it will take a concerted and long-term effort across a range of policies and services to deliver the transformational change required in order to secure better outcomes for all children. To this end the Framework identifies ten elements which will be key to bringing about the transformational change required. Finally, the Framework identifies a number of key actions which will require to be taken by a range of partners in order to bring about improved outcomes for children. Each of these areas were summarised in the report.

The Scottish Government has indicated that it will take ten years to deliver the radical improvement in outcomes set out in the Framework and has committed to working with partners at a national level to bring about transformational change in the planning and delivery of services to children and families. There is however no new funding available to support the implementation of the Early Years Framework. There is an expectation that the Framework will be taken forward by realigning and prioritising resources. Single Outcome Agreements and the community planning process will be the key local mechanisms for putting the Framework into practice.

In North Ayrshire considerable progress has been made to date in addressing some of the key actions set out in the Framework. Details were set out in the report. North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership (CPP) has identified the contribution of early intervention and the Early Years Framework to a range of medium to long-term outcomes across economic activity, employability, health, education, crime and communities. The CPP has therefore agreed to set aside £250,000 in 2009/10 from within the Fairer North Ayrshire Fund to support the implementation of the Early Years Framework in North Ayrshire through a pilot initiative based at Springvale Early Years Centre, Saltcoats.

This initiative will provide an integrated approach to working with young children and families across the Three Towns area. A multi-agency family support team will be established comprising a coordinator, staff from health, social services and educational services. The approach is based on early intervention with agencies working together to identify children and families at risk and then putting together support packages suited to their needs. The initiative will enable agencies to work in partnership with parents/carers to give them the skills and confidence they need to successfully support their family. Key targets have been set demonstrating the impact the initiative will have on individuals and communities. Progress reports will be provided to the Education Executive, the Integrated Children's Services Steering Group and the CPP Board.

The Education Executive agreed to (a) note the key messages in the Scottish Government's Early Years Framework; (b) approve the implementation of the early years pilot initiative at Springvale Early Years Centre, Saltcoats; and (c) receive a progress report after one year.

3. Confucius Classrooms

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the progress made in taking forward the Confucius Classroom Initiative within North Ayrshire.

The Confucius Classroom Initiative is a development of the China Strategy launched by the former Scottish Executive in 2006. The aim of the Strategy is to ensure that Scotland is ready to respond to the opportunities arising from the growth of China as an economic power. It aims to strengthen engagement with China through increasing understanding of the rich and diverse culture and ensure that Scotland can benefit from business, science and educational links.

The Confucius Classrooms Initiative is a Scottish Government supported project aimed at introducing Chinese language and culture to school pupils. In April 2008 a Memorandum of Understanding between Scotland and China was signed by Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. As part of this partnership, a letter of Co-operation Intent was signed between Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) and the Hanban (the Office of Chinese Language Council International - an organisation equivalent to LTS). The aims of the link between LTS and Hanban are to develop the understanding of Chinese language and culture in Scotland, and to develop Confucius Classrooms as hubs from which all schools in a local area will be able to access resources.

Six hubs, supported by LTS, are currently being developed across Scotland. One of these is a pan-Ayrshire initiative with the primary Confucius Classroom being located in Grange Academy, Kilmarnock. This was launched by LTS in January 2009 and a group of pupils from Glebe Primary School represented North Ayrshire at the event.

The next stage of development involves the creation of a North Ayrshire 'satellite' Confucius Classroom in Irvine Royal Academy. Irvine Royal Academy will make Mandarin available next session. In the first instance this will be at Access 3 level for pupils in S5/S6. A dedicated classroom will be used in Irvine Royal Academy to develop the satellite Confucius Classroom. In the course of next session the Mandarin pilot will be evaluated with a view to considering how it might be possible to develop this initiative, e.g. by delivering at other stages of the secondary school and/or at levels beyond Access 3.

A British Council Chinese Language Assistant (CLA) will support the delivery of Mandarin next session. A range of Curriculum for Excellence projects is envisaged involving the CLA who is likely to be able to work across a number of departments such as Art, Music and PE. In addition the CLA will support Chinese language and cultural developments in Glebe Primary School.

LTS are funding an International Group Study visit to China in spring 2009, for local authority staff involved in Confucius Classrooms, to enable meetings to take place with members of the Hanban. A group of 20 local authority staff are being taken to Beijing by LTS. Two officers will represent North Ayrshire on this visit. LTS are committed to making further opportunities available for immersion visits of Scottish school pupils to China. It is anticipated that further details about this programme of visits will be made available after the study visit to Beijing.

The Education Executive agreed to (a) approve the proposals for a Confucius Classroom at Irvine Royal Academy, as set out in the report; and (b) to receive progress reports at future meetings.

4. Priorities for Educational Services Planning 2009-2012

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on priorities for Educational Services planning in the period 2009-2012.

The Education Executive approved the overall aims, values and priorities for Educational Services in August 2008. The broad priorities were:

- Increasing educational attainment and achievement;
- Developing confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors and successful learners;
- Increasing the number of young people moving to positive post-school destinations;
- Promoting better health and more physical activity;
- Reducing disadvantage and promoting equality;
- Empowering communities through participation in cultural and lifelong learning;
- Supporting the professional development of staff;
- Making the best use of resources and providing high quality facilities.

These priorities will contribute to the Council's regeneration strategy through improving educational attainment, achievement and employability. Ensuring that young people are well qualified and confident is a key aspect of regeneration as is improving opportunities for adults to learn and participate. The service will also focus on supporting vibrant communities by working with them to build capacity and create opportunities for engagement and reflection. The recent Inspection of Education Authorities (INEA) highlighted some key areas which will be built into service planning. The service needs to build on the strong platform of basic education to develop a socially broader and more successful participation from upper primary through to upper secondary. Raising aspirations and expectations will require more focussed joint working of school, parents and communities. It is intended that partnership working with James Watt College, other local learning institutions and the University of the West of Scotland will continue to develop.

The appendix to the report provided details of the Service Planning priorities of Educational Services for the period 2009-2012. The report summarised the context in which the service planning priorities will be taken forward.

Members discussed the priorities and emphasised the need for the Education Executive to receive regular progress updates on the implementation of each of the individual priorities set out in the appendix to the report.

The Education Executive agreed (a) to approve the priorities for the Service Plan set out in the report; and (b) to receive an annual progress report in August each year; and (c) that the Corporate Director (Educational Services) also consider an appropriate means of providing regular updates on progress against individual priorities.

5. Replacement for Dreghorn Primary School

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the outcome of an options appraisal exercise carried out in connection with Dreghorn Primary School, and on the preferred way forward.

Educational Services has £9.3m approved in the capital programme for 2010/12 to address accommodation issues within the existing Dreghorn Primary School. The building has been previously rated a 'C' (poor in both condition and suitability factors) within the School Estate Management Plan. The project within the Capital Plan is to provide sufficient new or modernised accommodation suitable to deliver the Curriculum for Excellence. The project will also meet the requirements of pupils with additional support needs who currently attend the school.

The first stage in the process is to identify a site for development. Educational Services has formulated a working group involving staff from Planning, Roads and Architects to determine a preferred site for development. Through its work, the group identified four options for consideration i.e.

- Option 1 – Refurbishment of the existing site;
- Option 2 – New build on the existing site;
- Option 3 – New build on the site of Greenwood Academy;
- Option 4 – New build, Dundonald Road site.

Details of each of the options were set out in the proposed Consultative Document which was appended to the report. In considering these options, account was taken of a range of evaluation criteria including location, cost, design potential, traffic management, the planning perspective, and the community perspective. Following assessment and analysis of each of the options, Option 4 – involving a new build school on a greenfield site at Dundonald Road, Dreghorn, emerged as the preferred way forward. This option will use an area of Council owned land which is currently made up of open space, a small playing field and a disused bowling green.

The Education Executive agreed that (a) appropriate consultations take place to determine a site for development; (b) the consultative document attached to the report be issued to parents and interested parties; and (c) a further report on the outcome of the consultation be submitted in due course.

6. HMIE Report: Gateside Primary School and Nursery Class

Submitted report on the outcome of the inspection of Gateside Primary School and Nursery Class undertaken in January 2009 by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE).

The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. HM Inspectors evaluated the quality of the children's experience in the nursery; learning, teaching and achievement in the school; the effectiveness of the school; the environment for learning; and the school's processes for self-evaluation. Members of the inspection team also examined pupils' work, interviewed groups of pupils and staff, and met with the chairperson of the Parent Council, representatives of local partners, and a group of parents.

HMIE ceased inspection activity earlier than might be expected because of the high quality of self-evaluation and the clear direction of the school. The inspection report was published by HMIE on 10 March 2009. The report identified the following key strengths:

- Well-behaved, confident and articulate children who are keen to learn.
- Staff commitment, teamwork and their role in improving the school.
- Approaches to developing children's independence and motivation to learn.
- Opportunities for children to achieve in a wide range of areas.
- The leadership of the headteacher and her impact on improving the work of the school.

The report also identified improvements through self-evaluation and leadership for learning as examples of good practice. The following areas for improvement have been agreed between HMIE, the school, and the education authority:

- Continue to share good practice in learning and teaching and raise attainment further.
- Continue to improve the curriculum across the nursery and school in line with Curriculum for Excellence.

In consultation with the designated Quality Improvement Officer and staff, the headteacher has put plans in place to incorporate the recommendations of the HMIE report into the School Improvement Plan. The school's plan to address the recommendations will be submitted to the Head of Service for approval following consultation with staff and the Parent Council and will subsequently be shared with parents and carers. In terms of revised follow-through procedures, HMIE will make no further visits following the inspection. The school's progress will be reported to parents through the normal school and local authority processes.

Mrs Dunlop, the headteacher of the school was present and answered Members' questions. The Education Executive recorded its appreciation of the positive inspection report.

The Education Executive agreed to approve the proposals to address the key points for action in the HMIE Inspection Report, as set out in the report.

The meeting ended at 2.10 p.m.