

Validated Self-evaluation South Ayrshire Council 12 August 2014

Validated self-evaluation in South Ayrshire Council: Educational Services Directorate

Commentary by Education Scotland

Introduction

South Ayrshire Council is committed to improving outcomes for children and young people. The Council invited a team from Education Scotland, including HM Inspectors and Associate Assessors to work with them on a validated self-evaluation (VSE) exercise between March and May 2014 and focusing on three themes, each with a different focus on equality of opportunity to learn and achieve across the council. The VSE was conducted as part of South Ayrshire's ongoing approach to improvement through self-evaluation. Further details on the themes selected by South Ayrshire can be found in the South Ayrshire VSE report at the following link. <http://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/schools/validatedselfevaluation.aspx>

What has the VSE achieved?

The Education Scotland team of HM Inspectors and Associate Assessors are confident that South Ayrshire's evaluation is strong and supported by robust approaches.

The themes link very well with the Council's strategic objectives and outcomes. The Council through its evaluative work had built up a detailed picture of its strengths in relation to academic attainment, children's and young people's personal achievements in and out of school and their destinations on leaving secondary school. The Council was keen to ensure equality of opportunity for all children and young people. The key focus then for the VSE activity involved taking a closer look at the opportunities available with a view to ensuring all children and young people benefit equally. Three theme groups were established, with a particular focus on evaluating the extent to which the effects of multiple deprivation may be impacting negatively on the children and young people of South Ayrshire.

Council officers and their partners, including the elected members and Chief Executive, engaged strongly with the VSE process. They were closely involved in the range of evaluative activities arranged for the engagement week in April. Throughout that week it became evident that a very strong culture of self-evaluation exists with a particular focus on bringing about improvement. Each theme group had good representation from a wide range of partners as did the arranged programme of visits. The programme was meticulously planned to give the required breadth. Key questions ensured robust evidence gathering and a systematic, yet flexible, approach was adopted.

The Education Scotland team provided support and challenge to each theme group to help build their capacity. This involved looking at documentary evidence, observing practice, and engaging in focus group meetings with a range of stakeholders including children and young people. The Education Scotland team

engaged in professional dialogue activity at all stages. This approach provided feedback to confirm evaluations and strengths and identify areas for further development. This way of working was valued by officers and has served to further improve approaches to self-evaluation.

Looking ahead

South Ayrshire Council's involvement in the VSE process has enhanced further its existing and effective approaches for delivering change and improvement. The authority's VSE report and theme group reports have been revised to take account of the VSE engagement week. These reports contain more detailed information about specific actions and work with schools, council officers, stakeholders and children and young people. In the next year, council officers will extend this work through working groups and staff development and the development of new theme areas for improvement. These approaches will apply the support and challenge methodology used in the VSE, working directly with schools and their partners in the community.

Next steps

Education Scotland will continue to work in partnership with the authority to continue to build capacity and support South Ayrshire's commitment to improvement of outcomes for children and young people. This will be delivered through a Local Partnership Agreement between Education Scotland and South Ayrshire Council.

Marion Burns
HM Inspector

Education Scotland

How can you contact us?

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of validated self-evaluation you should write to Mr Alastair Delaney, Strategic Director, at Education Scotland, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA. Alternatively, if your query is related to this report, you may also write to Ms Eileen Howat, Chief Executive, South Ayrshire Council, County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr KA7 1DR.