How well are we improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap?

A framework to evaluate how well local authorities are improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap

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Transforming lives through learning

1. Evaluating local authorities' approaches to improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap

The National Improvement Framework (NIF) sets out Scotland's vision for the future: 'Excellence for all and equity for children and young people'. It works towards realising the Scottish Government's ambition for Scotland to be the best place to grow up.

To achieve the best outcomes there is a need to raise attainment and reduce educational inequity for all of Scotland's children and young people. Attainment (including achievement) is the measurable progress which children and young people make as they advance through and beyond school. However, there continues to be a gap between the progress which is made by those living in Scotland's least and most deprived areas. In rural areas, there is a need to evidence that deprivation and poverty in communities has been identified with appropriate targeting of provision.

The First Minister launched the Scottish Attainment Challenge in February 2015. Its aim is to accelerate the pace in which Scotland closes the poverty related attainment gap in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing through leadership, families and communities and learning and teaching. To support the challenge and bring a greater sense of urgency and priority to the issue additional funding is available for local authorities through the Attainment Scotland Fund.

Local authorities are involved in the Scottish Attainment Challenge in different ways. Nine local authorities are part of the challenge authority programme; twelve local authorities have schools involved in the schools programme. All local authorities have access to the universal offer and almost all schools have been provided with Pupil Equity Funding to support work to close the poverty related attainment gap.

Closing the poverty related attainment gap is complex and poses challenges to the system regarding how to evaluate the impact of the work being undertaken and the use of the significant public funding. Nevertheless, there is a clear requirement to ensure public money is helping to improve learning, raise attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 places a duty on HM Inspectors, either at the request of Scottish Ministers or at such intervals as appear to be appropriate, to inspect an education authority in order to review the way in which the authority is exercising its functions in relation to the provision of school education (Section 9).

It is important to evaluate how well additional funding is being used to support programmes which help to improve learning, raise attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap. To this end, HM Inspectors of Education work with colleagues from Audit Scotland to focus on how well additional finance from the Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding is being managed and the impact it is having on relevant groups of children and young people.

2. Rationale for including Educational Psychological Services (EPS) in the Inspection of Local Authorities

Between 2006 and 2011, HMIE undertook the inspection of all 32 local authority educational psychology services in Scotland. In March 2011, following the completion of the full round of inspections, HMIE published "*Educational psychology in Scotland: making a difference*[1]. During 2011 to 2014, HM Inspectors worked with EPS to support improvement. However, it was acknowledged that more robust and up to date evidence was required to:

- Inform the Area Improvement Plans as part of the shared risk assessment process managed by Audit Scotland;
- fulfil the Currie (2002) recommendation that EPS should be inspected by HM Inspectors to ensure public accountability and build capacity for improvement; and
- provide evidence to Ministers, particularly in relation to Section 4 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 ("the 1980 Act") which requires education authorities to provide a psychological service for their area and sets out the functions of that service (which includes for example the study of children with additional support needs).

A validated self-evaluation model was developed in partnership with the profession, managers and ADES to enable ES to fulfil the above requirements. More recently, the National Scottish Steering Group for Educational Psychology negotiated with the Scottish Attainment Challenge Implementation Steering group, funding for training of Educational Psychologists. A requirement of the funding was to provide robust evidence of the impact made by educational psychologists and services in achieving equity and excellence for all and closing the poverty related attainment gap. It was agreed that EPS should be integrated into the ILA inspections designed to inspect the nine Scottish Attainment Challenge authorities. It was agreed that this would be an effective use of time, reduce workload on local authorities by preventing duplication of scrutiny activity, and fulfil Scottish Government policy drivers. The approach will allow a thematic overview of the effective interventions used by educational psychologists to improve outcomes for children and young people.

3. The Framework for Evaluating the Quality of Services and Organisations

This document is based on the Framework for Evaluating the Quality of Services and Organisations (known as the Overarching Framework). This framework is the basis of many models for evaluation across the public and third sector. It provides a systematic structure for self-evaluation. It is firmly based on the principle that the most effective way of improving standards of service is to use a combination of rigorous evidence-based self-evaluation alongside independent external inspection.

The Overarching Framework is generic. It does not assume a particular organisational structure, type or size. It can be used in its entirety, or selected and adapted so that key quality indicators (QIs) and themes reflect the purpose of individual organisations, and meet the specific needs of their stakeholders. Adapted QIs can also be used selectively for external scrutiny or validation. The framework can also be used thematically by extracting key QIs or elements for a specific purpose. This document looks specifically at how well councils are improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap and therefore focuses on the QIs most relevant to this area.

The Overarching Framework is organised under six high-level themes which enable systematic evaluation of the quality of services across ten inter-related key areas. The six high-level themes focus first on the demonstrable outcomes and impact of the organisation or service, and then look at the key areas which contribute to these outcomes.

4. A Framework to support the evaluation of progress in improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap

The QIs highlighted in this document will help identify strengths and signpost areas for improvement. HM Inspectors use these QIs when carrying out the external evaluation of progress by individual local authorities in improving learning, raising attainment and approaches to closing the poverty related attainment gap. The external evaluation focuses on strategic governance and leadership and how the developments are impacting in these selected areas of an education service.

5. Evaluating how well we are improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap.

This framework is designed to help to evaluate how well local authorities are improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. To do this selected QIs are used to answer key questions[2]:

Question 1:
How effective is the education service's leadership, governance and management of Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) and Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to improve learning, raise attainment and narrow the poverty related attainment gap?[3]

QI 9.4   Leadership of improvement and change

Question 2:
How effective is the education service's use of data to target, select and evaluate the impact of initiatives?

QI 9.5   Self-evaluation to secure improvement
QI 1.1   Improvement in performance

6. Quality indicators for evaluating progress in improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap

The following QIs form the main focus for evaluating progress in improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. Under each QI there is a range of information to help guide the understanding and use of it. However, the information contained there should be taken only as an illustration. It is not a prescriptive list or a complete set of everything that can or should be considered under each QI.

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[2] The QIs are not formally graded but used to provide an overarching statement on progress.
3 To inform this question, Audit Scotland has developed 3 key questions, one for each theme:
- Strategic planning for improvement – To what extent does the council have a clear strategic direction and approach to raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap?
- Governance framework – How effectively is the council's committee with responsibility for education scrutinising progress in raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap?
- Management of finance for learning – How efficiently and effectively is the education service (including schools) managing SAC and PEF funding to raise attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap?

QI 9.4 Leadership of improvement and change

This QI relates to the effectiveness of leadership in improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure clear governance and communication to ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate. Management of SAC and PEF funding should support the improvement of learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Themes:

- Strategic planning for improvement
- Governance framework
- Management of finance for learning

Level 5 illustration:

Strategic planning for improvement

Senior leaders, including elected members, provide strong leadership and direction, and demonstrate a commitment to improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. Senior officers undertake effective and strategic planning, They identify key actions, intended outcomes, major targets and take full account of the need for accountabililty. Planning documents are accessible, succinct and set out key priorities. Channels of communication are effective. Senior leaders create conditions where staff feel confident to initiate well-informed change and are committed to collective responsibility in the process of change. Strategic leadership results in high quality outcomes for children and young people and improving outcomes for children and young people living in the highest levels of deprivation.

Governance framework

Leadership is clearly founded on effective governance. The roles and responsibilities of groups and individuals are defined through a clear framework of governance. Leaders monitor actions rigorously and ensures a prompt response to stakeholders' concerns and suggestions. Leaders work in close partnership with schools and communities. There are clear lines of accountability for the education service's and schools' performance and quality, including young people's progress and achievements.

Management of finance

Effective systems are in place for financial monitoring, ensuring best value and sustainability. Staff make innovative use of the finances available to allocate resources and take forward agreed improvement priorities. The available budget is used very effectively to improve learning, raise attainment and narrow the poverty related attainment gap. All stakeholders understand their responsibilities for effective financial management. Staff and partners work together to ensure transparency and equity in the use of financial resources. Staff take account of local and national advice in financial management, seeking support from those with appropriate financial expertise as appropriate. Staff systematically monitor and can evidence the extent to which the use of financial resources leads to improved outcomes for children and young people, particularly those living in the highest levels of deprivation.

QI 9.5   Self-evaluation to secure improvement

This QI relates to how well staff use rigorous self-evaluation to secure improvement in learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. It emphasises the responsibility of all to analyse a range of intelligence and data to help to ensure continuous self-improvement. This includes how the education service and schools apply the findings of self-evaluation to bring about and secure improvement for children, young people and their families.

Themes:

- Approaches to self-evaluation
- Analysis and evaluation of intelligence and data
- Impact on improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap

Level 5 illustration:

Approaches to self-evaluation

Staff understand that self-evaluation is an integral aspect of the approach to continuous improvement. The education service uses a range of effective approaches to ensure all staff, partners, learners, and other stakeholders are actively involved in on-going self-evaluation of improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. There are very effective mechanisms to consult with stakeholders which show how their views inform change and improvement. Leaders, including elected members, at all levels support evidence-based evaluation by individuals, groups of staff, and with partners across learning communities.

Analysis and evaluation of intelligence and data

Across the education service, staff analyse and use evidence, including robust attainment data, very well to ensure a clear focus on those priorities which will have greatest impact on improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. Schools have accurate intelligence about the quality of learning and teaching and the attainment of all learners. Staff gather a range of data and information to monitor and track progress for all learners. They interrogate regularly data, making use of digital technology to support this where relevant and appropriate. They use a wide range of local, national and international advice and research to reflect on current practice and evaluate any new initiatives, ideas and changes which have been introduced. These are subject to political scrutiny by elected members. The education service and schools actively seek out and share good practice within and beyond the education service and can demonstrate improvement as a result.

Impact on improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap

Self-evaluation focuses on key aspects of learners' successes and achievements. The education service and schools can show clear evidence of improvement based on actions taken as a result of self-evaluation. They can demonstrate the impact of improvement, arising from self-evaluation, on learning, attainment and the poverty related attainment gap. All stakeholders have shared ownership of this evidence and use it to plan continuous improvement.

QI 1.1   Improvement in performance

This QI relates to knowing how well performance has improved in the local authority since the Scottish Attainment Challenge was introduced. It focuses on the impact of developments on improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. It highlights the impact of improving pedagogy on learning. It considers how effectively the education authority is engaging families in all aspects of learning.

Themes:

- Improvement in raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing
- Impact of professional learning on improving outcomes
- Impact of strategic aims and objectives on families and communities

Level 5 illustration:

Improvement in raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing

The attainment of children and young people at important points in the primary and secondary sectors shows strong improving trends. Staff use an appropriate range of data to ensure an accurate understanding of the poverty related attainment gap across the local authority. Almost all children and young people make very good progress from their prior levels of attainment. Children and young people living in the highest levels of deprivation are making strong progress in relation to attainment in literacy, numeracy and health and well-being.

Impact of professional learning on improving outcomes

All staff routinely engage in career-long professional learning and develop enquiring and coherent approaches which build and sustain their practice. Individually and collectively, staff plan and evaluate their professional learning directly on the quality of impact on learning and can evidence improvements for learners. They are supported well to access high-quality professional learning linked to improving learning, raising attainment for all and improving attainment for the most deprived children and young people. Staff work collaboratively to enhance teaching which leads to high-quality learning experiences for learners. Schools and staff can evidence the impact professional learning has had on improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Impact of strategic aims and objectives on families and communities

Strategic aims and objectives that relate to ensuring excellence and equity have a strong impact on families and communities across the education service. Staff and partners are proactive in promoting positive relationships in the classroom, playground and wider learning community. Staff ensure children, young people and their families are active participants in discussions and decisions which may affect their lives. Staff actively engage and consult with them on school and education service decisions regarding their education. The education service and schools can evidence that families are becoming increasingly engaged in learning.

7. Capacity for improvement

Evaluating an education service's capacity to continuously improve learning, raise attainment and narrow the poverty related attainment gap requires a global judgement based on evidence from the three QIs used in this framework. In evaluating capacity for improvement it is important to take into account contextual issues. The global judgement should lead to a statement with the following components.

Example Council is making **very good** progress improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. HM Inspectors are confident that the evidence and evaluation to date indicates that:

- Overall, attainment in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing is improving well. The attainment of children and young people in SIMD 1 and 2 is improving at a faster rate than those in other SIMD deciles.

- Self–evaluation is identifying areas for improvement and evaluating the impact of developments very effectively.

- Leadership and governance at education service level supports headteachers well to implement change and improve outcomes for children and young people.

Interesting practice, worthy of sharing across the system, will be shared via links to relevant local authority websites.