

# Summary of Collaborative Improvement visit to South Ayrshire Educational Services on 17th and 18th June 2021

**August 2021**



## Collaborative Improvement

Collaborative Improvement is an approach to bringing about improvement through shared work involving staff from the local authority, Education Scotland and ADES. Together, the group establish the focus for the Collaborative Improvement visit and then undertake activities in the local authority that will result in an evaluative summary of where there are strengths and where there are areas that may require further focus. The approach to collaborative improvement was outlined in the joint agreement<sup>1</sup> and is based on the call for a “strengthened middle” in the 2015 OECD report on Scottish Education<sup>2</sup>. The approach is also intended to address the recommendation in Audit Scotland’s report on education that Councils should work with schools, Regional Improvement Collaboratives, other policy teams and partners, for example in the third sector, to reduce variability in outcomes<sup>3</sup>.

## Focus for South Ayrshire: closing the gap and challenging every learner.

The focus for the visit to South Ayrshire Council was broad and considered the education service’s mission statement<sup>4</sup> summed up in the phrase “closing the gap and challenging every learner”. The question for the collaborative improvement team was to what extent had the Council made progress in closing the poverty related attainment gaps while stretching and challenging every learner in primary schools. At the time of the visit, secondary schools were fully involved in the Alternative Certification Model process and separate engagement had taken place with Education Scotland around early years as part of the locality work.

South Ayrshire education service had agreed its mission statement in 2014 and was now reviewing its vision. The collaborative improvement visit therefore contributed to confirming the Council’s successes and working jointly with Education Scotland and ADES to identify the next steps in South Ayrshire’s improvement journey. It was considered the right time to take stock of progress and potential areas where more limited progress had been made which could then be addressed in the Service Improvement Planning process as we move forward.

## Planning and process

A team including South Ayrshire, ADES and Education Scotland were brought together to discuss the scope, ethos, process and outcomes a week before the start of the engagement. The scoping meeting clarified the background and enabled South Ayrshire to present some key information. ADES and Education Scotland leads set out the process, ethos and intended outcomes for the full team. Education Scotland prepared information on the profile of South Ayrshire including attainment results and inspection information. Packs were prepared for the team members providing them with agendas for meetings and recording documents.

The visit was coordinated by an ADES officer, Senior Regional Adviser and Senior HM Inspector from Education Scotland working with the Director responsible for education in South Ayrshire. In addition, the team for the Collaborative Improvement visit included four members representing ADES who were all senior managers or heads of service in West Lothian, Renfrew, Angus and Fife; two Quality Improvement Managers from South Ayrshire; a team from Education Scotland who were predominantly from the South West regional team.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/agreement/2018/06/education-bill-policy-ambition-joint-agreement/documents/00537386-pdf/00537386-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00537386.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/Improving-Schools-in-Scotland-An-OECD-Perspective.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2021/nr\\_210323\\_education\\_outcomes.pdf](https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2021/nr_210323_education_outcomes.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 1: Mission Statement South Ayrshire Education Service

The visit was carried out entirely remotely due to Covid restrictions. The visit was over 2 days and started with a presentation by South Ayrshire on progress to date and a joint presentation by Education Scotland and the South Ayrshire QIM which included a focus on outcomes data. These presentations set the scene and context and led into a discussion about the actions that had been taken and strengths and areas of challenge. A series of focus groups was then arranged<sup>5</sup> and groups were joined by Education Scotland and local authority colleagues. An agreed agenda was used for each stakeholder meeting with each member of the trio having a role in the stakeholder group to ensure the group was focused and stayed on task. Each stakeholder group explored where the authority was doing well what the challenges were; what would help moving forward and what next steps might be. At the end of each day a team discussion took place with sharing of information and an opportunity for clarification. Recording sheets from each focus group were collated and shared with the team the next morning to form the basis of discussions on the focus for that day or any gaps in the information.

### Arriving at conclusions

A meeting of the full team took place at the end of the two day visit which was followed up with a two-hour meeting at the start of the following week. During this meeting South Ayrshire set out what they had learned from the visit which was followed by discussion to arrive at a broad consensus on the main strengths and areas for consideration by the authority. Overall, the team felt that that South Ayrshire had made progress on the vision they set out. People were very clear about the vision and understood it well. South Ayrshire has had an improving pattern of attainment over a number of years, both for the most and least affluent but there remains an overall gap in attainment which is consistent with the national pattern. The strengths and challenges were identified as follows:

### Strengths

- South Ayrshire Council education has a clear and consistent vision which is shared by all relating to closing the gap and challenging every learner.
- A range of interventions such as Making Thinking Visible, improved learning and teaching which in turn is making a difference in closing the gap and stretching and challenging every learner.
- Staff are positive, enthusiastic and proud to be part of South Ayrshire Council and there is a sense of collegiality and empowerment.
- The input and contributions of South Ayrshire staff to meetings are valued and headteachers feel that they are part of the authority's senior leadership team.
- Schools know well the health and wellbeing needs of children, young people and families.
- Schools and the local authority are making effective use of data to target appropriate interventions.
- The local authority and schools understand the challenges around Covid but remain positive about making a difference to children and young people in South Ayrshire.
- Partnership working is strong across the Council and with other agencies including speech and language therapy. The focus on care experienced learners led by the Virtual Head Teacher and team shows signs of early impact.
- Locality working is making a strong contribution to supporting improvements.
- Staff are committed to taking forward the aims and vision of *School as learning organisation* and are very familiar with what this means for them in their own context.
- Over the time period in focus, from 2014 to the present, there is a broad pattern of improved attainment at the primary stages for both the most and least deprived. As a result, the gap

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<sup>5</sup> Appendix 2: Programme for the visit.

remains broadly consistent, however there is a 2% narrowing of the gap at combined P1, P4 and P7 numeracy attainment and a 6% narrowing of the gap at combined P1, P4 and P7 literacy attainment (2018-19 data).

## Challenges

- Embedding some of the work which is making a difference into daily practice across all schools and considering the sustainability of some of the interventions.
- Making more consistent use of data to evaluate impact and inform learning, teaching and assessment which results in closing the gap and challenging all learners.
- Ensure the focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing does not reduce opportunities to close the gap and challenge all learners through the entirety of the curriculum.
- Clarity and a shared understanding across all schools about the core entitlements and expectations for learners.

## Planning for Improvement

- Establishing a baseline at the start of the new session so that the local authority and school staff know the gaps at this stage in order to work consistently on closing the gaps either as a result of deprivation or as a result of school closures during the pandemic.
- Identify which core interventions make the most difference in terms of closing the gap and challenging all learners with a focus on longer term impact.
- Establish a vision for learning using *School as Learning Organisation* and continue to strengthen the universal offer and consistency of high-quality learning experiences for all learners.
- Work to build further the capacity in critical analysis of available data.
- Develop follow up activities with colleagues who were part of the Collaborative Improvement team on specific examples of effective practice in their own local authority, thus ensuring high quality support and challenge for South Ayrshire colleagues.

## What will happen next?

- South Ayrshire Council will incorporate key aspects of the collaborative improvement visit into Service Improvement Planning.
- Education Scotland Locality team will continue to work alongside South Ayrshire council to support the delivery of the relevant actions identified in the Service Improvement Plan.
- Progress will be reported through the Standards and Quality reporting process.
- South Ayrshire will follow up engagement with colleagues from the team in areas identified in this report.

## Appendix 1: South Ayrshire educational services mission statement

### Closing the gap and challenging every learner

'Our vision and ambition in South Ayrshire Educational services is to achieve excellence and equity. We have the highest expectations for all learners so that they achieve their potential regardless of their circumstances. We want to achieve this in a context where we act with integrity in a climate of mutual trust and respect and have the highest ambition for every learner. It is our ambition to close the attainment gap while constantly stretching and challenging children and young people who are attaining at the highest levels to achieve more. Closing the gap while challenging every learner will guide and define the work of educational services.'

Agreed August 2014

**2014 Mission - "Closing the gap and challenging every learner'  
To what extent have we made progress at primary?"**

|   |  |                                    |   |
|---|--|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2021</b> |  |                                    |   |
| <b>All on MS Teams</b>                    |  |                                    |   |
| <b>9:30am – 11:00am</b>                   | <b>Presentation, Questions and Clarification</b> |                                    |   |
| <b><i>Focus groups</i></b>                |  |                                    |   |
| <b>11:30am – 12:30pm</b>                  | <b>Literacy</b>                                  | <b>MTV Group</b>                   | <b>Care experienced / Vulnerable Learners</b> |
| <b>1:15pm – 2:15pm</b>                    | <b>Numeracy</b>                                  | <b>Improvement and Use of Data</b> | <b>Assessment and moderation</b>              |
| <b>2:30pm – 3:30pm</b>                    | <b>Support staff</b>                             | <b>Wider council group</b>         |   |
| <b>3:30pm – 4:00pm</b>                    | <b>Team meeting</b>                              |                                    |   |

|   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Friday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2021</b> |   |  |  |
| <b>9:30am – 10:00am</b>                 | <b>Reflections and Opportunities for clarification / discussion</b> |  |  |
| <b>10:00am - 11:00am</b>                | <b>Partners</b>   | <b>SWEIC</b>                           |  |
| <b>11:30am – 12:30pm</b>                | <b>Attainment challenge</b>   | <b>School as Learning Organisation</b> | <b>Children – RRS</b>                              |
| <b>1:15pm – 2:15pm</b>                  | <b>Teachers Group</b>   | <b>Parents</b>                         | <b>Mental health (psych services / resilience)</b> |
|   |   |  | <b>Head Teacher group</b>                          |
| <b>2:15pm – 3pm</b>                     | <b>Notes / team discussion</b>                                      |  |  |