

Review of arrangements for transitions in learning in the Kirriemuir neighbourhoods

Angus Council

24 January 2017

1. Context of Review

This review of the Kirriemuir neighbourhood¹ in Angus Council was one of a range of new approaches to inspection and review tried out during academic session 2015-16. We agreed with Angus Council that we would explore how well arrangements for transitions from one setting to another are supporting children and young people in their learning and helping them to achieve as highly as possible. Prior to this review, schools and other establishments in the Kirriemuir neighbourhood had already been working together to evaluate and improve arrangements for transitions.

The schools and other establishments involved in this neighbourhood review are listed in the Appendix. The early learning and childcare (ELC) settings involved included Angus Council primary school nursery classes, and private and voluntary providers working in partnership with Angus Council.

A team of inspectors with expertise in ELC, primary school, secondary school, college and community learning and development (CLD) undertook this review in June 2016. We explored the agreed theme by setting out to answer the following four questions.

1. How well are children, young people and their families supported to learn and achieve in this neighbourhood?
2. How well does the curriculum support learning and achievement for all children and young people?
3. How well do transition arrangements support progression in learning for all children and young people aged 2-18?
4. How well does self-evaluation support improvements in the progress of all children and young people in our neighbourhood?

¹ At various points in this report, when we are referring to schools and ELC settings only, the term 'cluster' is used instead of neighbourhood.

One school supported children well in their learning through the use of class leaflets to welcome children into new classes. In addition children produced film clips to explain their learning in literacy and numeracy for parents and children moving to the next stage in their learning.

One school with a nursery class had two shared learning sessions each week throughout the year with a clear focus on shared learning in health and wellbeing and French. This increased to four sessions in the third term. Parents found this very useful in helping children with transition to school both in terms of their learning and emotional wellbeing.

Background

What is transition?

For the purpose of this review, we have defined transition as ‘changes that children make from one phase of education to another over time’.

Taking into consideration the importance of transition in the lives of children in the Kirriemuir neighbourhood, headteachers of the primary schools and Webster’s High School and heads of ELC centres have worked together to review transitions across the schools and other establishments, and transitions within schools and other establishments. They welcomed an external review as part of their work to ensure transition arrangements within the Kirriemuir neighbourhood are effective.

Findings from the review

1. How well are children, young people and their families supported to learn and achieve in this community?

Arrangements for the pastoral transitions for children starting nursery and then moving on to primary are strong overall across the cluster of schools and ELC settings. Flexible approaches to children starting ELC are appreciated by parents. The variety of models of provision, such as whole-day sessions and lunch clubs meet the needs of most families, taking account of parents’ work commitments. The provision for two year old children is continuing to be implemented thoughtfully across the cluster area. Young children benefit from accessing this provision within their local community. In a few ELC settings, in particular those in private partnership with Angus Council, staff would benefit from working with other nursery settings in the neighbourhood in order to develop a shared understanding of the appropriate expectations of young children’s learning. Staff in the private partnership ELC settings correctly identify children who require additional challenge, and now need to use more appropriate strategies and activities to extend the learning of these children.

Overall, across all primary schools, there is a warm, friendly atmosphere where parents and children feel relaxed and welcome in school. Children benefit from a range of natural opportunities to work across stages and learn from each other. Parents and children are positive about how well the particular needs of children from rural schools are met at times of transition and the range of steps taken by teachers at Webster’s High School to support them. In all primary schools, children benefit from meeting the secondary school guidance teacher prior to moving into S1. Effective transfer of information on individual children supports this transition well. As a result, children feel

reassured and more confident as they move on to secondary school. In most schools, staff use assessment information to identify children who require additional support for their learning. However, in transferring information, there is scope for staff to focus more on the needs of higher-attaining children to ensure they are challenged appropriately during this transition. Overall, most schools need to provide clearer information to parents and children about progress through Curriculum for Excellence levels of attainment.

Across Webster's High School, staff identify the social, emotional and mental needs of young people very well. The pastoral care team provides effective support to almost all young people. Young people and parents engage well with the transition arrangements for children moving from P7 into S1. However, from S1 to S3, young people do not have a clear enough understanding of the progress they are making in their learning. The school is engaging well with a range of partners to support young people. Partners include Dundee and Angus College, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), employers and other agencies. This is helping to support transition arrangements for young people moving into further education or employment. Staff at Webster's High School are continuing to improve the effectiveness of these partnerships. For example, they are working proactively with Dundee and Angus College to increase the number of college places for young people from S4 to S6. Teaching staff work well to support young people to make appropriate progress in S4-S6. This will be enhanced by the information due to be provided through the new system for tracking and monitoring young people's learning.

Angus Council has robust approaches in place for early identification of children who have additional support needs. A range of agencies such as health visitors, social work and nursery staff meet regularly to discuss children aged two to five who will require additional support, whether this is through placement in a school with provision for children with additional support needs or additional support in a mainstream ELC setting. Staff see these approaches as positive in allowing early planning to meet children's needs. Meetings with a range of agencies take place throughout the year to alert and discuss children from P6 to S6 who will require lifelong additional support. The purpose of these meetings is to ensure early awareness and planning for children leaving secondary school. The schools engage very well with families at times of transition, from ELC to primary school, from primary school to secondary school and when young people are leaving secondary school. Parents feel that children are well prepared for these transitions and have good opportunities to visit the schools, participate in enhanced transitions and discuss issues with staff. The schools, together with Angus Council should further develop how they will use assessment information to ensure children are placed in appropriate establishments and that they receive suitable support to meet their identified needs. Panels led by Angus Council are effective in determining placements for children and young people with additional support needs. However, further guidance and support from Angus Council would help schools develop more inclusive approaches and ensure that children and young people have appropriate opportunities to be included in mainstream classes

There is effective practice in supporting young people who attend college programmes. Webster's High School and Dundee and Angus College work well in partnership to support the transition of young people into the college environment.

Pastoral care staff from Webster's High School visit young people in the college, offering support and developing their own understanding of what young people are gaining from their college experience.

Transitions out of Webster's High School for young people from S4 to S6 are well organised. The school provides a good range of opportunities for staff and pupils to engage with events, such as university open days, college taster days, work experience and careers conventions, and find out information about the next stage in their learning. Young people from S4 to S6 are very positive about the support they receive when making subject options, and planning work placements. They also appreciate the support they receive when applying for further and higher education or for employment. This includes individual interviews with pastoral care teachers and careers advisors from SDS.

CLD staff are engaging with a few families in Kirriemuir neighbourhood to help support them and their children through Family Learning programmes. There is a focus on supporting parents with the social and emotional wellbeing of their children and helping them understand how children can benefit from play. CLD and partners offer young people a range of youth work programmes in Kirriemuir. These include arts, music and targeted groups. There is considerable scope for CLD staff to provide more support for young people when they move on from Webster's High School. There is potential for better joint working with schools and other agencies

Staff who are members of the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) team at Webster's High School have a strong focus on preparing young people for post-school destinations in education and employment. The team is well led and have a formal plan containing DYW priorities linked to the School Development Plan which is helping to focus the work of the group. The careers advisor from SDS supports Pupil Care and Support staff to provide a comprehensive careers programme to all levels from S1 through S6, pupils with additional support needs and those identified as being at risk.

Staff from Webster's High School and Dundee and Angus College collaborate well to ensure young people are placed on the level of study that is best suited to their needs. Where appropriate, mixed-age groupings are used to enhance the learning experience, for example in sports programmes, young people from S4 to S6 in the same group benefit from peer learning, improved personal development and higher aspirations for progression.

The college offers helpful taster sessions to pupils in S3-S4 which provide an initial experience of college and the vocational opportunities on offer. The integration of young people into college programmes is very effective and is producing positive outcomes for young people beyond the essential requirements of the qualification for which they are studying. These positive outcomes include essential skills such as time-keeping, employability, and working with others. Young people are also developing greater self-confidence. Webster's High School provides useful transition information on young people's needs and prior learning to the college through Personal Learning Support Plans. Teaching staff at the college use these plans well to adjust their teaching to the needs of individual learners. The college would also welcome the opportunity to attend all transition meetings relating to young people

Rural schools value the enhanced transitions to Webster's High School. Children in rural settings need time to adjust to the much larger numbers of a large secondary school. Parents felt the enhanced transition helped their children prepare for being taught by a greater number of teachers. In addition children were able to build relationships with others before entering secondary school.

with additional support needs. This will ensure they have all the information available to plan transitions effectively for these learners.

Better provision for travel from school to college would help transition arrangements, as young people from Webster's High School, in the early few weeks of their course, are disadvantaged by the distance they have to travel and the summer bus timetable. This can result in learners missing up to half of their college class and does not provide a good environment for young people to establish positive relationships.

2. How well does the curriculum support learning and achievement for all children and young people?

In ELC classes that are part of primary schools, there are good opportunities for shared learning across the ELC and P1 throughout the year. In the best practice, these experiences are well planned and linked to young children's learning needs. As a result of effective home links with children aged two to five, staff are able to ensure that the curriculum takes good account of the needs and interests of the youngest children. In most settings for children aged three to five, the curriculum is largely broad and balanced, built on children's interests and delivered through a play environment. There is scope to improve the use of the national guidance *Building the Ambition* to support the progression and delivery of the learning for two-year-olds. In most primary schools, there is a strong focus on supporting children to access the curriculum using 'Growth Mind-set' approaches and 'The Learning Pit'. These approaches are helping children persist and make progress in their learning.

In Angus Council primary school nursery classes and in a few partner providers, staff use children's individual folios well to capture progression in learning across the curriculum. Profiles for children in P7 are being used well to document children's achievements as they move on to secondary. These could be used more effectively to engage and sustain children's interest as they move to secondary school. All schools are using the Angus Council progression pathways and standards to support planning for the curriculum in such a way that allows children to build on their previous learning. However, the approach to curriculum planning is at different stages of development across the primary schools. This is leading to inconsistent experiences for children across the cluster of primary schools.

Primary headteachers in the cluster work together well to develop areas of the curriculum. In a few schools, the pace of curriculum change is too slow. The cluster is taking forward plans to improve curriculum transitions from P7 to S1. The use of the Angus Standards is supporting this work through the development of a shared understanding of standards and the progress children are expected to make by the end of P7. Good progress has been made in implementing the 1+2 Languages policy. The focus on French across the primary

schools is having a positive impact on children's progress and the course in S1-S2 is currently being revised to ensure the pace and challenge in S1 builds on these higher levels of prior learning. There is scope for more joint working between primary schools and Webster's High School on expected standards in mathematics. This would avoid the need for assessing children in mathematics at the end of P7.

Webster's High School has identified the need to review the curriculum from S1 to S3 to ensure it meets the needs of all learners. Staff have identified the need to develop learning pathways for different groups, including the lowest- and highest-attaining young people. The school is developing a range of pathways for different groups of learners from S4 to S6 which includes college provision and work placements. Young people at risk of not achieving a positive destination are identified in partnership with SDS and appropriate experiences planned for them through the Angus Council 'On Two Feet' programme.

Webster's High School builds well on the skills for work which are developed in most of the primary schools in the neighbourhood. A few of the primary schools have a strong focus on this area. For example, in Tannadice Primary School, children at P6/7 run a fortnightly Community Café. Glamis Primary School have very good links with local businesses and have a progressive programme called 'Tattie Tastic', a programme where children follow the manufacturing process of crisps. This good practice should be shared across the cluster to encourage skills for work to be developed more fully across all schools. Webster's High School provides increasing opportunities for young people to accredit their achievements, including those related to skills for work. It will be important to ensure that they have further opportunities to develop these skills from S1 to S3, in a planned and progressive manner. This will ensure that a focus on skills for work is not confined to the senior phase of secondary school.

The focus at Webster's High School on the national initiative Developing the Young Workforce has supported the development of young people's skills for life and work. Almost all young people have left school for a positive destination in the last four years. Almost all young people at Webster's High School go on to further education, higher education, training or employment.

The college offers a good range of vocational learning opportunities for young people including programmes that deliver recognised national and industry standard qualifications. Webster's High School proactively seeks alternative provision for pupils where it is not available at Dundee and Angus College. Pupils attending college on school-link programmes are positive about their choice and keen to begin their studies. They enjoy learning in the college environment. Outside speakers are used well by the school and the college to promote vocational routes, apprenticeships and education opportunities. Across all schools in the Dundee and Angus region, the college endeavours to offer all young people their first choice of college programme. However, this is not always possible given the physical and staffing resource constraints that dictate the viability of college programmes. Consequently, not all young people are enrolled on the college programme they choose and a few do not gain a place at the local college.

In Tannadice Primary School the headteacher and staff had developed a clear easy to use system to track children's progress in their learning.

Children and young people with additional support needs who are placed in bases or in support groups follow an individualised curriculum. Staff and parents are positive about the progress children and young people are making. Parents highlighted the progress their children have made in terms of better engagement, better behaviour and improved communication skills. Young people of secondary age are achieving success in a broad range of National Qualifications across subject areas. Both Webster's High School and Southmuir Primary School should consider further developing the curriculum for children and young people in additional needs bases to ensure that they are appropriately challenged, and that programmes and courses reflect their individual strengths and areas for development. Webster's High School needs to improve further transitions from S3 into the senior phase for young people in the additional support needs group. In addition, they need to improve further the senior phase curriculum for these young people to ensure they have opportunities to gain relevant skills and accreditation through a wider range of programmes and pathways.

3. How well do transition arrangements support progression in learning for all children and young people from 2-18?

In all early years' establishments, there are effective arrangements in place to provide personal support for children as they start their early learning. In most cases, personal learning profiles (PLP) and observation tools are being used well to assess, record and plan children's progress in learning. However, private and voluntary partner providers require more support to ensure the PLP approaches are used consistently to support children's learning. In the majority of transition points from the start of early learning to P1, there needs to be a clearer focus on continuity and progression in children's learning.

In the best practice across the primary schools we visited, there are very effective approaches to ensure children build on prior learning as they move through the school. In schools where there has been recent changes in headteachers, staff are working together to identify where they need to make improvements to the curriculum. P7 transition information, shared centrally with staff in Webster's High School, includes attainment data from P7 and information on progress from P7 teachers. Staff at department level in Webster's High School are using this information to identify young people who may require additional challenge and support. We have asked staff at Webster's High School to include information about children's levels of attainment in Curriculum for Excellence in the new tracking and monitoring system being developed. This will support staff to plan continuity and progression in young people's learning and ensure they build on their prior attainment. Links between subject departments and primary schools should continue to be established to ensure a shared understanding of expectations around children's and young people's levels of attainment. This will ensure they make appropriate progress in their learning.

Most primary schools have made good progress in developing P7 profiles to support young people to record their learning and identify their next steps. Good progress has been made in developing profiles in S3 to ensure they support young people's progress in learning. Young people are beginning to build on their P7 profile by using it as a basis for continued recording of their learning from S1 to S3. Although subject departments across Webster's High School are developing approaches to involving young people in understanding their progress in learning, young people in S1 to S3 are not yet able to discuss their progress in learning and the skills they are developing. A consistent whole-school approach to profiling and reflecting on learning would support them to do this.

There is scope to improve joint planning with CLD to ensure young people can benefit fully from the opportunities available. As yet there is not a clear picture of the 'CLD offer' to schools and other partners.

Both schools with support bases and additional support needs groups work well together to meet the pastoral and learning needs of the children and young people. The campus provision of Webster's High School and Southmuir Primary School facilitates good-quality collaborative planning when children are moving from P7 into S1. Well-planned, enhanced transitions are in place for children attending additional support needs bases or groups within the schools. Good joint working between the support for learning staff from Webster's High School and primary schools within the cluster results in very effective individualised programmes which are helping children feel confident when transferring to secondary school. Schools work well with other agencies such as health professionals and social work services to meet the needs of children and young people. For example, review meetings and transition meetings for young people include other agencies such as Enable and college partners. However, the work of these transition meetings could be further enhanced with focussing more clearly on how children will build on their learning as they move from class to class or school to school. Individualised educational programmes in Webster's High School should take better account of children's strengths and needs. In Tannadice Primary School children themselves reflect on their strengths and needs using wellbeing indicators and their evaluations are included in their own improvement plans. There is scope for this good practice to be adopted more widely across the cluster.

4. How well does our self-evaluation support us to improve the progress of all children and young people within our community?

In most ELC settings, staff have made a good start to tracking and monitoring children's progress. There is scope for private and voluntary partner providers to work more closely with Angus Council to develop the use of tracking and monitoring of children's progress more fully. Most primary schools across the cluster have a range of ways to track and monitor children's progress and thus allow them to transfer accurate information when children move from one stage to another. Some schools are less well advanced in developing these processes due to changes in leadership. As a result, there is variability in the quality of information being transferred. The views of children and young people are used well to improve transition arrangements across all sectors. Parents have been involved in evaluating and informing the transition arrangements. In most primary and ELC

establishments, self-evaluation has led to improvements for children and their families.

Webster's High School would benefit from further analysing attainment from S1 to S3 at school and department level. It is worth continuing to ensure that at faculty meetings there is a clear focus on the importance of raising attainment from S1 to S3. This will help young people build on prior levels of attainment from primary school and improve attainment at the senior phase.

Webster's High School has recently developed new approaches to monitoring and tracking attainment of young people and this now includes those in the additional support needs groups. The support for learning staff and the senior leadership team are beginning to consider how they can use these approaches to better track and monitor progress and attainment of young people within each group. The schools, together with Angus Council, should evaluate and review approaches to placing children and young people in additional support bases. Webster's High School has arrangements in place such as the additional support needs group which are designed to meet the needs of children and young people who have significant additional support needs. Whilst these provisions are providing well-resourced learning opportunities, some children and young people would benefit from more opportunities for inclusion within the mainstream schools and access to mainstream classes

The Schools Portal provides helpful and detailed information which the Dundee and Angus College and Webster's High School use well to monitor progression of almost all young people in their transition to post-16 education and employment. Sharing between the secondary school and college is effective. The college provides regular reports to the school on young people's progress and imports information from the school into its management information system for analysis. The college makes good use of its comprehensive quality arrangements, along with feedback from learners and curriculum teams, to evaluate the success of school transition programmes and improve the experience of school-based learners.

What Next?

We have confidence that, in the Kirriemuir neighbourhood, most of the transition arrangements are ensuring continuity in learning for children and young people as they progress from early years through school and beyond. We found interesting practice which we have highlighted throughout the report.

Our Area Lead Officer will maintain contact with Angus Council to monitor progress on addressing the aspects for development identified in this report.

Appendix

The contributors to learning within the Kirriemuir Neighbourhood are

Schools/Nurseries

Webster's High School

Southmuir Primary school with nursery provision (shared campus with Webster's High School)

Northmuir Primary School with nursery provision

Airlie Primary School with nursery provision

Newtyle Primary School with nursery provision (morning only)

Cortachy Primary School with nursery provision

Glamis Primary School with nursery provision

Eassie Primary School

Isla Primary School with nursery provision

Tannadice Primary School with nursery provision

Standalone early learning and childcare provision

Wendy House, Kirriemuir

Sunshine Playgroup, Kirriemuir

Charleton Playgroup, Glamis

Newtyle Playgroup

College and Community Learning and Development

Dundee and Angus College

Community Learning and Development, Kirriemuir

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