

31 July 2018

Update on Strategic Inspection of the education functions of Argyll and Bute Council

In March 2017, HM Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) published a report on the education functions of Argyll and Bute Council. The report set out a number of areas for improvement which we had agreed with the council. We returned to the council in June 2017 to carry out a further visit to monitor progress and reported on that progress in August 2017.

In September 2017, HM Inspectors carried out a further inspection visit and reported on the progress which the council was making in December 2017. In our report, we noted that central officers and school-based staff had worked with commitment to bring about a wide range of improvements. We advised that all staff needed to continue to work together to ensure that these improvements became embedded across the authority, leading to a positive and sustained impact. We indicated too that Education Scotland would carry out further inspection activity by the end of 2018 to monitor and report on the continued progress made by the council.

In May 2018, HM Inspectors carried out a further inspection visit. During our visit we talked to a number of key stakeholder groups. As a result, we were able to find out about the steps which the council has continued to take in order to improve the quality of its education provision. This is a short summary of what we found.

The authority has built on its earlier progress with how it collects and uses data to drive improvement. Staff at all levels have continued to increase their skills and confidence in the use of data. There is now a clearer shared understanding that rigorous and high-quality data analysis is required in order to achieve and sustain improved outcomes for children and young people. It will be important for the authority to continue to build the capacity of both central officers and school staff to make effective use of data as a tool for improvement.

The authority continues to develop and strengthen its arrangements to drive improvement in the quality of its educational provision. Central officers and elected members now have increased knowledge and capacity to provide higher levels of support and challenge. Central officers have prepared and put in place a helpful programme of Performance Data Meetings and information sessions which are helping elected members to understand and scrutinise the performance of individual schools as well as the education service.

A carefully-structured annual programme of quality improvement school visits by central officers is now established. There is now a more consistent approach across sectors and between officers. School visits have a clear and agreed purpose and officers have appropriate opportunities to engage with children and young people in their learning activities. Individual members of the central team have an increasingly

clear understanding of the performance of the schools they link with and the authority has a greater knowledge and understanding of its schools. A sound evaluative process to identify levels of risk has been put in place. As a result, the authority is able to provide customised support to individual schools and groups of schools. The authority recognises that any identified risks need to be addressed promptly and effectively to ensure that improvements are secured.

The authority has continued to increase its efforts to implement a carefully-structured plan to improve relationships and communication. This is promoting a more positive ethos amongst all stakeholders. The authority has built on its early successes following the publication of its vision and strategy paper, *Our Children, Their Future* (OCTF). Central officers have promoted the vision very effectively and staff in schools now have higher levels of awareness of OCTF. This vision and strategy continues to be an important driver for the work of education staff. As a result, staff at all levels across the authority are increasingly focused on outcomes for children and young people.

The council has continued to build on its early progress across a number of key aspects of the leadership of the Education Service. The council's recent budget decisions demonstrate its confidence in the work of the central team to take forward the continuous improvement of its Education Service. Under the strong leadership of the Chief Education Officer, staff have sustained and strengthened their efforts to embed improvements at all levels of the education community. The two recently appointed Heads of Service have a strong capacity to enhance educational leadership across the authority. The vision and strategy articulated in OCTF are now driving clearly the Education Service's Improvement Planning.

Argyll and Bute Council has made positive and continued progress since the original inspection in September 2016. As planned, we will return later in 2018 to carry out a further visit, focusing on how well the council is improving the quality of young people's attainment, and report on its continued progress.

HM Inspectors of Education