

Educational psychology services in Scotland:

Making a difference to excellence
and equity for all: Outcomes from
inspection evidence 2015 to 2018

February 2019

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Foreword

I am delighted to publish this report on Educational Psychology Services in Scotland: Making a difference to excellence and equity for all: outcomes from inspection evidence 2015 to 2018.

It is commendable that educational psychology services support the implementation of Getting it right for every child, at individual child, school and authority levels. Their work with other agencies and families is helping to build capacity in communities and is improving outcomes for children and young people. I especially draw attention to the increased role of educational psychology services in the early intervention and prevention of mental health and wellbeing.

An increasing number of services now offer specialist therapeutic interventions for individual children and young people, together with training and policy advice to schools, establishments and local authorities.

Within a context of improving leadership of change and improvement across educational psychology services, it is pleasing to note that educational psychologists are helping to overcome inequality in attainment and achievement of the most vulnerable groups of children and young people. They are also helping to empower teachers in the classroom by supporting professional learning for teachers and other staff in nurturing approaches, assessing dyslexia, and working effectively with autism spectrum disorders.

Going forward, it continues to be important for educational psychology services to measure their impact, to ensure that they achieve an appropriate level of individual work with children, young people and their families, whilst empowering others to improve outcomes and achieve equity and excellence for all.

I would encourage services to continue to develop and extend this role in partnership with relevant agencies and to ensure continued high quality educational psychology service delivery for *Scotland's learners, with Scotland's educators.*



Gayle Gorman HM Chief Inspector of Education

Introduction: HM Inspectors' scrutiny of educational psychology services 2015 to 2018

From April 2015 to April 2018, Education Scotland carried out a review of the quality and impact of Educational Psychology Services in all 31 Education Authorities.¹ HM Inspectors carried out the review using a collaborative scrutiny model known as [validated self-evaluation \(VSE\)](#).

The purpose of the VSE process is to support, extend and challenge the service's own self-evaluation, to affirm, or otherwise, their evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement, thereby strengthening outcomes for learners and other stakeholders. The process is collaborative and uses many of the principles which underpin a collaborative enquiry approach to evaluation, intervention and improvement.

The VSE model scrutinised two themes:

- learning and teaching, and
- partnership working.

The learning and teaching theme focused on closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and raising attainment and achievement for all. The partnership theme had a particular emphasis on Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC). The themes are not discrete. In scrutinising the two themes HM Inspectors and associate assessors were also able to evaluate the quality of leadership and impact of self-evaluation for improvement.

The self-evaluation reports, action plans resulting from VSE, and thematic reviews for all inspections during 2015 to 2018, can be found on EPS own websites.



¹ During the period of inspection, Stirling Council and Clackmannanshire Council operated as a shared service. Clackmannanshire EPS was not inspected due to the timing of their decoupling from Stirling Council.

Theme 1: learning and teaching

Early intervention and prevention: building capacity in others by working at whole school and establishment levels

Evidence from HM Inspectors' scrutiny of EPS found that almost all are involved in supporting children's attainment in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Work in the area of numeracy is less advanced and requires stronger emphasis by almost all services. Similarly, the measurement of health and wellbeing and its relationship to improving attainment in literacy and numeracy requires a more sophisticated analysis and approach.

The majority of services' work in raising attainment is preventative and focused on early intervention. Individual work with vulnerable children and young people with additional support needs (ASN) is effectively addressed using a staged intervention approach and is covered in the section of this report: partnership working.

HM Inspectors found that EPS work is most effective when they work at whole systems levels². Systemic interventions³ designed to build practitioner skills in learning and teaching and based on an audit of need at individual, school, local authority and national levels, have the potential to achieve greatest impact. This is particularly the case given the small numbers of EPs working in education authority EPS. Almost all services provide high quality coaching and mentoring to build practitioner skills. EPs use their work with individual children, young people, schools, establishments and other professionals to identify professional learning needs. They then provide targeted interventions working with practitioners to build skills and knowledge. By engaging in this kind of informed service delivery, they are able to engage with a wider range of professionals, prevent the same barriers to learning from arising routinely, and improve learning outcomes for children and young people. For example, in a few services inspectors found psychologists engaging in highly effective professional learning with learning support staff in the assessment and identification of dyslexia. The result of professional learning is to reduce the number of children and young people requiring referral to the EP, thereby ensuring that children and young people have their needs met more timeously. The professional learning also informed teachers and specialist staff in how to teach literacy to all children and young people better, helping to achieve equity and excellence for all.

² OECD (2015). [Improving schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective. OECD.](#)

³ Burden, R.L (1999.) We're on the Road to Nowhere: Twenty-one years of reconstructing educational psychology. *Educational psychology in practice*, 14, 228-231. Gillham, W(Ed) (1978). *Reconstructing educational psychology*. London: Croom Helm

The majority of EPS use robust research methods well to measure improvements and advise schools on appropriate measurement tools to help evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. In a few EPS, research/psychology assistants provide very effective reviews of research literature and analysis of data obtained from school and establishment interventions. In the best of practice, services use the school's self-evaluation data and school improvement plans to determine their service delivery. For example, in East Dunbartonshire EPS an action enquiry research model is used to help schools raise attainment in literacy. A reflective problem-solving approach is deployed with small groups of teachers to facilitate a full assessment of need at individual school level. This allows interventions to be tailored appropriately to each different context and to link school improvement planning to an action research approach. Services will now benefit from looking more closely at what data are already available within councils to avoid creating similar data from different measurement tools. Services should also ensure that evaluation methods are easily replicable by all schools and classroom practitioners so that they can share effective learning and teaching interventions and evaluate impact using the same measurements.

Want to raise literacy attainment in your classroom? Do you know where your children need support? Have you tried using an action enquiry approach? Want to know more? Click the [link](#) now...

Almost all EPS are working on the [National Improvement Framework \(NIF\)](#) priorities and in particular closing the poverty-related attainment gap. For example, in West Dunbartonshire Council, EPs worked with a local nursery to improve the poverty-related vocabulary gap. The intervention addressed the effects of poverty with the aim of preventing further disadvantage by intervening at an early age.

Closing the vocabulary gap within the early years

Research evidence has shown that by the time children reach the age of 5, the expressive vocabulary gap between children from the richest and poorest backgrounds is around 18 months. In addition, comparing the number of hours that children are read to reveals significant disparities between those from rich and poorer backgrounds. Given that this gap exists pre-school the challenge is how best to intervene to make a difference before children start school.

See [link](#) for more detail.

A few services are beginning to show improvements in literacy attainment and practice over time. For example, in [North Lanarkshire EPS](#) their longitudinal study is able to demonstrate sustainable improvements in children's literacy skills over two decades. Significantly, the research method is also being used to measure the effectiveness and sustainability of their funded [Scottish Attainment Challenge \(SAC\)](#) work in [numeracy](#) and [health and wellbeing](#). More services need to consider the use of longitudinal methods to ensure that improvements are sustainable and to alert them as to when they need to re-engage with schools and when they can withdraw. This will release time for EPs to do other activities and ensure that best value is achieved. In addition, services should consider how they can coordinate their interventions and evaluation strategies within and across EPS to have a greater impact across more schools and establishments. A few services at the end of the scrutiny programme were beginning to consider how they can use the Regional Improvement Collaboratives to facilitate this type of systemic approach across Scotland. The [Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists \(ASPEP\)](#) and the [Scottish Division of Educational Psychology \(SDEP\)](#) should collaborate to see how the above improvements can be taken forward.

Children in North Lanarkshire have benefited from innovative literacy interventions for over two decades.

How is this possible, and what research methods have they used to measure progress over this length of time?
Find out how. [Link](#).

In many services, mental health and wellbeing is perceived as critical to improving the poverty-related attainment gap. Almost all of the interventions to improve learning and teaching outcomes emphasise the need to enhance children's and young people's motivation and resilience. The hypothesis is that if children's and young people's self-efficacy⁴ in relation to themselves as learners can be enhanced, then they will be better able to learn. When children and young people experience impoverished learning experiences from an early age, motivational learning theories and attachment and brain development research are all influential in EPs choice of intervention. Almost all services are engaged in developing practical applications of the above research evidence. Almost all approaches are targeted at whole school, class and authority levels. The majority still need to evidence the connection between improvements in children's and young people's self-efficacy, emotional wellbeing and overall resilience, to outcomes in children's and young people's progress.

⁴ Bandura, A.; Barbaranelli, C.; Caprara, G. V.; Pastorelli, C. (1996). "Multifaceted Impact of Self-Efficacy Beliefs on Academic Functioning". *Child Development*. 67: 1206–1222.

Current national priorities have highlighted the underlying principle of developing learners who are able to approach learning as an active participant. Although not a new concept, metacognition has been used as a framework from which to explore children's and young people's understanding of their own learning processes thereby promoting more effective learning and positive attainment. How do you do this in the classroom?

Fife Council: [metacognitive strategies](#).

The research on metacognition is applied in the areas of improving literacy skills. Metacognitive approaches have the potential to link health and wellbeing with learning outcomes as they include the importance of learner characteristics, as well as cognitive and metacognitive skills. EPS should consider how to apply this thinking using a person, task and strategy framework⁵ to bring together health and wellbeing and learning outcomes.

Want to know how to use self-regulation with children to improve learning and close the poverty-related attainment gap? Then read on and see what Perth and Kinross Council EPS are doing with teachers. [Link](#).

5 Flavell, J. H. (1979). Metacognition and cognitive monitoring: A new area of cognitive-developmental enquiry. *American Psychologist*, 34(10), 906-911.
Currie, LA (2002) Think about it: A Metacognitive approach to the teaching of early literacy skills. Division of Educational and Child Psychology: Extending the Boundaries: Developments in Psychological Thinking. Presentation
Currie, LA, Gunion, M and McLaren, M (2003) Early Intervention in North Lanarkshire: A Multifaceted Approach to Achievement. *Support for learning*, Vol 14, issue 2.

In the most effective health and wellbeing practice, services are able to show improvements in teacher knowledge and practice as a result of motivational and emotional resilience informed approaches. For example, The Highland Council EPS are able to show improvements in teacher knowledge about how to develop an emotionally resilient classroom to improve the learning environment. Self-evaluation of the approach is very positive, with teachers and other stakeholders reporting positively on the accessibility of the materials.

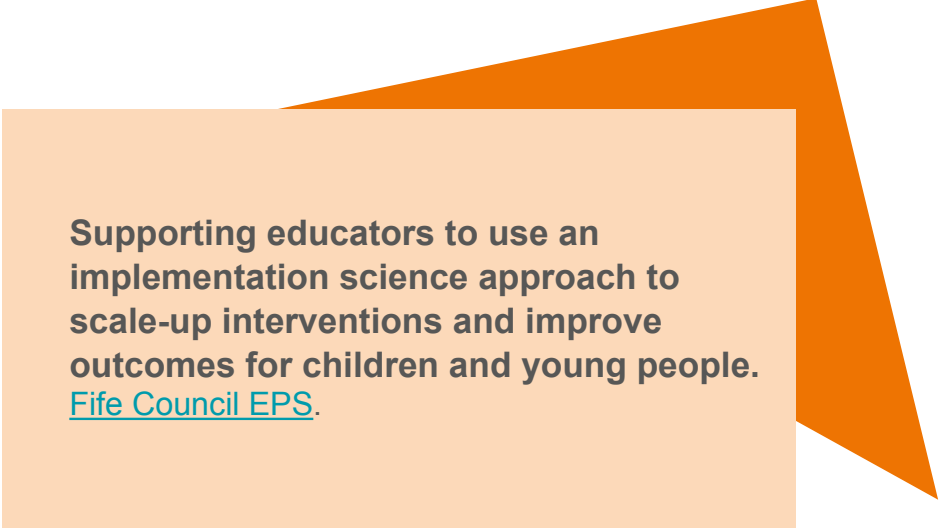


RESILIENT KIDS

When social and emotional learning is targeted within a school curriculum it can have a positive impact: nurturing builds resilience, appropriate responsibilities help children feel valued, recognised and respected, and being included supports emotional wellbeing (Durlak et al., 2011). Empirical research has demonstrated how robust social and emotional learning programmes can have a positive effect on academic success (Zins et al., 2006).

[Click](#) to find out more.

A key strength of almost all services inspected is their ability to translate academic research into practice. Almost all stakeholders valued this ability. Services now need to ensure that they continue to build their skills and knowledge of current academic research so that they can create new and innovative approaches to achieving excellence and equity for all.



Supporting educators to use an implementation science approach to scale-up interventions and improve outcomes for children and young people.
[Fife Council EPS.](#)

Theme 2: partnership working

Multi-agency working

'EPS' involvement in multi-agency work with parents and carers to support children and young people is a strength. This includes working with others to provide family learning programmes such as that implemented by Fife Council EPS.

Working together to empower parents



[Fife implementation of parental engagement approach \(Solihull\).](#)

Almost all services are involved effectively in working across agencies such as health, social work, and the voluntary sector to develop professional skills based on psychological theory. For example, in South Ayrshire Council, staff in children's houses and foster carers with professional learning experience in resilience theory and nurture approaches are able to demonstrate increased confidence in working with very vulnerable children and young people, leading to more positive outcomes. Similarly in Fife Council, partners report that the EPS work with health services on the strategic dissemination and delivery of commercially produced family learning approaches as very effective. They value the EPs' psychological knowledge underpinning many of the approaches. Work with parents is helping to build empowerment by providing them with increased knowledge about their children's development and how they can contribute more effectively.

In South Lanarkshire Council, multi-agency work in the identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders and in the subsequent planning of interventions is found to improve outcomes for children and young people, and staff confidence.

Multi-agency working autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Consultation Model: South Lanarkshire Council

Autism is an increasing need and many teachers will experience a child or young person in their classroom with autism. How do we help teachers to understand autism better? South Lanarkshire Council has been working on a consultative approach to help practitioners to apply, reinforce and develop their understanding of ASD to assist teachers.

[Click](#) to find out more.

The majority of EPS offer very good multi-agency support at the early years, providing assessments to identify children's and young people's needs and support to families and other professionals in how to meet needs effectively. Most services have helped to develop baseline assessment measures to provide information to inform teaching and learning on transition from pre-school to school. Individual work with children and young people undertaken by EPs in preparation for transitions is a strength. Such work is underpinned by effective staged intervention approaches to identify and support children's and young people's individual needs.

Almost all EPS are engaged in high quality work with vulnerable children and young people at key transition stages. The majority of services are central to supporting individual young people with severe and complex learning needs into appropriate post-school destinations in consultation with other agencies. Most services provide consultation and advice to post-school favorably. For example, services provide assessment information and advice on appropriate intervention strategies for individual young people who have been known to the EPS and supported by them during their schooling. Advice on dyslexia and autism is requested frequently. Only a few services are able to offer a systematic and comprehensive delivery across the five core functions of consultation, assessment, intervention, professional learning and research to 18-24 year olds. The majority will offer advice, but few will engage with individual young people. Services need to engage more in [Developing the Young Workforce](#) which may require bespoke interventions for the most vulnerable young people beyond the age of 18.

Partnership working and Getting it right for every child

EPS in Scotland make a very positive contribution to the strategic and operational implementation of Getting it right for every child. Almost all are contributing effectively to the development of education authority guidance and policy for schools and other agencies. In particular they are helping schools and other professionals to apply the national guidance within the context of individual authorities. For example, in the Highlands and Islands, EPs play a significant role in leading Getting it right for every child policy and practice. They work closely in partnership within the education authority and across other agencies to facilitate and improve multi-agency assessment, identification of need and the planning of interventions. In many instances this results in fewer referrals at Stage 3 of the intervention process, and more effective preventative work at an individual child and family level. Similarly in an urban area stakeholders report that the EPS has:

“ EPS fulfilled a key role in collaborating with the Education Leadership Team, Quality Improvement Team and multi-agency practitioners to deliver guidelines and training on Single and Multi Agency Assessment protocols and practices through the Getting it right for every child Leadership Group and Getting it right for every child Implementation Group (Education).”

In most EPS across Scotland, leadership of Getting it right for every child policy and practice is valued by almost all stakeholders. EPs effectively support and empower parents/carers, children and young people to contribute meaningfully to the assessment and planning of their needs. In one authority a solution-focused planning approach helps staff prioritise positive solutions to a child's needs. This helps parents/carers to view their child more positively, encouraging them to feel that they can make a difference to their child's lifelong learning, thereby empowering them. Services should consider how the approaches they use to help parents/carers engage more positively in their children's learning improves outcomes for their own children and those in the wider community⁶. The majority of EPS effectively offer direct advice on the assessment of children and young people at Stages 2 and 3 of Getting it right for every child. For example, at school level they provide class teachers with effective advice and support to assess individual learning needs and determine appropriate interventions. At authority level they provide advice to senior managers and other agencies about appropriate resources and how best to meet needs at education authority and out of authority educational placements. They also provide assessment information on individual children and young people to help with multi-agency assessment and planning.

⁶ In: Currie, LA (1989) Developing a Community perspective in a Primary School. Children and Society Vol.3 No.3

Very effective contributions are made by EPs in building capacity in others to help improve the identification of need and the implementation of appropriate interventions. Almost all of this work is provided at a universal level. For example, the use of nurture approaches to help maintain children and young people within their local communities. Health and wellbeing approaches to improve emotional literacy, growth mindset interventions, restorative approaches, professional learning and building resilience, have all helped schools and other professionals to support vulnerable children, young people and their families more successfully. Such universal approaches are used effectively to build skills and knowledge across agencies to prevent difficulties from arising, or to avoid escalation of mental health problems. Many of the interventions have also been created by EPS using research evidence translated into accessible teaching approaches for schools and practitioners.

A significant contribution to Getting it right for every child is made by EPs through targeted interventions. Individual children and young people benefit from direct work with an EP. Targeted work will include consultation, assessment, and intervention at individual child level. For example, most EPS provide access to a range of therapeutic interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy, video interactive guidance, the management of loss and bereavement (both targeted and universal), and applied behaviour analysis. Assessment information is well considered and helpful in contributing to the Child's Plan. For example, in one service partners noted that:

“ Assessment has been rigorous and robust; interventions have been worked through thoroughly and stand up to scrutiny.”

EPS have particular skills in working with partners managing and facilitating Getting it right for every child meetings using psychological interventions such as solution-oriented approaches. For example in a few EPS, the Getting it right for every child meeting is structured using solution-oriented questions such as: 'if something miraculous was to happen, what would Scott's behaviour look like, what would it feel like for you, for the family, for other people; what would be different'. By using the approach, the focus of the meeting moves away from the negative impact of the learner's behaviour, to finding solutions which can be monitored and reviewed over time. In one service practitioners noted that:

“ This is a really constructive way to help the multi-agency meeting move forward, to find solutions rather than dwelling on everything which is wrong.”

Partners report during inspections that they value the psychological knowledge which EPs bring to multi-agency meetings. For example, in one service stakeholders noted that:

“ The EP helps join the dots in terms of assessment. The knowledge-base helps inform decisions and practice.”

Stakeholders also report that EPs help to facilitate meetings well by coaching and scaffolding questions during Getting it right for every child meetings, thereby helping to find successful multi-agency solutions for vulnerable groups. Joint agency professional learning using, for example, coach-consult methodologies, are also highly effective, resulting in fewer referrals and better outcomes at lower stages of intervention.

In the best of practice, when professional learning and delivery of psychological services is integrated at education authority and council levels, bigger gains are realised. For example, Glasgow Psychological Service's city wide approach to improving [health and wellbeing](#).

The Nurturing City

'Towards the Nurturing City' is Glasgow's Children's Services agreed aspiration across all agencies. Glasgow recognises that the principles which underpin a nurturing approach are applicable across all establishments and form a strong basis on which to build effective interventions for all. Hence within the vision of becoming 'The Nurturing City' it is the expectation that all children and young people are educated in learning environments that are nurturing and inclusive.

[Click](#) to find out more

The majority of services are involved in supporting looked after and accommodated children and young people (care experienced children and young people) by providing effective direct psychological interventions, empowering staff to build their skills, and in developing policy at authority level. Increases in attainment for looked after children away from home provide some evidence of the chain of impact that the above involvement from EPS produces. A few services have taken responsibility for monitoring and tracking performance of care experienced children and young people, enabling better identification of needs. EPS should build on their work with this group of vulnerable children and young people. A focus on raising attainment to address the poverty-related attainment gap with care experienced children and young people will help to improve equity for this group.



How well do educational psychology services improve the quality of their work?

Management posts in EPS are beginning to change. A few education authorities are now employing Principal Educational Psychologists (PEPs) to manage EPS and additional support for learning services at authority officer level. Other education authorities are using senior managers of EPS to deliver authority objectives which would have been previously undertaken by authority personnel such as Education Officers and Quality Improvement Managers. While increasing the use of PEPs by authorities enables EPS to have a strategic input to policy development, it also has the potential to draw managers away from the delivery and management of educational psychology.

Leadership at all levels is a key strength of EPs. PEPs demonstrate strong leadership in the majority of services inspected. Almost all main grade EPs have leadership roles to develop services to schools and vulnerable children, young people and families. For example, developing professional learning to support professionals working with care experienced children and young people, supporting children and young people who are dyslexic, and providing materials and resources to help parents/carers support their children's literacy skills.

Almost all services are better integrated into education authority planning. In a few services, improvement planning and self-evaluation is effectively informed by the NIF drivers. For example in East Ayrshire Council, they noted that:

“**Employing the NIF as a framework for reflection and discussion allowed us to be more confident that our service delivery was needs-led in the context of East Ayrshire and also our Scottish national context”.**

[East Ayrshire Psychological Service.](#)

The move towards integrated children's services has facilitated some EPS to work across the council and with other services. Integration with education authority planning is resulting in much more synergy between the support provided by EPS and its relevance to council and school planning. [East Renfrewshire EPS](#) provides a strong example of how effective partnership working and integration with authority priorities is improving outcomes for children and young people.

Self-evaluation has improved in the majority of services. There is still a significant number of services identified during the VSE that required further support in the areas of operational management, self-evaluation for improvement and leadership of change. Most services have the capacity for continuous improvement.

Conclusion

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths and next steps.

Key strengths

- Leadership of change and improvement has improved across most services. There is a clear vision in most services based on national priorities and those of education authorities. EPS are now more integrated into council and education authority improvement planning.
- EPS are providing very good holistic interventions, working closely with other agencies and families to build capacity in communities and improve outcomes for children and young people.
- EPs work with individual children and young people is highly valued by stakeholders and is effective in improving outcomes. This is particularly the case when working with vulnerable groups such as care experienced children and young people, and those with ASN.
- The quality and expertise of EPs, in the area of mental health and wellbeing has increased and improved substantially. A growing number of services now offer specialist therapeutic interventions for individual children and young people, together with professional learning and policy advice to schools, establishments and local authorities.
- EPS parental engagement initiatives are empowering parents/carers more than previously and building capacity in other agencies working with parents/carers, families and communities.
- Almost all services provide very good professional learning to build the skills of teachers and other professionals in, for example, learning and teaching approaches, promoting positive relationships, and meeting children's and young people's additional support needs.
- Almost all EPS provide very good evidence-based practice, and advise others on how to apply research in their individual settings. Such systemic approaches to service delivery are providing best value from a scarce and specialist resource by building capacity in others to empower them to deliver high quality learning and teaching interventions.
- EPS effectively support the implementation of Getting it right for every child, at individual child, school and authority levels. In addition, transition arrangements between stages of education, particularly in the early years, and for those children and young people with a Child's Plan or a Coordinated Support Plan is effective.

Next steps

- Services should work together better to share effective practice and create new ways of working to improve the poverty-related attainment and achievement gap. In doing this, EPS need to refine the data which they use to evaluate outcomes in the short, medium and longer term. They need to use robust measures which will allow them to know when they can stop an intervention and when they need to re-engage. They need to work with local authorities to share data better.
- Services should continue to build on the very effective work which they have developed to improve learning and teaching, partnership working, and empowering parents, teachers and other professionals. In so doing, they need to make their role and contribution more explicit so that they can better demonstrate their impact in addressing the poverty related attainment gap, and in improving outcomes for children and young people in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.
- EPS should continue to review and modify the balance of work at individual, school and authority levels. A model for allocating time to each of the Currie functions of consultation, assessment, intervention, professional learning and research across all levels of individual, school, and authority, is a challenge which will require ongoing review and evaluation by services.
- Self-evaluation for improvement needs to be improved in a significant number of services. In these services, better links with educational authority planning is required to ensure that the service provided by the EPS is based on sound evidence of need.



Appendix 1

Explanation of terms of quality

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quality are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91% – 99%
Most	75% – 90%
Majority	50% – 74%
Minority/Less than half	15 – 49%
A few less than	15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.

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