

Inspection of Local Authorities

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

25 June 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 children and families 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, Dundee City Council is one of nine [Challenge Authorities](#).

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

The Scottish Attainment Challenge has a total budget of £750 million over the period from 2015-16 to 2020-21. As a Challenge Authority, Dundee City 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 Dundee City 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 Dundee City Council, the 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 Dundee City Council is improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Context

The children and families service in Dundee City Council is responsible for the education of over 21,000 school age pupils in mainstream education establishments and for 147 school age pupils who are based outside of mainstream education. The strategic lead for education across the Council is the Executive Director supported by the Chief Education Officer. Education is delivered through:

8 council managed early learning and childcare settings;

22 partner providers of early learning and childcare;

33 primary schools;

8 secondary schools; and

1 school for children and young people with additional support needs; and one off-site education service which also supports young people with additional support needs.

The Executive Director has overall responsibility for all service functions within the children and families service including education, social work and community justice.

He is supported by a head of service who is the Chief Education Officer and a head of service who is the Chief Social Work Officer.

Four education managers (including the principal educational psychologist) each lead an area and/or function of the service i.e. early learning and childcare, 5-18 (east and west) and additional support needs, educational psychology and inclusion.

As illustrated later in this report, Dundee City Council has a specific Children and Families Services Committee whose role is to scrutinise the performance of the children and families service. The [City Plan for Dundee 2017-26](#) and the [Tayside Plan for Children, Young People and Families 2017-20](#) provide the backdrop to service delivery. A coherent school improvement framework, aimed at supporting self-evaluation to improve outcomes for children and young people in Dundee, was launched in February 2018. Dundee City Council’s [School Improvement Framework](#) supports a shared understanding amongst staff at all levels of the expectations and quality assurance approaches to help ensure a high quality education service. In September 2017, the council launched the [2017-18 Annual Education Plan](#). Its framework includes a focus on:

- nurturing the early development of cognitive and social skills in 0-5 year olds by targeting parenting and child centred support;
- investing in education and, where relevant, other support to enable all children and young people to thrive; and
- sustaining early development with effective education and supported transitions through to adulthood.

The Annual Education Plan outlines actions, which have been informed by national and local priorities including the priorities set out in the Tayside Integrated Children’s Services Plan.

Click here to find out more about the [Annual Education Plan for 2017/18](#) which provides detailed information about the structure and priorities for the Service.

The Annual Education Plan builds on the council’s aspiration of Dundee Changing for the Future and the earlier (2012-17) Service Plan - Raising Attainment, Achievement and Ambition in Dundee – Can do, Must do, Will do. The current Council Plan for 2017-22 outlines the priorities for the children and families service. These priorities are illustrated below.



Children & Families

Our children and young people will have the best start in life and Dundee will be the best place in Scotland to grow up.

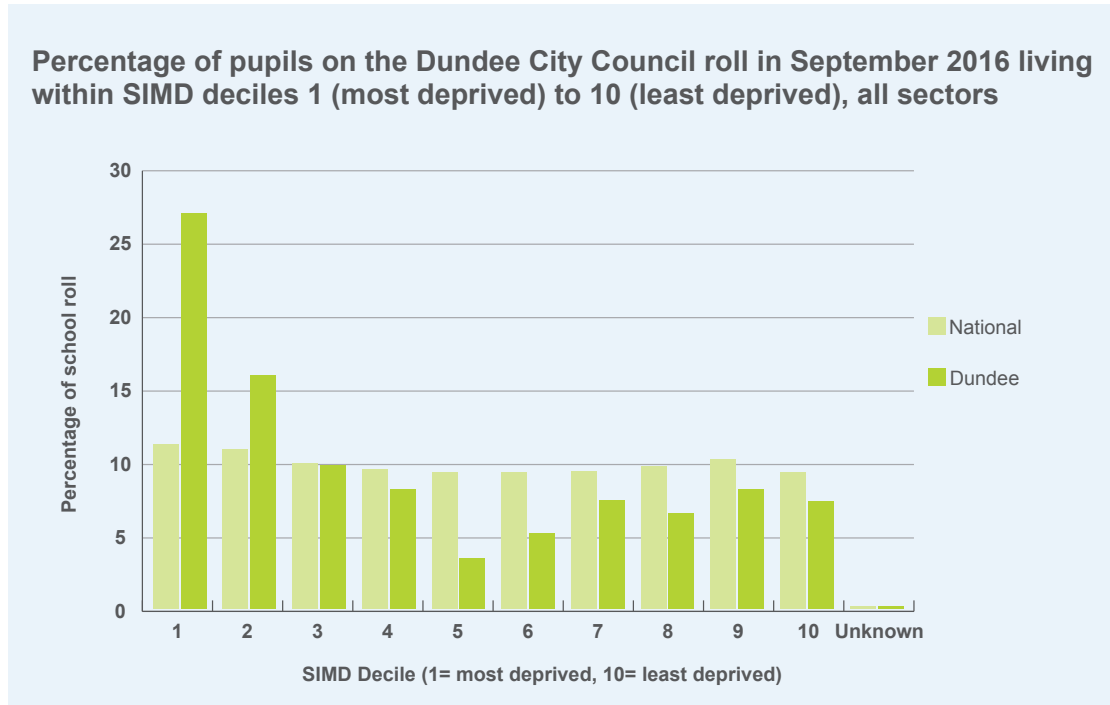


Priorities

1. Our children will have the best start in life - improve early years outcomes
2. Close the attainment gap
3. Improve physical, mental and emotional health for children and young people
4. Improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people who experience inequalities, including looked after children
5. Increase safety and protection of young people



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 it can be seen that in 2016 over half (53%) of all pupils in Dundee City Council's schools live in the areas of highest deprivation categorised as SIMD 1, 2 and 3. This is well above the national average.



The Attainment Scotland Fund in Dundee City Council

Primary schools

Dundee City Council took an early strategic decision to focus Scottish Attainment Challenge resources on supporting children and families in early learning and childcare, reflecting both the context and challenges within Dundee.

Dundee City is now in its third year as a challenge authority as Scottish Attainment Challenge primary schools funding began in the 2015-16 financial year. Between 2015-16 and 2017-18, the authority drew down a total of £7.3 million from the Scottish Government to support Scottish Attainment Challenge improve learning and teaching and raise attainment in primary schools. This compares to a grant of £9.9 million from the Scottish Government. The difference was mainly due to delay in funding approval and appointment of staff. The difficulties in recruiting staff, including teachers and early learning and childcare educators, were compounded by a few instances of lengthy council recruitment processes.

In the first year of the funding for primary schools, the grant was not announced until the end of June 2015. As is the case with other Challenge Authorities, this meant that projects were not fully started until well into the autumn term of that school year. Building on previous improvement work, Dundee City Council is using this funding to support eight specific key areas of learning to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Secondary schools

Funding for secondary schools began in the 2016-17 financial year. Between 2016-17 and 2017-18, the authority drew down £1.5 million compared to a grant of £1.9 million from the Scottish Government. The main reason for the difference was difficulties in recruitment of staff. In the first year of the secondary schools' programme, the grant was not confirmed until the autumn term and this had a delayed impact on the plans put forward by the Challenge Authorities in general.

Across all sectors

Scottish Attainment Challenge funding is being spent well on eight main workstreams:

- Local management and governance: this includes the appointment of an education officer to work with educational psychology service to ensure evidence-based initiatives and support research and development.
- Interventions-general: this is a transition programme to support work across P6 to S2 to ensure a smooth progression for targeted individuals and groups in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. This involves appointing specific transition teachers.
- School and family development workers – allocated to every school to develop parental engagement and family learning.
- Interventions – birth to age five: appointing early learning and childcare practitioners to help target closing the vocabulary gap.

- Interventions – literacy: using literacy development officers and interventions to raise attainment in early learning and childcare, primary and secondary sectors.
- Interventions – numeracy: using numeracy development officers and interventions to raise attainment in early learning and childcare, primary and secondary sectors.
- Health and wellbeing: appointing a range of staff to promote and develop the health and wellbeing curriculum, nurturing approaches and growth mindset.
- Secondary school workstreams: e.g. study support and a focus on care experienced young people.

Evidence of the selected Scottish Attainment Challenge initiatives, building on and adding to earlier work already in place within the council includes, for example, developing leadership. This had been identified in the 2012-2017 Service Plan and Scottish Attainment Challenge funding allowed this work to be developed further with a wider reach.

The authority also drew on national and international research to inform its decision-making alongside independent evaluations of council-funded programmes. The council has developed a matrix database for the Scottish Attainment Challenge, and now Pupil Equity Fund initiatives containing information on all initiatives and activities underway and their impact. This is being used effectively by the children and families service to assess impact and help inform which initiatives are working or should consider being exited.

“ As secondary headteachers, we are actively encouraged and involved in strategic decision making. Our opinions are listened to. We are constantly reminded our role is to improve outcomes for young people and families, raise attainment and be mindful that we are striving to close the poverty attainment gap. This is then emphasised to all staff at every opportunity along with the inclusion agenda. ”

secondary headteacher

The Scottish Attainment Challenge funding for schools will cease by 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 challenging 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 over a five year period. In 2017-18, a total of £4.97 million has been provided to headteachers in Dundee City Council. However, it is estimated that not all of this will be spent in 2017-18, with the rest being carried forward into 2018-19. Continued, appropriate support from officers in areas such as finance, procurement and human resources is essential to helping headteachers spend this funding appropriately. A few school clusters have been working together on recruitment and selection, helping to gain economies of scale and supporting best value. In moving forward, headteachers should be considering more explicitly the sustainability of planned initiatives. The education authority should ensure that a review is undertaken of the experience of the first year of Pupil Equity Funding. Through this review, and informed by headteacher feedback, lessons learned and good practice could be shared across the council.

Defining and targeting the poverty-related attainment gap in Dundee City Council:

Dundee City Council has used standardised assessments and aspects of Insight to define the poverty-related attainment gap. Recognising the context of the area, health and wellbeing has been seen as an important priority along with literacy. Targeting the early years and vulnerable families has been an important area of focus to help tackle some deep-seated issues.

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

As a result of engagement with the Scottish Attainment Challenge, Dundee City Council has built successfully a strong appetite for using data well amongst staff at all levels. In all focus group meetings, staff and partners demonstrated their growing understanding of the importance of using data effectively to underpin judgements and improvement planning. Education officers increasingly use data to challenge school leaders, encourage peer challenge during school reviews and as an important aspect of school improvement partnerships. The council now needs to monitor progress of this learning and to ensure all staff are engaged fully in this aspect of improvement work.

We found consistent evidence that Dundee educational psychology service and the data analyst team within Dundee City Council provide a strong contribution to self-evaluation to secure improvement. The education authority's commitment to research is also a central and effective feature of their approach to self-evaluation. The Dundee City Council research team, funded by Scottish Attainment Challenge resources, has raised significantly the profile of research as a key aspect of self-evaluation over recent years. This is resulting in increased staff confidence and a greater awareness of the needs of cohorts, groups and individual children. The two graduate trainees work directly and effectively with school staff to support and help them understand data. As a result, headteachers and other staff are increasing their data literacy skills and confidence to interrogate data and now ask more complex questions of the data analysts themselves.

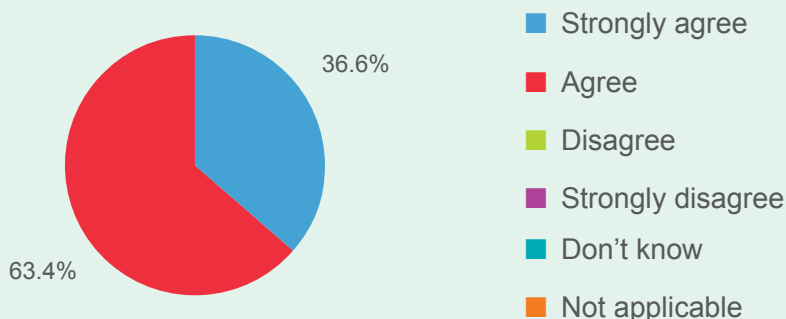
“ Children and families service in Dundee is on a journey of improvement. The Leadership Team has been quite bold in promoting gathering data in more efficient ways using internet-enabled technology from parents, pupils and staff. This has allowed headteachers and their staff to efficiently establish baselines, which often results in positive action in areas requiring development. ”

partner

Attainment data is analysed centrally and related reports provided to schools to help identify gaps in the progress of groups and individuals. Practitioners report increased skills which are increasing their confidence to support and challenge others, for example, through the school improvement partnerships and networks. Helpfully, this is leading to staff being more selective in the interventions. The data analyst team provide additional support on the use of Insight which is helping secondary schools to know their attainment story better through a focus on targeted groups. For example, children and young people living in SIMD 1 and 2 and those who are looked after or accommodated.

Pre-inspection questionnaire feedback from 42 headteachers

The education authority uses data effectively to demonstrate our progress in raising attainment.



The work of the Scottish Attainment Challenge research team, consisting of representation from the University of Dundee, Dundee educational psychology service, central data analysis officers and education officers teams, has led to the creation of the useful intervention matrix designed to record the small gains that children and young people in Dundee are making as a result of the interventions made through the Scottish Attainment Challenge initiative. This has helped to promote a clearer and more consistent focus on improving outcomes across aspects of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The education authority has undertaken an evaluation of the intervention matrix identifying the following strengths:

- a city wide method for recording the small gains from the range of interventions taking place;
- all settings have access to the matrix so can potentially view the work of other schools and share practice;
- supporting distributive leadership by empowering the intervention leads to complete the matrix directly; and
- partnership working with the University of Dundee to evaluate the matrix and its impact.

Senior leaders have also recognised that further improvements are required and intend to take action to:

- look critically at the variable range of interventions put forward by different establishments;
- continue the professional learning in the use of the matrix to cover all schools across the city – half of primary schools still need to receive training;
- explore how the matrix can be better used to share practice between establishments; and
- develop closer links with Dundee educational psychology service in terms of data analysis and school specific support.

We agree with the education authority's view of these strengths. The freedom for practitioners to develop small scale projects has fostered important ownership among staff at different levels. In moving forward, it is now important to narrow down the range of activities to those identified as having the greatest impact.

“ Investment in the staff is changing the outcomes for the children. ”

educational psychology service team member

The data from the matrix has been used to evaluate the range and focus of interventions as well as their impact. In 2016-17, most interventions were focused on health and wellbeing (recorded as 105 interventions) and this was where the education authority considers it is having the greatest impact. The education authority recognises that the next step will be to evaluate the impact of the significant number of interventions recorded on the intervention matrix, to support forward planning for sustainability and develop exit strategies as appropriate across the education authority. As an example of this, interventions in reading and writing are having a strong impact on children’s early reading accuracy and comprehension. Other programmes and strategies have shown to be effective in developing nurturing approaches with improved positive self-belief and self-regulation. Strong progress is already evident through the work of the speech and language development workers in nurseries, through the nurturing approaches in all sectors and the transition teachers targeting specific children and young people.

Overall, the education authority is making good progress in improving learning and raising attainment in literacy and numeracy. In secondary schools at S1-S3, pupils’ performance has improved over the last two years. In Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) qualifications, young people’s performance has improved in a few measures in literacy and numeracy over the last three years. However, this is often below the authority’s virtual comparator and the national average. Through a coordinated approach from the research team, Dundee educational psychology service and education managers and officers, combined with improved dialogue with headteachers and school staff, the education authority is building a shared and better understanding of Dundee City Council’s poverty-related attainment gap. The education authority is now making improved progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Progress is being made in the broad general education. Although this was starting from a low base, there is evidence that the approaches being taken through Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding, combined with strong leadership and higher aspirations are beginning to increase the pace of improvement.

Click on this link to find more about effective family learning in Dundee

[Family Fresh Air Club](#)

[CANI Coaching](#)

[Using App technology](#)

[Ardler Aventures and Chill out Parents](#)

Parents report strong, clear lines of communication to headteachers and senior officers. They report confidence that questions, concerns or suggestions are listened to and appropriately acted upon. They welcome the additional opportunities and support that have been offered to develop their confidence to support their children’s learning and development. Specifically, the positive impact which the early years and school and family development workers have had on supporting them to engage with their child’s school and on aspects of their home life. As a result, parents have had increased expectations on themselves and their families. Examples of this included parents explaining how their positive experience has encouraged them to attend college and regularly volunteer in their child’s school. Schools need to continue with this to engage the hardest to reach families. Harnessing those parents

“ I cannot fault the education that is being provided across the city. ”

parent

who have engaged in order to share their positive experiences and encourage others to become involved.

Through the parental and family engagement strategy, parents whose children are aged between 3-18, are involved increasingly in a range of evaluative activities through structures such as parent councils, workshops, open mornings/afternoons, social events, or through numerous family learning initiatives. Parent Councils are involved appropriately in decision-making in relation to spending particular allocations of funds. Engagement with Dundee educational psychology service and parental engagement officer has resulted in parents and pupils co-producing recently parental information for pupils with additional support needs.

Across Dundee, settings have engaged in a range of family learning initiatives, which are supporting parents and carers to engage in their children's learning and also increase adult participation in education. Schools in receipt of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding have engaged in a range of projects, which are improving children and young people's health and wellbeing through improved engagement with families. The Breakthrough initiative supports children who are looked after through a corporate parenting approach to mentoring. A growth mindset inter-agency project is working well to engage families through developing a deeper understanding of what children can achieve rather than focusing on problems. The education authority is currently engaging in research to consider the challenge of tracking progress in health and wellbeing to build more consistently on the use of wellbeing wheels and the resilience matrix. Health and wellbeing assistants in all primary schools, funded by Scottish Attainment Challenge, play a key role in supporting children and families.

The education 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 joint planning for improvement. Working with chairs there is scope to ensure broader representation on Parent Councils.

“ Ensuring our staff have a good knowledge of the range of available career pathways is about not leaving anyone behind. ”

education officer

Across Dundee City, speech and language therapists provide an important contribution through their scrutiny of data sets and targeted interventions for children. Early learning and childcare practitioners spoke very highly of this work.

There is a range of emerging evidence that improvements in learning and teaching in literacy are leading to increased progress for children at the early level. For example, the nursery narrative initiative is showing evidence of eight months gain following an average of ten weeks intensive experience for children. Similarly, there is evidence of positive impact on improving progress of children in SIMD 1 and 2 through the ABCDundee project evaluated by the senior leadership team.

“ I have an education and reason to leave the house. ”

secondary school pupil

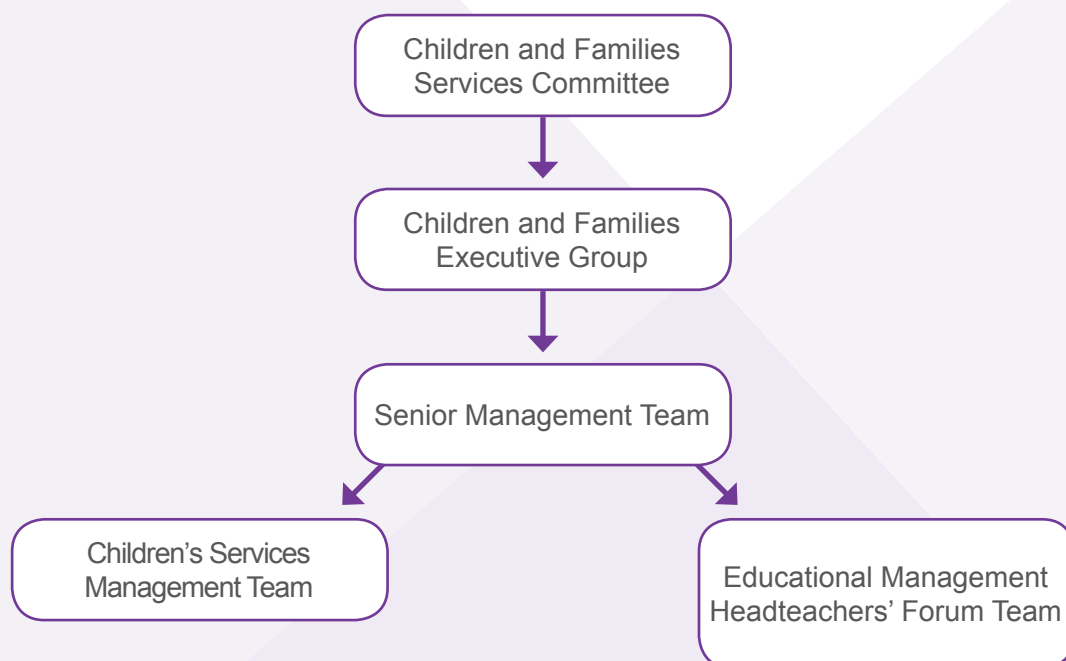
Working in partnership with third sector and private provider organisations, the council can demonstrate the impact of projects that are supporting improvements in mental health and wellbeing. The [Anxiety in Motion project](#) provides evidence of positive impact for a few targeted young people who have a history of not engaging with school. Similarly, the Includem project which offers 24/7 support to some of the most vulnerable families in the city is supporting young people to remain within the education system and move towards a positive destination

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 Executive Director and the Chief Education Officer, along with education managers, education officers and other key central staff have established successfully a positive improvement culture where staff, particularly headteachers, are taking forward well-informed changes. Expectations have increased since their appointments, as has the pace of improvement. Within and across the service there is a clear and collective responsibility for improvement and change. Strong leadership and direction to establishments are resulting in further improvement and change. The Executive Director and Chief Education Officer work very well together, including when planning strategically for improvement. Senior officers and establishment headteachers demonstrate a strong commitment to improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Much of the direction of travel is focused on improving learning and teaching through career-long professional learning, including leadership development and using performance information to tackle inequalities.

Through the work of the Children and Families Services Committee, elected members demonstrate strong commitment to continuous improvement of education in Dundee City. The clear strategic direction supports the education authority's good progress towards ensuring excellence and equity.

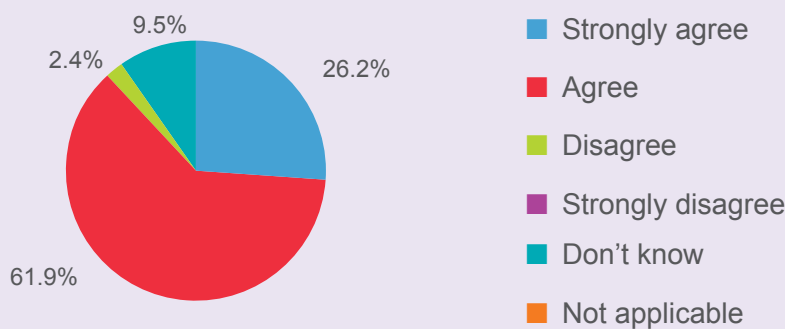
The policy decision-making structure for education in Dundee City Council



Overall, there is clear evidence from staff at all levels of the children and families service that recent work has improved significantly approaches to self-evaluation. There is greater alignment between the strategic vision and the day-to-day practice of staff working in varying roles across the service. High levels of commitment to sharing skills and expertise are evident and growing among staff in education settings. They feel valued and empowered to be creative and innovative, whilst understanding fully the need for a secure evidence base which informs improvement.

Pre-inspection questionnaire feedback from 42 centrally deployed education service staff

Education authority is well led.



The recently published [Dundee Framework for School Improvement](#), developed in collaboration with school leaders, sets out clearly and succinctly a coherent approach with effective self-evaluation being central to school improvement. The senior leadership team has developed successfully 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 the education service's senior managers. Additionally in focus group discussions, almost all stakeholders, including parents, partners and young people, articulated praise and positivity about the quality of education and support delivered by schools and the children and families service more widely. Leaders at all levels demonstrate a collective and deep understanding of the local context and the potential barriers to learning experienced by many children, young people and families.

Across the city, establishments use a range of useful approaches to ensure evidence-based improvement work. Working with the Scottish Government Improvement Adviser, the majority of establishments have implemented successfully improvement methodology with a relentless focus on evidence-based practice. There is an expectation from the education authority that this approach will be operating in all schools, although this is not yet the case. Working with Dundee educational psychology service, other schools have taken on a collaborative action research approach which is also working well. However, these approaches are particularly prevalent in the early learning and childcare and primary sectors. There is scope for greater engagement of secondary staff in addition to further roll out across early learning and childcare and primary sectors. This would be supported ideally by a stronger strategic message about expectations for all establishments with regard to these and other evidence-based approaches to improvement.

A research partnership with the University of Dundee, funded through the Scottish Attainment Challenge, is highlighting key messages as the Scottish Attainment Challenge evolves. These include an increased level of understanding data and use of research amongst headteachers as well as a strengthened understanding of SIMD and the impact this can have on learning and attainment. However, the research highlights a need for swift strategic decisions about the extent and reach of the Scottish Attainment Challenge targeted work across the city, particularly to include a greater proportion of the Dundee's children and young people living in SIMD 1 and 2.

Stakeholders, including headteachers are clearer about the drive for improvement needed and the increased pace of change required to improve the life chances of Dundee's children and young people. Staff at various levels have increased confidence that the direction of travel is one they can contribute to with success.

There is clear evidence of impact from the strategic leadership of the senior team. The central team recognise the need to work in different ways and through a revised structure which is promoting increased collegiate working across the education service, with partners across the council and in other organisations. Staff report a heightened focus on the corporate responsibility for improving outcomes for all children, young people and families in Dundee. This is leading to a growing, collective responsibility amongst staff and partners to improve significantly outcomes for children and young people, particularly those living in poverty. Moving forward, there is need to ensure this culture and commitment leads to consistent high quality learning and teaching with sustained significant improvement in outcomes for learners.

“ I really enjoy working for Dundee's children and family service. Almost all senior leaders are extremely supportive, realistic and committed to improving outcomes for all learners. Furthermore, the work I see going on around Dundee to improve outcomes is both heart-warming and humbling. We are encouraged to be reflective, interrogate data and engage with families. I believe, we as an authority, are doing everything we can to help families get it right. ”

primary headteacher

There are consistent messages that the senior leadership team is reinvigorating successfully the culture and ethos across the education service. Expectations for improvement are high and relentless. For example, the earlier strapline “We should be able to do this, we must do this, how can we do this?”

Responsibility for improvement is beginning to shift from a top down model to a bottom up approach with increasing distributed leadership. Staff in focus groups spoke confidently about a range of pedagogical approaches and gave examples of how career-long professional learning is improving their practice. They are also increasing their understanding of the importance of evidence-led approaches and ensuring these are underpinned by robust data. Further work is required to ensure these approaches are extended to include all practitioners and settings to increase the impact on children and young people in terms of raising attainment.

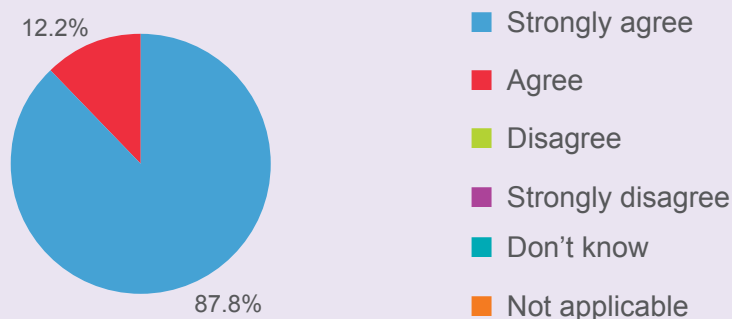
Dundee City Council has begun to implement a Future Skills College in partnership with Dundee and Angus College. Although in its early stages, this initiative is already providing much needed alternatives to learning in school for young people who might otherwise disengage with education. There are early signs of increased positive destinations as young people move from this programme into apprenticeships with local employers. Plans for further development to widen the reach of this initiative are progressing well.

“ Through the Growth Mindset initiative we have developed a real sense of connectivity between school and community. Our consistent use of positive language is strengthening relationships. ”

third sector partner

Pre-inspection questionnaire feedback from 42 headteachers

The Senior Management Team and staff in the education authority show a high level of commitment to improving education.



Senior leaders promote consistently and drive forward their vision of improved outcomes and increased life chances for all children and families. They are well supported in this by elected members. Through the Children and Families Services Committee, senior leaders provide regular updates which ensure elected members have a good understanding of the priorities for education. In addition to committee meetings, members receive helpful briefings. However, more regular and holistic reporting of progress against strategic targets, rather than of specific programmes, would allow elected members to fulfil more widely, their scrutiny role, through informed support and challenge.

Leadership at all levels is an improving feature across the education service. The leadership of the principal educational psychologist and the other managers within the revised structure is having a positive impact on the quality of service delivered to children, young people and families. Headteachers are working more collaboratively in trios and across clusters to support and challenge each other. Leadership by teachers and early years practitioners is improving through the increased opportunities to work with partners, to engage in research and critical reflection, and through a wider range of high quality career-long professional learning. Although a few were less clear, the majority of headteachers are now much clearer about their accountability for the Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Fund initiatives.

Overall, education authority arrangements for on-going monitoring of Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Fund spending are sound. The senior leadership team regularly monitor progress and provide reports to Scottish Government colleagues as required. Updates are provided to the Children and Families Services Committee on progress with the Scottish Attainment Challenge. There are longer term risks which the council needs to address. For example, to strengthen its approach to sustainability to ensure that progress in closing the attainment gap is maintained. This includes evaluating, with partners, which initiatives are having the greatest impact on improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. In addition, there is a need to plan how these will be taken forward once Scottish Attainment Challenge funding ends. To support current and future work, the service and council should review and strengthen their approach to risk management.

The contribution of the Dundee Educational Psychology Service to the Scottish Attainment Challenge

Dundee educational psychology service is making a strong contribution to closing the poverty-related attainment gap, particularly in relation to the needs of care experienced children and young people. Dundee educational psychology service is providing an integrated psychological approach across education and care to reduce placement breakdown, and improve educational attainment and achievement.

The service has strengthened its approach to self-evaluation, effectively responding to the action points which arose as part of the 2017 validated self-evaluation. Dundee educational psychology service has used evidence based psychological practice effectively in supporting the improvement of outcomes for children and young people in nurture, anxiety, literacy and numeracy. The service has had a significant involvement in the Scottish Attainment Challenge planning and implementation at universal and targeted levels, including researching appropriate literacy and numeracy interventions. They are now focusing on the collation, synthesis and analysis of data to monitor the progress of learners and the effectiveness of the interventions in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge developments. The service recognises the need to evaluate the impact of professional learning and capacity building, to ensure that the new skills of staff across Dundee City Council improve the quality of teaching and learning. Moving forward, it would be helpful for the service to further support schools in analysing patterns and trends in relation to attendance and exclusion. Dundee educational psychology service, supported by the new senior leadership team, now needs to extend further their contribution to reducing the poverty-related attainment gap through supporting schools in responding to the Pupil Equity Fund agenda.

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

Dundee City is making **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 that:

Strengths

- Strong leadership of the children and families service which has recently improved the pace of change through increased awareness of the need for improvement and appropriate support and challenge within the system to deliver change.
- Effective partnership working is providing a wide range of support for children and families and is leading to improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.
- A range of career-long professional learning opportunities is supporting practitioners to collaborate, test out changes in their practice, make better use of research and develop further their knowledge and skills.
- Improved self-evaluation which is being supported by the recently developed framework, trios of schools working together and more intelligent use of data and improvement methodology.
- Very helpful advice to headteachers with regard to supporting them in their responsibilities with respect to Pupil Equity Funding.

Aspects for development

- Continue to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap across all sectors, building on valuable lessons learned in the early learning and childcare and primary sectors and in health and wellbeing. In so doing, continue to raise the attainment of all children and young people in literacy and numeracy.
- Review, based on evidence available, the number of initiatives that are being tested out and supported with a view to simplifying the landscape and gaining improved outcomes.
- Continue to develop exit or continuation strategies for Scottish Attainment Challenge funded initiatives in order to embed practice and build on children's progress.
- Further strengthen the information provided to the Children and Families Services Committee to enhance scrutiny and transparency through, for example, providing more information on the funding provided and used and an increased focus on progress against planned activity.
- Building on the good start made, develop further the role of school improvement partnerships, using these as a mechanism to share good practice and collaboration of stakeholders across wider areas.

What happens next?

Education Scotland is confident that the evidence and evaluation to date indicates that Dundee City Council is making good progress in improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. We are confident that the education 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
Education Scotland
25 June 2018

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