

Inspection of local authorities

How well is West Dunbartonshire Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap?

1 May 2018

Introduction

In 2017 we introduced a new model of inspection of local authorities which we piloted with West Dunbartonshire Council over the week beginning 11 December 2017. HM Inspectors and professional associates, working in partnership with Audit Scotland evaluated the education service strategies to improve learning, raise attainment and narrow the poverty-related attainment gap. These are the aims of the [Scottish Attainment Challenge](#), a key Scottish Government programme introduced in 2015. Within this programme, West Dunbartonshire Council is one of nine [Challenge Authorities](#).

As part of this inspection, we used the same framework to evaluate the contribution of the educational psychology service to the Scottish Attainment Challenge in West Dunbartonshire Council. Our findings on this aspect are included throughout this report.

The Attainment Scotland Fund has a total budget of £750 million over the period from 2015-16 to 2020-21. As a Challenge Authority, West Dunbartonshire Council is allocated a significant proportion of this funding. The money is being directed to support the excellence and equity agenda. The aim is to close the attainment gap which currently exists between those living in Scotland's least and most deprived areas. This report is our findings on the progress West Dunbartonshire Council is making and the capacity of the council to continue to make appropriate progress with this work. Whilst we worked in partnership with others to gather the evidence that underpins this, the report and the judgements in it belong solely to Education Scotland. Throughout the report when you see text that is underlined you can click on this text to get further information from the web pages owned by West Dunbartonshire Council, Scottish Government or Education Scotland. We hope you will find this useful.

The [framework](#) for this inspection includes quality indicators which enable us to evaluate aspects of leadership and management, self-evaluation and improvements in performance. We use our evidence to answer two questions:

1. How effective is the education service's use of data to target, select and evaluate the impact of initiatives?
2. How effective is the education service's leadership, governance and management of resources to improve learning, raise attainment and narrow the poverty-related attainment gap?

As a result, we are able to make an overall judgement about the extent to which West Dunbartonshire Council is improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Context

The education service in West Dunbartonshire Council is responsible for the education of around 12,000 school age pupils in mainstream education establishments and for 187 school age pupils who are based outside of mainstream education. The strategic lead for education across the council is the Chief Education Officer. Education is delivered through:

21 Council managed early learning and childcare centres

10 partner providers of early learning and childcare

33 primary schools

5 secondary schools

2 schools for children and young people with additional support needs

1 programme for young people whose needs are not being met by mainstream secondary schools

Four senior education officers and one principal educational psychologist each lead a function of the service: children's services; raising attainment; performance and improvement; workforce and professional learning; and, the educational psychology service.

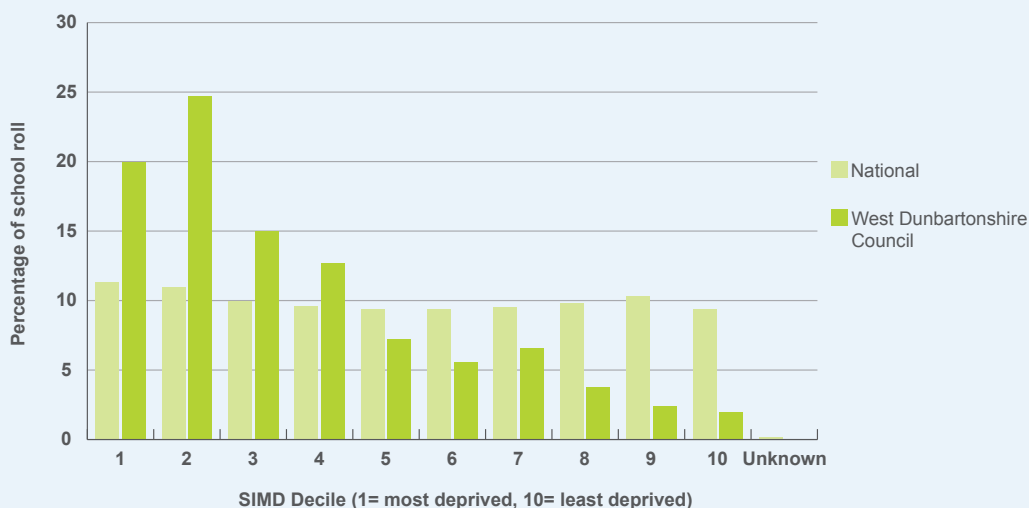
As illustrated later in this report, West Dunbartonshire Council has a specific [Educational Services Committee](#) whose role is to scrutinise the performance of the education service. A coherent [Raising Attainment Strategy](#) approved by the Educational Services Committee in 2012 set a clear vision for the education service and provided a strong foundation from which the current commitment to excellence and equity has grown. This is enabling the local authority to effectively grasp the opportunities provided by the introduction of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and more recently [Pupil Equity Funding](#). These initiatives are supporting the local authority to achieve a deeper, broader reach of the key aspects that were previously built into its own raising attainment strategy. West Dunbartonshire Council's [Improvement Framework](#) supports a shared understanding amongst staff at all levels of the expectations and quality assurance approaches to ensure a high-quality education service. In August 2017, a revised version of that framework was launched. It includes a strengthened focus on building capacity and quality assurance of leadership, learning and teaching, data management and parental engagement. This continuous and sustained focus on improving learning and raising attainment for all over a period of more than five years is an important factor which underpins the current successful approach to promoting improvement and change in West Dunbartonshire Council's education service. More recently, the [Education, Learning and Attainment Delivery Plan 2017-18](#) is very well aligned to national and local priorities.

Click on this link to find out more about about West Dunbartonshire Council's [Education, Learning and Attainment Delivery Plan 2017-18](#).

It provides detailed information about the structure, achievements, priorities, budgets and performance of the service. This will help you to understand more about how the council's plan for education aligns with national and local priorities.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) provides information about pupils in Scotland's schools. It tells us what percentage of pupils live in the most deprived and in the least deprived areas of each council. From the graph below you can see that just under half of all pupils in West Dunbartonshire Council schools live in the areas of highest deprivation categorised as SIMD 1 and 2. This is well above the national average. The percentage living in SIMD areas 3 and 4 is also above the national average.

Percentage of pupils on the West Dunbartonshire Council roll in September 2016 living within SIMD deciles 1 (most deprived) to 10 (least deprived), all sectors



The Attainment Scotland Fund in West Dunbartonshire Council

Primary schools

Between 2015-16 and 2017-18, the education service in West Dunbartonshire Council has been able to draw down from the Scottish Government a total of £3.2 million to support improving learning and teaching and raising attainment in primary schools. Between 2015-16 and 2017-18 the education service spent a total of £3.3 million on Scottish Attainment Challenge initiatives in primary schools. The education service expects to draw down funding of £908,000 from Scottish Government in 2018-19 to fund Scottish Attainment Challenge initiatives. This would mean that the local authority will have benefitted from total funding of £4.1 million from the Attainment Scotland Fund for primary schools. In the first year of the funding the grant was not announced until the end of June 2015 which meant that projects were not able to be fully started until well into the autumn term of that school year. As funds became available, the education service moved quickly to put projects in place and in the first year drew down £780,000 of the original £1.02 million bid.

Building on previous improvement work, West Dunbartonshire Council is using Scottish Attainment Challenge funding to support four specific aspects of learning to improve outcomes for children and young people: [early level play and learning and family support](#); [transition from primary to secondary in mathematics](#); [the school improvement partnership programme](#); and, [improving science, technology, engineering and maths project](#).

“ We are incredibly ambitious for all our children. ”

primary headteacher

Secondary schools

Funding for secondary schools began in the 2016-17 financial year. Between 2016-17 and 2017-18 West Dunbartonshire Council has been able to draw down in excess of £1.1 million from the Attainment Scotland Fund. Between 2016-17 and 2017-18 the education service spent a total of £1.1 million on secondary initiatives. The education service expects to draw down further funding of £862,000 from the Scottish Government in both 2018-19 and 2019-20 to support improving learning and teaching and raising attainment in secondary schools. This would mean that the local authority will have benefitted from total funding of £2.8 million from the Attainment Scotland Fund for secondary schools. In the first year of the secondary programme, the grant was not confirmed until the autumn term and this impacted on the plans put forward by the Challenge Authorities in general. As a result, West Dunbartonshire Council drew down £353,000 of the original £646,000 bid. The education service has identified three core areas of work to be taken forward as a result of this funding; the development of [a multi-agency hub](#); [improving secondary literacy and numeracy](#); and, [the introduction of skills academies](#). A number of

these initiatives, including the work of the family learning and multi-agency hubs have been supported by educational psychology posts funded directly through the Attainment Scotland Fund.

Scottish Attainment Challenge funding for primary and secondary schools will continue until 2020-21. Where initiatives are delivered in partnership, consideration must be given to long term sustainability. Given the council's predicted budget gap over the next three years it may be difficult for such initiatives to continue to be funded solely from education budgets.

The Pupil Equity Fund was introduced in 2017-18 and forms part of the £750 million Attainment Scotland Fund which will be invested until 2020-21. In 2017-18, a total of £3.4 million has been provided to headteachers in West Dunbartonshire, however, it is estimated that only £2 million of this will be spent in 2017-18 with the rest being carried forward into 2018-19. The council is aware of the Scottish Government expectation that, other than in exceptional circumstances, Pupil Equity Funding should be spent within the current academic year. Timely, appropriate support from areas such as finance, procurement and human resources have been planned to ensure headteachers spend this funding appropriately.

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

The education service makes very good use of data to target improvement initiatives funded through the Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding. Overall, strong self-evaluation at all levels has resulted in evidence-based targeted interventions to secure improvement in learning, raise attainment and close the poverty-related attainment gap. A wide range of well organised and accessible data exists across West Dunbartonshire Council which staff at all levels and in varying roles use very effectively to evaluate and plan their work. Staff gather and use a wide range of qualitative data very effectively to ensure the clear focus on improving learning. A range of quantitative data is increasing as projects develop. The local authority is aware of the need to continue to develop this.

Defining the poverty related attainment gap in West Dunbartonshire Council

Since 2012, the local authority has used standardised assessments and aspects of Insight to define the poverty related attainment gap. Due to the high number of children and young people in SIMDs 1-2, the local authority measures the gap in attainment between SIMDs 1-2 and 3-10.

The educational psychology service has strengthened its use of data to better target its interventions and demonstrate impact. Staff, in their varying roles across the education service have clear, well-analysed data focused on improving outcomes for children and young people in SIMD 1-2. As a result, almost all staff are well aware of the local context and challenges for many children, young people and families in their care and are increasingly skilled in developing and delivering interventions which make a positive difference.

The local authority structure of local learning communities facilitates strong collaborative planning for professional learning which is highly valued by staff in varying roles. Within each learning community there is a supportive environment for discussion of data and improvement strategies. This is leading to an increasingly strong culture of distributed leadership and practitioner responsibility to improve outcomes in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing for all. In addition, high quality professional learning has significantly increased staff skills including in data analysis and effective pedagogy. Staff have deepened their understanding of the poverty related attainment gap. The growing use of collaborative action research is supporting staff to base developments on research, local and national policy and what is considered to be good practice. There is scope to increase the reach of this work so that more staff participate. Very strong and helpful [case studies](#) have been collated and shared across the local authority, including reporting on improvements in attainment. The word aware case study led by the educational psychology service provides evidence related to closing the vocabulary gap in the early years. The local authority's "data led – outcome focused" approach is leading to better informed projects and improved outcomes for children and young people.

Overall, the attainment of children and young people in West Dunbartonshire Council is improving. Local authority data indicates that most children and young people achieve appropriate levels in literacy and numeracy at P1, P4, P7 and S3. National attainment data indicates that most young people make very good progress from S3 into S4 in literacy and numeracy. At S4 and by S5 and S6 young people in West Dunbartonshire schools are, overall, attaining better than young people with similar characteristics being educated in other areas of Scotland.

The local authority continues to drive forward improvements in literacy, numeracy and, health and wellbeing for all children and young people. Across the broad general education and senior phase there is evidence that the local authority is making progress in narrowing its poverty-related attainment gap. In the senior phase the attainment of young people living in SIMD areas 3 to 10 is improving however, there is evidence of more significant improvement in the attainment of young people living in SIMD areas 1 and 2. Over recent years, sustained targeted approaches to improving numeracy have resulted in noticeable improvements in closing the attainment gap across the broad general education. Although attainment in literacy has been overall higher than attainment in numeracy, the local authority recognises the need to further improve children's and young people's attainment in literacy going forward. This is a focus of career long professional learning for staff and of a range of targeted initiatives working with children, young people and families.

Click on this link to find out more about the development of West Dunbartonshire Council's [Our cloud](#) environment which supports very good use of digital technology to enable sharing and interrogation of data, highly effective sharing of practice, networking, professional dialogue and education forums.

There is an extensive range of sound evidence-based interventions supporting improvement in children's and young people's health and wellbeing across the local authority. The very good use of evidence-based practice by the educational psychology service, combined with effective partnership working has supported a range of high-quality interventions selected to suit the West Dunbartonshire Council context. These include nurture, mindfulness, growth mindset and resilience. The [multi-agency hub](#) provides high levels of support for children, young people and families through a partnership approach which provides access to wide-ranging professional expertise. Pupil and family support workers provide highly-regarded targeted support for identified families which is already leading to increased attendance and achievement. Early qualitative data is promising regarding improved outcomes for children, young people and families. Although it will be some time before robust quantitative data can be used to measure the impact of these initiatives, the local authority has sound arrangements in place to achieve this through data being gathered at school, learning community and local authority level.

Click on this link to find out more about some of the range of high-quality interventions that are supporting children, young people and families across West Dunbartonshire Council. These include [nurture groups, seasons for growth, mindfulness and the Solihull approach in primary schools and a multi-agency hub](#).

“ The expectation is that pupil voice is at the heart of everything we do. ”

education officer

Whilst staff articulate this commitment to learner participation very well, they are aware of the need to strengthen this further in practice within learning communities. There are a few strong examples of learner participation through children and young people being involved in the pupil self-evaluation programme. As a result, children and young people are increasingly confident that their views are valued by their school and by the local authority. Some children and young people can talk at length and with detail about the impact of local authority initiatives designed to support improvement in their learning and attainment. During the inspection, many children and young people told us that their confidence and resilience has grown as a result of the targeted support being offered to them.

Over the course of session 2018-19, the local authority plans to further develop learner participation in planning, and evaluating the impact of activities and improvements in their schools.

“ I wouldn’t be able to talk to you today if it wasn’t for nurture. ”

secondary school pupil

Over the last five years, attendance of primary school pupils has increased. In the current year the attendance of secondary school pupils has increased. However, attendance remains below the national average. The proportion of children and young people excluded from school has declined significantly and much faster than the national average. As a next step there would be merit in setting specific targets for improving attendance and monitor closely the progress towards these. Improvements in health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people will be further supported by new local authority guidance on the delivery of the health and wellbeing curriculum. The local authority has committed to ensure this guidance is introduced for session 2018-19 and to work with partners to continue to develop approaches to measuring improvements in health and wellbeing for children and young people across West Dunbartonshire Council.

Click on this link to find out more about how West Dunbartonshire Council’s approaches to family learning which are very effectively supporting families across the local authority. These include: [Incredible Years](#), [Transition One](#), [Family Hub WOW project](#) and [‘St Ronan’s cooking club’](#).

“ At our outdoor project we did team-building, problem-solving, health and safety and fitness. It helped me feel confident and able to control my anger better. I feel more ready for high school. ”

P7 pupil

Across West Dunbartonshire Council families are increasingly engaged in learning. The local authority has a clear set of strategic aims relating to engaging families and communities. Digital technology is used very well to gather the views of parents and carers to support improvement planning. All schools have a parental and family engagement policy and there is strong evidence that these policies are supporting the development of innovative and effective parental engagement. A number of these initiatives are well supported by the educational psychology service.

Click on this link to find out more about how some West Dunbartonshire families benefitted from an [outdoor learning residential for children and parents/carers with school staff and partners](#).

Across the local authority, there are very good examples of family learning which are leading to accredited and meaningful outcomes for parents and carers. This is helping to improve the resilience and confidence in families and increase their ability to support children to learn. It would be helpful to develop a database which can be used to monitor the impact of these initiatives over the longer term. Staff develop very positive relationships with families, partners and the wider community. This increases the confidence of parents and carers to engage with the school and learning, leading to a better understanding of how to support their children's learning.

Through the parental and family engagement strategy parents are increasingly involved in a range of evaluative activities through structures such as Parent Councils, workshops, open mornings/afternoons, social events, or through many family learning initiatives. Parent Councils are involved in decision-making in relation to spending of a particular allocation of funds. The local authority recognises the need to continue to develop creative ways to capture the views of the wider parent forum in evaluating the quality of aspects of school life and participating in planning for improvement. Working with chairs of Parent Councils, there is scope to ensure broader representation on Parent Councils.

“ I’m able to help my wee boy understand his emotions and we’re trying out some of the behaviour management strategies at home now. ”

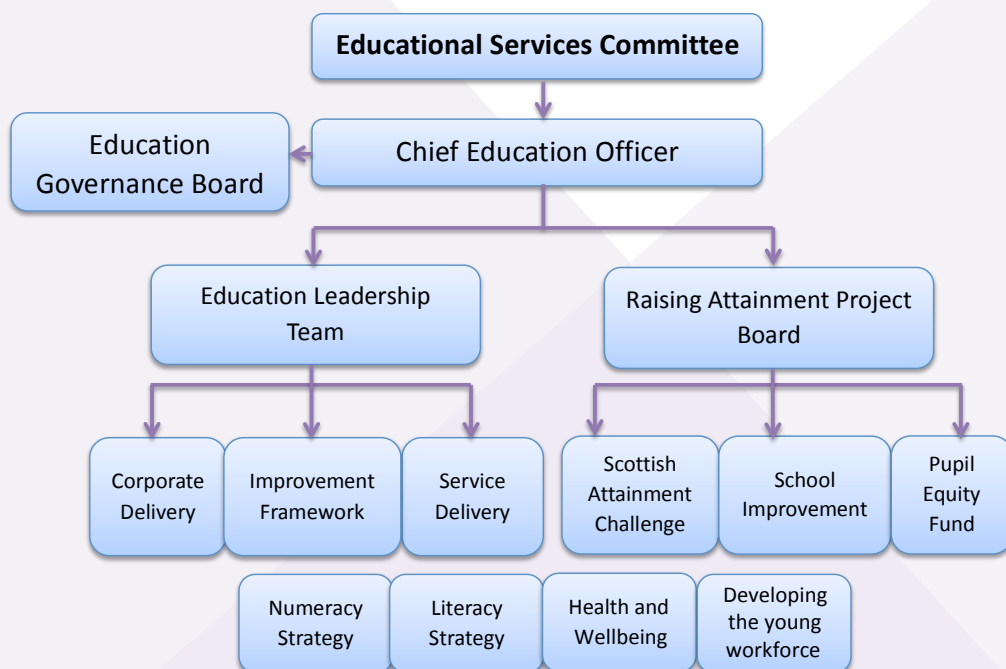
parent of child in P1

How effective is the education service's leadership, governance and management of resources to improve learning, raise attainment and narrow the poverty-related attainment gap?

The Chief Education Officer and her team provide very effective leadership to the education service which is improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap in West Dunbartonshire Council. There is a long-standing, clearly articulated vision and strategy for raising attainment within West Dunbartonshire Council.

The improvements are underpinned by a clear commitment to achieving the strategy, at an overall council level through to the school community. This ensures consistent clarity amongst all stakeholders of the relentless focus on improving life chances for all children, young people and families. A coherent governance framework in operation at all levels, provides clarity of both responsibility and accountability. Planning and management of interventions are also robust. The governance framework ensures appropriate methods for scrutiny and challenge and for the sharing of progress and successes with stakeholders. Through the work of the Educational Services Committee, elected members demonstrate strong commitment to continuous improvement of education in West Dunbartonshire Council. The clear strategic direction supports consistent clarity amongst all stakeholders. This is a significant strength which firmly underpins the local authority's very good progress towards ensuring excellence and equity.

The policy decision-making structure for education in West Dunbartonshire Council



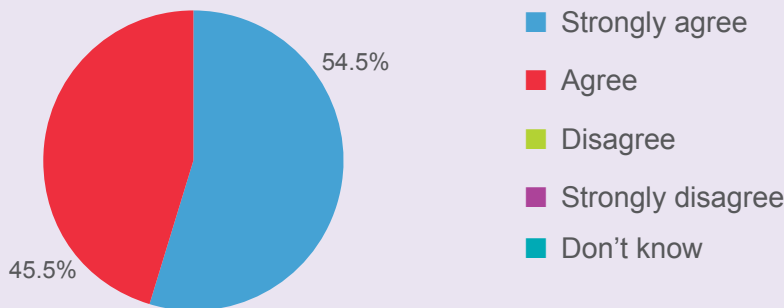
Over the five year period, since 2012, the local authority has successfully created very strong conditions, including winning the hearts and minds of practitioners working in schools, third sector organisations and other partner agencies, upon which to deliver excellence and equity. Key elements of the [raising attainment strategy](#) include a focus on:

- securing strong distributed leadership;
- increased parental involvement;
- high-quality professional learning and staff development;
- effective use of data; and
- increased partnership working.

This clear and comprehensive strategy effectively supports the education service delivery of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The senior leadership team has successfully developed a culture of collective responsibility and a collegiate approach to improvement. Centrally-deployed staff, headteachers and Parent Council chairs who completed the pre-inspection questionnaires indicated high levels of confidence in education service senior managers. Additionally, in focus group discussions almost all stakeholders, including parents, partners and children and young people articulated praise and positivity about the quality of education and support delivered by schools and the education service more widely. Leaders at all levels demonstrate a collective deep understanding of the local context and the potential barriers to learning experienced by many children, young people and families.

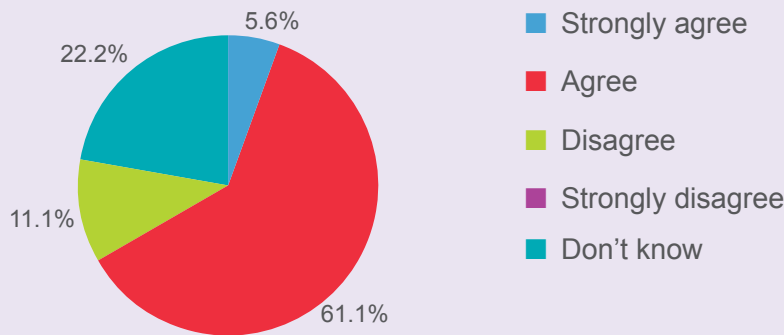
Pre-inspection questionnaire feedback from 22 centrally deployed education service staff

Senior managers have established a clear vision for the education authority which has been shared successfully.



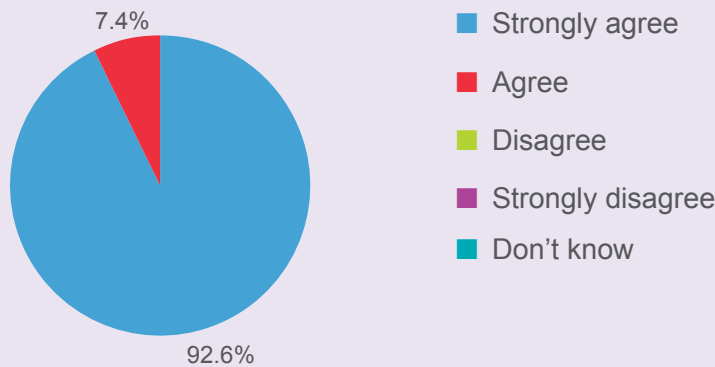
Pre-inspection questionnaire evidence from 18 Parent Council Chairs

The education authority is well led.



Pre-inspection questionnaire feedback from 27 headteachers

The senior management team and staff in the education authority show a high level of commitment to improving education.



Senior leaders, including elected members consistently promote and drive forward their vision of improved outcomes and increased life chances for all children, young people and families. Through the Educational Services Committee, senior leaders provide regular updates which ensure elected members have a good understanding of the priorities for education. The educational governance arrangements as outlined in the diagram on page 10 provide a sound basis for elected members to scrutinise education performance. The Educational Services Committee ensures valuable dedicated time for discussion of education including the council's progress in raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. During this inspection, we found consistent evidence of ways in which elected members provide support and challenge to the Chief Education Officer and the education leadership team.

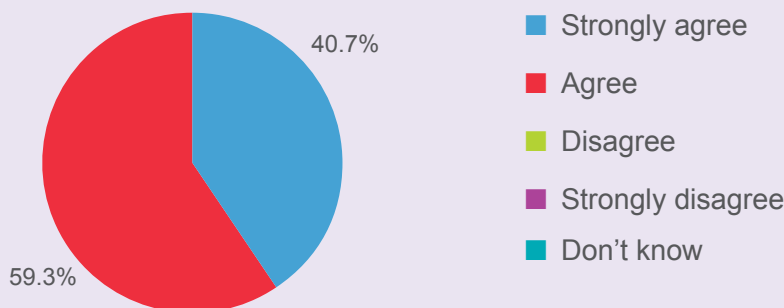
Leadership at all levels is a positive feature across the education service. The Chief Education Officer and her team have instilled confidence in staff across the council which underpins the success of Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Fund initiatives. Senior education officers, the principal educational psychologist and their teams have impacted positively on the quality of service delivered to children, young people and families. Headteachers rightly see themselves as senior

officers of the local authority. They contribute extensively to local authority decision-making. They promote collaborative working and leadership by practitioners in varying roles through forums such as the senior managers' network, education leaders' meetings and local learning community networks. Building on the previous [School Improvement Partnership Programme](#), [the school improvement trio](#) approach adopted across the local authority is encouraging and supporting effectively a significant number of practitioners and partners to engage in research and critical reflection which is improving learning and teaching. Headteachers are well aware of their accountability to the [Raising Attainment Project Board](#) for successful delivery of Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Fund initiatives. This includes a requirement that initiatives are outcomes-focused and data-driven. In almost all learning communities and establishments sound analysis of data informs improvement planning.

The local authority governance framework provides effective systems for financial management of projects. As funding from the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the Pupil Equity Fund has been introduced, the local authority has strengthened financial monitoring through the specific project boards which feed into the Raising Attainment Project Board. These boards actively ensure that all planned initiatives are aligned to the local authority Education, Learning and Attainment Delivery Plan with clear targets for improving outcomes for children and young people. Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Fund plans have been effectively integrated into the council's existing approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. These funds are being used to extend the reach and pace of existing and previously planned initiatives. This ensures the council's approach is coherent and aligned to the longer term strategic priorities. Headteachers have benefitted greatly from ongoing support from skilled central services such as [strategic procurement and human resources](#). Going forward, more formal training in procurement is planned to ensure value for money is a key factor within initiatives. Continuing to build the capacity of new and existing headteachers in this aspect of their work is important to ensure they make well-informed choices. As the budget for central resources becomes more challenging, the current level of support may not be sustainable. The local authority should monitor this closely.

Pre-inspection questionnaire evidence from 27 headteachers

The education authority has robust systems for managing finance to improve outcomes for learners.



Local authority arrangements for ongoing monitoring of Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Fund spending are overall sound. Internally robust monitoring and reporting arrangements ensure the education service has regular oversight of how and where the funding is being spent. Regular updates are provided to the Educational Services Committee on progress with the Scottish Attainment Challenge. To ensure transparency and enhance scrutiny, there is a need to improve the level of information provided to elected members to enable them to more fully critically assess the progress and outcomes achieved. It would be helpful to include, for example, more detail about actual progress against planned progress in all internal and external reports. Importantly, the education service has given some consideration to the longer term sustainability of the Scottish Attainment Challenge initiatives through building the capacity of existing staff. The council recognises the need to continue to strengthen its work on sustainability to ensure progress in closing the attainment gap is maintained. This should include conducting robust evaluations with partners to identify what is having the greatest impact on improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. There is a need to plan how these will be taken forward once the Scottish Attainment Challenge funding ends.

**“We try to protect the things
we know will make a difference.”**

principal teacher

The contribution of the West Dunbartonshire Educational Psychology Service to the Scottish Attainment Challenge

HM Inspectors are confident that the educational psychology service is making a very strong contribution to closing the poverty-related attainment gap in West Dunbartonshire Council, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing. The service has worked hard to respond and overtake the improvement actions outlined in the [Education Scotland Validated Self-evaluation report \(2015\)](#).

The educational psychology service recognises that it is now time to review their model of service delivery to take full account of the excellence and equity agenda, and the need for capacity building and sustainability. The educational psychology service has effectively supported the improvement of outcomes for children and young people's health and wellbeing and early literacy. They have made a strong start in the collation, synthesis and analysis of data to monitor the progress of learners and the effectiveness of interventions. The service, in partnership with the education service will continue to review and evaluate the effectiveness of their contribution to closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

To what extent is the education service improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap?

West Dunbartonshire Council is making **very good** progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. HM Inspectors are confident that the evidence and evaluation to date indicates the following strengths and aspects for development.

Strengths

- Highly-effective leadership of the education service has resulted in a clear shared understanding of the local authority context and vision for improving the life chances for all children and young people.
- Staff and partners working effectively together provide a wide range of support for children, young people and families which is leading to improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.
- Many children, young people and families demonstrate a strong desire to positively engage in new projects and different ways of learning. As a result, they are increasing their achievements and developing skills for learning, life and work.
- A well thought-out strategic approach to career long professional learning is supporting practitioners to improve their practice through collaboration, engagement in research, critical reflection and skills development.
- Self-evaluation, underpinned by a robust governance framework, is an integral approach to continuous improvement.

Aspects for development

- Continue to ensure self-evaluation provides clarity about which interventions add the most value to children's and young people's attainment and achievements and take steps to formalise exit or continuation strategies as appropriate.
- Further strengthen the information provided to the Educational Services Committee to enhance scrutiny by elected members through, for example, an increased focus on actual progress against planned activity.
- Building on the current good practice, improve planning with parents, carers and children and young people to ensure they are fully involved in discussions and decisions which affect their learning.
- Monitor the workload and impact on headteachers and central staff, including in human resources, procurement and finance, of their work related to the Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Fund to ensure there is capacity to continue providing the required levels of administrative and other support.

What happens next?

Education Scotland is confident that the evidence and evaluation to date indicates that West Dunbartonshire Council is making very good progress in improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. We are confident that the local authority's self-evaluation processes are robust and leading to improvements. As result we will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this inspection.

HM Inspectors
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1 May 2018

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