Strategic Inspection of the Education Functions of Local Authorities

Argyll and Bute Council

21 March 2017

Transforming lives through learning

Contents

1. Introduction

Background

The *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* places a duty on education authorities to provide children and young people with school education and (in terms of raising standards) requires authorities to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of that school education. The Act also places a duty on HM Inspectors to provide external evaluation of the effectiveness and performance of education authorities in relation to their education functions.

HM Inspectors from Education Scotland participate in the Shared Risk Assessment (SRA) process which was introduced in 2009 following the Crerar Review (The Report of the Independent Review of Regulation, Audit, Inspection and Complaints Handling of Public Services in Scotland). The SRA process involves the national scrutiny bodies working together to identify risks and propose scrutiny responses. This results in an annual local scrutiny plan which identifies any area of risk and agreed scrutiny responses.

The Local Scrutiny Plan for Argyll and Bute Council was published in March 2016 and identified several areas of risk in terms of the council's education functions and the need for scrutiny. This strategic level inspection of the education functions of the council constitutes this scrutiny response.

2. Aims, nature and scope of the inspection

Scrutiny Response

This inspection was conducted within the European Framework for Quality Management using selected, updated quality indicators from Quality Management In Education 2 and in accordance with Education Scotland's Principles of Inspection and Review and Code of Conduct.

The inspection and this report set out to answer the following key questions.

- What key outcomes has the education authority achieved?
- How well are the needs of stakeholders being met?
- How well does the education authority deliver and improve the quality of its education services?
- How good is the quality of strategic leadership and direction?
- What is the education authority's capacity for improvement?

Quality Indicators

The following updated quality indicators were evaluated against the six-point scale as shown in Appendix 3.

QI 1.1   Improvements in performance
QI 2.1   Impact on children, young people, adult learners and families
QI 5.1   Delivering and improving the quality of services
QI 9.2   Leadership and direction
QI 9.4   Leadership of change and improvement

3.   The context of Argyll and Bute Council

Argyll and Bute is bounded by the urban areas of Helensburgh and Dunoon along the Clyde, Loch Lomond to the east, the Mull of Kintyre to the south, Atlantic Islands to the west, and the Sound of Mull and Appin to the north.

Argyll and Bute is the second largest local authority area in Scotland and has a population of approximately 90,000. Almost half of all inhabitants (45%) live in settlements of 3,000 or more people; conversely, 55% of Argyll and Bute's population live in settlements with fewer than 3,000 people, or outwith settlements altogether. It has more inhabited islands (23) than any of Scotland's other council areas, including the three islands authorities. These islands include, Bute, Islay, Jura, Mull, Iona, Coll and Tiree and account for 17% of the total population of Argyll and Bute. Around 80% of Argyll and Bute's population live within one kilometre of the coast. The size of the area and its population spread mean that multiple facilities for service delivery are needed to ensure services are delivered close to users and communities. The distances between main settlements and involvement of ferry services create challenges in terms of reliability, time and cost of travel.

The current political administration has been in place since 2013 and is a coalition of the Argyll and the Islands Group (TALIG) and the Alliance of Independent Councillors and an Independent Councillor. The Leader of the Council is an Independent Councillor.

The work of education services is monitored by elected members through the Community Services, Performance Review and Scrutiny, Audit and Policy and Resources committees.

The council's Chief Executive, previously Executive Director of Community Services, took up post in May 2016. As a result, the Head of Education then became acting Executive Director of Community Services and an acting Head of Education was appointed from within the Education Management Team.

Argyll and Bute currently has 89 schools, comprising 78 primary, ten secondary and one special school. Of its 78 primary schools, almost half have a roll of 25 or less. There are 11 joint headships across 22 primary schools. The largest of the ten secondary schools is Hermitage Academy with 1,308 young people and the smallest is Tiree High School, with a roll of 27. The Education Service, like many of Scotland's other local authorities, can experience challenges in recruiting staff across Argyll and Bute. The service works with a range of partners, including Argyll College, to help it to train and develop staff locally in Argyll and Bute. The council successfully met its target for teacher numbers in 2016.

4.   What key outcomes has the Education Authority achieved?

Whilst there are a few areas of strength, there remain significant areas for improvement in how well the education authority has achieved positive outcomes for its children and young people. Overall, the quality indicator 'Improvements in Performance' is evaluated as weak.

Attendance and Exclusions
Attendance rates across primary, special and secondary schools are above the national averages. A newly developed approach to monitoring attendance has been rolled out successfully in all ten secondary schools. The number of children excluded from primary and special schools is well below national averages. The number excluded from secondary school is declining over time and is also below national averages.

Achievement
The achievement of children and young people across Argyll and Bute Council reflects a broad range of national and award bearing wider achievement qualifications. Schools have worked well to develop a wide range of learning pathways for young people which enables them to achieve a broad range of skills. Over two thousand young people enhanced their achievement portfolio last session and this has contributed well to securing positive, sustained destinations for young people when they leave school. The council has secured a number of key partners to enhance the achievement of young people across all four administrative areas. There are strong examples of young people accessing courses to meet specific local needs, such as, Maritime Skills. A large number of Skills for Work qualifications are available across the authority in key skills which have the potential to grow the local economy and enhance services, for example, in early education and childcare, hospitality, engineering and rural skills. The 2014/15 council Standards and Quality report documents clearly the range of wider achievement courses and awards gained by young people.

Over 1500 young people last session achieved across a broad range of awards including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, John Muir, Saltire and Youth Achievement Awards. This is helping them to extend their personal achievements and to enhance their skills for learning, life and work. Schools are regular, successful contributors to the national Mod. The council's Modern Apprenticeship programme has provided 23 young people with relevant placements and a few schools have been successful in offering senior phase learners Foundation Apprenticeships in both engineering and health and social care.

Attainment
In almost all early learning and childcare (ELC) settings, most children achieve their expected developmental milestones. In primary schools, children make a promising start. Data provided by the authority during the inspection indicates that most children achieve in line with national expectations in key aspects of literacy and numeracy by the end of P1. The proportion of children and young people who continue to achieve in line with national expectations then declines, overall, across the remainder of their primary school experience but then improves again by the end of S3 in secondary school. Progress for children and young people in Gaelic medium education follows a broadly similar pattern. The council is working with schools to build higher levels of confidence in making professional judgements about the progress of pupils. This includes further work on making effective use of increasingly robust data and in developing approaches to moderation.

At the secondary stages, young people's attainment across the senior phase in National Qualifications has recently improved in a few key measures. For example, in 2016, the numbers achieving success at Higher level (SCQF level 6) at S5 and S6 improved, overall, from the previous year and is now broadly similar to comparable[1] and national averages.

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[1] The term, 'comparable average', is used when comparing the performance of pupils in Argyll and Bute with pupils who have similar needs and backgrounds in Scotland's other local authorities.

Overall, however, there remains considerable scope for further improvements in attainment. In several important measures of attainment, young people in Argyll and Bute do less well than learners who have similar needs and backgrounds from elsewhere.

Young people's attainment and progress in literacy and numeracy by the time they leave school is overall lower than comparable averages.

Young people's attainment by the time they leave school in terms of tariff[2] scores is, overall, lower or much lower than comparable averages.

Young people's attainment in National Qualifications has declined over recent years in several important measures. At S4, the number of young people achieving National Qualifications is now well below comparable and national averages. By S5, the number achieving National Qualifications at SCQF level 4 and 5 is now below or well below comparable and national averages. The gap between young people's performance at SCQF levels 4 and 5 in Argyll and Bute and elsewhere has widened considerably in the last three years. By S6, the proportion achieving National Qualifications at SCQF level 5 has broadly declined over the last three years and is lower than comparable averages.

Positive destinations from school
The number of young people securing a positive destination on leaving school has increased over the period 2011-2016. Overall, the proportion of young people moving on to a positive destination has been above comparable and national averages. The proportion of young people moving on to a positive destination varies greatly across the council's ten secondary schools. In one school, the proportion entering a positive destination has been significantly lower or much lower than comparable and national averages over recent years.

The proportion of young people moving into employment on leaving school is well above comparable and national averages and has been consistently so for each of the last five years. Schools value the positive relationships that have been developed with Skills Development Scotland and consider that the strong partnership that exists has contributed to the increase in positive destinations for learners. The number of young people staying on at school from S4 into S5 and then from S5 into S6 is above comparable and national averages.

Staff at various levels expressed concerns about the availability of college placements for secondary school pupils across the authority. The Education Service is working with Further Education Colleges to improve their provision of opportunities for young people.

Evidence from inspection
Over the last three years, evidence from 13 school inspections indicated that:

- all schools were evaluated as satisfactory or better and most schools were evaluated as good or better for *Learners' Experiences* (QI 2.1);
- almost all schools were evaluated as satisfactory or better and a majority of schools were evaluated as good or better for *Improvements in Performance* (QI 1.1) and *Meeting Learning Needs* (QI 5.3);
- the majority of schools were evaluated as satisfactory or better and fewer than half of schools were evaluated as good or better for the *Curriculum* (QI 5.1); and

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[2] 'Tariff scores' have been designed for *Insight*, a national benchmarking tool for attainment.

- most schools were evaluated as satisfactory or better and fewer than half of schools were evaluated as good or better for *Improvement through Self-evaluation* (QI 5.9).

There is evidence of decline in inspection outcomes over the three year period. Outcomes from the most recent inspections are less positive and have indicated important weaknesses in the quality of the curriculum.

Scrutiny by Argyll and Bute Council
Headteachers report annually on school attainment patterns and performance to elected members at Area Education Committee. A standardised format of report has been developed and is now in use. Secondary headteachers also provide opportunities for local elected members to discuss the performance of individual schools. A range of statistical data for primary schools is also presented to the Area Education Committee by the associated Area Education Officer. A few elected members consider that further steps require to be taken to ensure a more consistent and rigorous approach to providing the overview of the quality of education in each establishment and in making the presentation of attainment data much more transparent at both school and authority level.

5.   How well does the Education Authority meet the needs of its stakeholders?

Overall, the extent to which the education authority meets the needs of its stakeholders is satisfactory.

Dealing with young people and families entering the council area who need support
The education authority and its partners in other statutory services meet effectively the needs of young people and families who face challenges. A Professional Learning Community is working well to address and support the practical, emotional, educational and social challenges that children from Armed Forces families can often face as a result of deployment or mobility. Refugee families from Syria have been given a warm welcome and have settled very well within their school community as a result of the strong commitment shown by the school and its young people. Children are making very good progress in acquiring English language skills. Children themselves report high levels of wellbeing. They are successfully making positive friendships within their community. Outcomes for children from these groups are positive.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)
Argyll and Bute Council has implemented all aspects of the GIRFEC national practice model and is continuing to develop and improve it. At school and council-wide level there are well-developed and embedded systems for supporting children and young people. GIRFEC approaches are understood and there are positive examples of effective practice outlined in the Care Inspectorate Services for Children and Young People Inspection Report September 2013. Opportunities for staff to continue to develop their own professional skills are readily accessible on the council website. Staff working in the ELC sector value the access which they have to e-learning. These opportunities are also impacting positively on the confidence of primary school staff to deliver the national practice model for GIRFEC and in improving their planning for the individual child and young person. The Education Service plays a key role in leading the development of GIRFEC across Argyll and Bute and through its contribution to the national *Well-Being Application* working group. Staff and young people have also worked well with

partners, including health agencies and *Choose Life*, to develop guidance to support young people at risk of suicide and self-harm.

Children with Additional Support Needs (ASN)
Current arrangements for allocating ASNs staffing and resources have been drawn up following considerable consultation with various stakeholders, including the ASN Review Group which includes headteachers, ASN specialists and teaching (and other) unions. The role of the area principal teacher of ASN in allocating resources to support ASN in schools is leading to greater fairness and equity. The total amount of ASN assistant provision increased from August 2015 to August 2016 and the total amount of time available is allocated on a needs basis against specific criteria. Nevertheless, across the authority many staff report significant challenges in ensuring an adequate provision of resources and equipment for children with ASN. Several headteachers are concerned over the changes in ASN staffing allocations in their own schools and how this impacts on their ability to meet the requirements of all children's plans.

Enabling schools to help all children and young people to progress
Whilst the progress of children and young people at key stages of the primary and secondary sectors has some positive aspects, there is no clear trend of improvement and some important evidence of decline, particularly at the secondary senior phase, compared to comparable averages. There are positive examples of ELC settings and primary schools creating a bespoke curriculum which takes good account of local circumstances and which meets local needs and context. School staff appreciate the input by council officers to help them to develop the curriculum appropriately, including during *Curriculum Design* days. However, recent inspections of a small number of primary schools indicate important weaknesses, overall, in curricular provision. There are wide variations in the curriculum of secondary schools across the council. Whilst it is appropriate that local contexts and circumstances are taken into account, this has led to a wide range of practices and differing attainment outcomes for young people. As a result, in some secondary schools, it is not clear how young people achieve their entitlement to a broad general education within a curriculum that meets the needs of all. In other schools, stakeholders hold significant and reasonable concerns over the approaches to preparing young people for National Qualifications and for the outcomes achieved by pupils.

The council is now beginning to develop a systematic approach to ensuring more robust procedures in moderating and sharing a better understanding of standards across all establishments within the broad general education phase. The Education Service now needs to consider what key principles and expectations it holds important for every school and to ensure that these are monitored and implemented effectively. Importantly, the Education Service must take stronger steps to ensure that young people's needs are met effectively in all schools and that young people are not disadvantaged and under-achieve as a result of curricular models being followed.

A significant amount of work has been carried out to support Looked After Children. Educational Psychology Services have supported school staff to carry out assessments of the reading and spelling abilities of all Looked After Children of primary school age. This work has helped the Education Service to plan suitable strategies for supporting this potentially vulnerable group of children.

Working with children, young people and learners outside school
The Community Learning and Development (CLD) Management Information System shows improved outcomes for young people and adult learners. Young people's uptake of accredited learning with Youth Services has been consistently good each session. Adults report increased levels of confidence as a result of their positive learning engagement with CLD. There is a

higher proportion of adults registered for Adult Learning and Literacies provision than for comparator authorities. The number of new adults accessing literacy support through the Literacy Service has risen consistently.

Youth Services coordinate an annual Young Leaders' Programme, engaging young people to participate in an accredited training course designed to develop confidence and leadership skills. As part of the programme, Young Leaders are actively involved in facilitating workshops, presenting findings to their peers and planning a wide range of activities. Young people's leadership skills are also developed through partnership with Youth Scotland in Involvement Training activities, aimed at promoting greater levels of community involvement and activities.

Listening to children and young people's views on their learning
The Education Service has appropriately identified the quality of its engagement with children and young people as a key area for improvement. The extent to which children and young people's views about their learning and about wider matters related to their schooling is heard and valued by schools varies too much across the education authority. In some areas, staff are able to identify opportunities for children and young people's views to be heard and taken into account, but, overall there is no consistent mechanism or expectation across the authority. In the best examples, children and young people take an active role in shaping improvements with their peers. Transition projects in some areas have been particularly successful in supporting children to make a positive move into their secondary years. However, children and young people's voice is not encouraged sufficiently strongly or consistently by senior managers across all schools. In some schools, young people have good opportunities to air their thoughts and views and to make a difference. In others, however, children and young people are not encouraged sufficiently to give their views nor have sufficient confidence that their views will be listened to. As a result, they are missing valuable opportunities to develop their own leadership skills and to act and contribute responsibly.

6. How well does the Education Authority deliver and improve the quality of its education services?

Overall, while there are some strengths in how well the education authority delivers and improves the quality of its education services, there are also significant areas for improvement. Overall, this area of provision is weak.

Policy and Guidance
A wide range of policies and guidance for schools in Argyll and Bute was produced between 2008 and 2016. These include the Education Service Plan and policy statements on Curriculum for Excellence and Personal Learning Planning. The Argyll and Bute Early Years Strategy (draft) is a positive example of a policy that reflects national and local priorities well. It provides helpful guidance to inform practice in ELC settings. There are good examples of the Early Years Strategy policy being embedded in practice. For example, active play sessions are very well received by parents and 'Bookbug' sessions are valued highly by staff in helping them to improve children's early literacy skills. In addition, the Education Service, with its partners, has updated a range of policies and guidance for schools in relation to GIRFEC, school exclusions, and Looked After Children.

Stakeholder involvement in policy development

Many stakeholders are critical of the council's arrangements for developing policies and communicating with them more generally. In questionnaires and in focus groups, many school based staff noted that they felt they have only limited involvement in quality improvement processes and that senior leaders and some centrally-based senior officers did not value their opinions. Senior managers in some schools are not confident that they are given sufficiently good opportunities for genuine consultation and that communication with centrally-based officers has not always been consistently good enough. Similarly, over half of centrally-based staff who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that communication amongst staff is ineffective and that they do not have good opportunities to get involved in decision-making processes.

Building capacity to support improvement

Important changes have been made across the Education Service to engage headteachers and senior staff in improvement activities. This includes the Secondary Performance Reporting Group (now called the Attainment and Achievement Group). There are also focused sessions during headteacher meetings as well as through a range of working groups, some of which are chaired by school staff. These changes were implemented in response to views that centrally-based staff, over recent years, had not possessed a secure enough knowledge of their schools and their strengths and weaknesses. Visits to schools by centrally-based officers had not been consistently regular or constructively challenging. As a result, the Education Service lacked key information about their schools to enable it to drive improvement. Senior officers at all levels are now beginning to develop more effective systems to gather relevant information to support change and improvement. This will provide greater information and provide more reliable information sources and a more accurate basis to consult on Education Service policy matters, areas of priority and recommendations through the Community Services Committee. In so doing, it is important to ensure that future strategic planning frameworks clearly and fully reflect current and future financial and resourcing challenges facing the service.

Involving staff in implementation of policy

A number of internal forums and working groups have been set up to support the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. There is promising work being undertaken by the Literacy forum, assessment forum, health and wellbeing group, budget working group and ASN working group. These groups, along with a range of other vehicles, are now involving staff in the development and implementation of policy and changes. As part of the 'tackling bureaucracy workload review' undertaken by Education Scotland in August 2016, collegiate working was identified as a key strength of the Education Service. The numeracy forum had not been in a position to meet for a period of time and, as a result, development in this important area has been slower than planned. It is therefore difficult to establish the impact made by this particular group in improving outcomes for children and young people, or in improving the quality of learning and teaching in numeracy across the authority.

Use of performance data to drive improvement

As part of the council's efforts to raise attainment, all schools are developing an increasing awareness of the use of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation information in relation to the children and young people enrolled in each establishment. This is helping to inform schools about children and young people who require further support to achieve to their potential. As identified, the Education Service should now take further steps to ensure all staff are sufficiently clear about the authority's expectation for measuring and closing the poverty related attainment gap.

The Education Service has an appropriate focus on tracking the attainment of particular groups of young people, including those for whom English is an Additional Language and those from Ministry of Defence (MOD) families. The council recognises the need to improve the attainment and achievement of young people who are looked after by the authority. As a result of the council's more focused and targeted approach to early intervention for more vulnerable children and young people, there has been a decline in the number of young people placed outwith the council.

Individual school profiles, including the council's standards and quality reports need to make better and more consistent use of all available data, to provide a more accurate and meaningful benchmark of progress and improvement. Too often such reports only reference progress in relation to national averages which, whilst helpful, provide an incomplete picture.

The authority needs to audit its data sources and review its use of data to provide a framework which allows it to measure performance better and to help it to challenge schools more robustly. There is headroom for improvement in the authority's approaches to assessment across all sectors to ensure that the resulting data is valid and reliable, informs priorities and achieves targets set for raising attainment and wider achievements.

7. How well is the Education Authority led?

Overall, while there are some strengths in how well the education authority is led, there are also significant areas for improvement. Overall, this area of provision is weak.

Strategic Vision
Argyll and Bute Community Services commenced work on its new vision for education, *Our Children, Their Future*, in December 2015. With its focus on ambition, excellence and equality it appropriately reflects local and national priorities. While the council consulted stakeholders in developing its vision, this has not always been shared effectively by all senior school leaders, education staff and wider stakeholders. This has resulted in the vision not being adequately understood or 'owned' by education staff and key stakeholders, including children, young people, parents and the wider community. The council now needs to ensure that its vision is fully understood and embedded in practice. Some senior officers have been in post for less than a year and recognise that implementation of the vision requires more direct contact with establishments to meet staff and discuss the authority's aspirations. The acting Executive Director acknowledged that the new vision now required to be fully implemented including providing reassurance that all stakeholders were actively involved in this implementation.

Leadership of the Education Authority
The Chief Executive has a comprehensive knowledge of the Education Service and has appointed senior education staff who work hard to make improvements. Senior leaders are playing an increasing role in corporate planning and are working within very tight timescales to develop and improve service planning in their respective areas. These timescales in some cases, are constraining the level of consultation with headteachers which would support the necessary ownership and 'buy in' for change. The senior leadership team has begun to put in place new support structures and strengthened planning. They recognise the developments are at the very early stages of implementation and the links between strategic planning and operational planning are not yet impacting sufficiently on service delivery.

Strategic approaches to learning, teaching and curriculum development
There is a need for clearer strategic direction in a number of areas including learning and teaching and curriculum development. Planned developments to address these concerns are underway and there are promising signs that these have the potential to make a positive impact. The ASN review group has been in existence for almost two years and has delivered a number of improvements and updates to policies and procedures.

Corporate ethos
The new education vision and strategy presents good opportunities for leaders at all levels to work together more effectively to develop better cohesion and a genuine sense of shared vision and purpose. Overall, there are important weaknesses in communication, ethos and values across the Education Service. Strongly critical messages about these issues have been conveyed through interviews, focus groups and pre-inspection questionnaires. Strategic leaders need to continue with their approaches to address the concerns relating to staff isolation and poor morale. The shared heads group, mentoring of newly appointed heads and probationer and middle leadership networks can support this. Levels of trust between school and centrally-based staff, though improving, are not yet strong enough. Leaders, at all levels, need to work together more effectively to develop greater cohesion and a genuine sense of shared vision and purpose.

Planned measures are in place to address a number of concerns over communication, including, through the role of the new education officers. While communication of strategic information within the Education Service is facilitated by various means, including the use of Sharepoint and HUB, meetings and bulletins, senior leaders recognise that a stronger, clearer and more comprehensive communication strategy is now required.

Headteachers as senior leaders of learning
Senior officers have contributed to headteacher meetings and to professional learning events to outline the authority's aspirations. They have not yet developed a clear policy framework on key aspects of learning and teaching to enable staff to work more consistently towards meeting the aspirations of the vision. More remains to be done to clarify to all staff in educational establishments, and particularly headteachers, their role in collaborative and partnership working, and the potential benefits for learners and their families. Senior leaders recognise that headteachers and centrally-based officers need to work together more effectively and with greater accountability to share and improve strategic leadership and direction. Several headteachers lack confidence in current arrangements for their own professional review and development. A few headteachers have not had sufficient opportunities to benefit from one-to-one meetings with their line manager over recent years. This has contributed to a sense of isolation and a lack of confidence that their work is appropriately known or recognised. As a result, they are not always sure of their own level of performance.

Leadership at all levels
In developing effective leadership at all levels, staff benefit from a suitable range of opportunities to develop their professional skills and competencies. The Education Service provides relevant and well-received opportunities for staff at all levels to engage in professional learning opportunities to develop leadership skills and have established a structure that helps to *Grow Our Own* in Argyll and Bute. The service's Leadership Strategy Framework has raised the profile of the leadership agenda within Argyll and Bute. A middle leadership group (Argyll and Bute Educational Leadership) supports practitioners and links directly with the University of the Highlands and Islands leadership modules. As part of the authority's leadership strategy and support for the Scottish College for Education Leadership Fellowship programme, a strong middle leadership network supports leaders with self-evaluation within their own context.

Newly-appointed headteachers participate in a comprehensive support programme. An effective programme is in place to support newly qualified teachers. Arrangements for training leaders of assessment and moderation are working well. There are some positive examples of collegiality amongst the 'shared headteacher' group, providing helpful leadership support and guidance for those starting a shared headship post. There are a few positive examples of school staff taking forward useful initiatives through engaging with SQA subject development days. The service should now review approaches to continued professional development ensuring staffing and financial constraints do not prevent participation.

Linking leadership activities to the Strategic Vision
The Education Service now needs to continue to develop stronger, more coordinated and consistent leadership at all levels of the service. There is a need to ensure that leaders are clear about their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities and that the Education Service's structure supports the priorities set out in *Our Children, their Future*. Whilst there is a strong commitment to devolve greater leadership and management to schools there is room to build on the very focused set of linked strategies with the aim of improving attainment and achievement. Alongside a stronger strategic drive drawing together disparate approaches and initiatives, there is a need to strengthen the challenge to schools to set meaningful achievement targets and to find imaginative local solutions through more extensive and focused partnership working.

Strategic approaches to risk
The council has appropriate arrangements to manage strategic risk. A corporate risk register is in place, which is updated appropriately. Further work is needed to raise the profile of risk management at an operational and school level. While there has been recent professional learning on the management of risk for headteachers, there is a need to extend this to improve their understanding of risk in relation to improvement and performance. Complaints procedures are well managed with a clear logging and monitoring process in place. Complaint deadlines are overtaken in over 90% of occasions. The Education Service is currently staffed by a number of 'acting' posts and secondments. This has contributed to uncertainty for senior staff in terms of their role and responsibilities and to those staff line managed by senior colleagues in an 'acting' capacity. Headteachers, middle leaders, teachers and parents are concerned about what they view as significant staffing issues across the authority. This is a significant area of risk. The Education Service has been proactive in responding to national staffing issues. These issues have been raised through formal papers to Community Services Committee outlining a wide range of ambitious approaches to securing posts to the authority.

School estate
There is a clear political statement about school closures and shared headships within the authority. Unless a school has no pupils registered, the council would not consider that school for closure. There is also a clear policy position in relation to shared headships approved by committee in 2015. Overall, communities feel that the authority now has a deeper understanding of the needs of small rural communities, but stakeholders recognise that there is tension and competition between the rural and more highly populated areas when resources are tight. There continues to be tensions across the council around the provision for small, rural schools and their sustainability.

Leadership of Change and Improvement
Overall, while there are some strengths in how well the education authority leads the change and improvement of its education services, there are also important areas for improvement. Overall, this area of provision is weak.

The pace of change in recent years has been too slow in terms of strategic planning for improvement and change. This has had an adverse impact on the quality of strategic planning for improvement and change in the service. Planning and reporting systems are not yet sufficiently well developed or fully effective to ensure the change and improvement needed. Senior leaders at all levels need to provide more effective guidance and strategic direction in order to take forward improvements within a realistic pace of change. In doing so, senior leaders, elected members and headteachers need to ensure that they involve all their stakeholders in order to engender a positive culture where everyone feels valued but which recognises that they are all accountable for and have a role to play in driving improvement. By doing this, staff at all levels would feel more confident to initiate and support change and improvements.

In recent months, the Education Service, under a new management team, has started to make improvements in its arrangements for strategic planning for improvement and change. Senior council officers are supporting elected members to undertake their respective scrutiny and challenge roles, including, for example, submitting and presenting relevant papers to the Community Services Committee. There is some optimism in schools and within the central team that recent senior appointments will have a more positive impact on the performance of the central team.

In her short time in post, the acting Executive Director has made a promising start in improving approaches to planning for improvement and change. This involves, for example, addressing areas of inequity of provision, sometimes historic, across the council and beginning to develop a clearer insight into the quality of provision.

The acting Executive Director has taken some positive steps to improve approaches to self-evaluation and planning for improvement and change. These very recent changes to quality improvement arrangements, while providing better clarity, are not yet sufficiently embedded to bring about improved outcomes for children and young people. Senior leaders are confident that the level of support and challenge provided by centrally-based officers to schools has now improved. There is also a recognition that more needs to be done to build leadership capacity at all levels. School improvement planning formats have recently been refreshed to respond to local and national policy. Some staff have welcomed the new approaches and believe that they have the potential to improve the quality of children's and young people's learning and achievements. Several headteachers, however, have concerns over the consultation arrangements and timescales for implementation of these new materials.

Leading and supporting improvement
There are examples of effective practice in terms of support and challenge leading to improvements. These involve individual council officers. The early years service has effective systems in place which promote improvement through regular quality improvement support and challenge visits which impact positively on change across Argyll and Bute. Other successful examples include developing the young workforce (DYW) and work with the MOD. Youth workers have a higher profile as a result of Youth Services now being aligned with Education Services. They are now more highly valued by headteachers and aid support and improvement, for example, through advising on youth voice, youth information, Internet safety and sexual health. There are a few positive and very early signs that both services are beginning to use

data and develop some systems to gather intelligence to help improve strategic decision-making.

Partnerships with other stakeholders
Various partnerships help support improvement and change and add value. These include the Integrated Children's Services and CLD partnerships. In these partnerships, staff are highly involved in decision-making and support the change and improvement agenda. There are some very positive examples of partnership working with the MOD and naval families and this is adding value and improving outcomes for children and their families. School staff and children involved in the Scottish Attainment Challenge benefit from partnership working with external partners, including Education Scotland, for example, in terms of raising pupils' attainment and achievement.

The *Argyll and Bute Employability Partnership* works well to help improve links between education, employability and employment to support economic growth within Argyll and Bute. Information from the *Compelling Argyll and Bute* study was published in autumn 2015 and the detailed analysis informed the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) and Community Planning Partnership actions for the next ten years. Useful information contained in the study resulted in a review of the Youth Employment Activity Plan, including agreed actions. Other positive examples include multi-agency and partnership working with social work, health, police and the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration which is helping to support the GIRFEC agenda.

Collaboration at cluster level
There are examples at local cluster level where staff work well together, add value and improve outcomes for children and young people, for example, through learning technologies and the literacy forum. The early years partners provider group have positive partnerships with the authority which helps improve their service. Effective partnerships within the community child-minding initiative improve outcomes for vulnerable children and their families. The Parental Involvement Strategy offers staff and others useful advice on implementing family engagement activities. For example, the *Tarbert Cluster Family Engagement Project* and *Home Start Magic* in Rothesay which supports children from pre-birth to eight years of age.

The council currently, through the work of the Community Planning Partnership, has an agreed shared vision which is further articulated within the SOA and within the new education strategy and vision. The council acknowledges that while the implementation of the new education vision is still at the early stages, it is confident that there is a suitable range of performance indicators in place to measure and report on improving outcomes for children and young people.

Arrangements are in place to share practice both within the authority and across other education authorities. Examples include, leadership development with East Dunbartonshire Council and early stage developments with Western Isles Council on Gaelic curriculum development and moderation.

Elected members
Despite some evidence of improvement, poor relationships between some centrally-based staff, headteachers and a few elected members remain an on-going issue and present challenges to improvement. Relationships with a few councillors and other elected representatives are strained and, at times, unnecessarily adversarial. There is still significant room for improvement in relationships and in the morale of staff, overall. Elected members, all strategic managers and

senior leaders now need to work closely with a range of staff, including headteachers, to improve significantly the culture across the council.

A broad range of performance information is routinely presented to elected members covering all aspects of the service. This includes quarterly performance reports against measures contained in the service plan, attainment and achievement data on a school by school basis, teacher staffing standards, DYW performance measures and data related to attendance, absence and exclusions

Whilst the performance information shared with elected members is helpful, a few feel it is not yet sufficiently rigorous or transparent. As a result, they do not yet have sufficient information to enable them to know what is working well and what needs to be improved. In terms of improvement and change, there is a need for the Education Service to make better and more consistently transparent, use of data to secure continued improvements and to raise attainment for children and young people across the authority.

8. What is the Education Authority's capacity for improvement?

There are significant challenges identified in this report. Whilst there are a number of strengths in the educational provision across Argyll and Bute, there is considerable work required to address the challenges and build a corporate ethos for improvement across all stakeholders.

Educational Assets of Argyll and Bute Education Authority
In almost all ELC settings, children are making good progress in meeting expected milestones of progress. A high proportion of all young people move on to a positive destination from almost every secondary school. Many of these young people have attained appropriately in national examinations and have received recognition for their wider achievements and interests. Strong partnerships with other organisations help the Education Service to meet the needs of children and young people, including those who are vulnerable. Good practice exists at authority and individual establishment level across each of the authority's four administrative areas and the care and commitment of staff at every level helps children and young people to learn within a safe and welcoming environment.

Areas for improvement in Argyll and Bute Education Authority
There are significant and important areas for improvement and these diminish learners' experiences. The pace of change and improvement has been too slow. The quality and consistency of curricular experiences provided for children and young people in schools across the authority vary significantly. There is strong evidence of a decline in important aspects of young people's attainment. Overall, young people attain less well compared to learners with similar needs and backgrounds across the rest of the country. The morale of many staff, including headteachers and centrally-based officers, is low and relationships between staff and elected members can sometimes be challenging. The vision and level of expectation of the council and its senior centrally-based staff has not always been shared sufficiently well with wider groups of stakeholders. There is a lack of confidence in strategic leadership amongst centrally-based staff, headteachers, some elected members and parents. It is acknowledged that the recruitment of staff in such a widely dispersed geographical area is challenging. There are promising recent signs of greater stability in staffing and some staff are now more optimistic that recent appointments will make a positive impact leading to improvement.

What happens next?

The education authority now needs to take urgent and sustained action to address the significant areas for improvement identified throughout this report to ensure the development of its education provision and increase positive outcomes for learners across Argyll and Bute.

Given the need for urgent and sustained action, Education Scotland will provide support and monitor the council's progress towards improvement. Education Scotland will carry out a further inspection visit within three months of the publication of this report to monitor progress. We will also carry out a further visit within six months and we will then publish a further report that outlines progress that has been made.

Key strengths

- The proportion of young people who move on from school to a positive destination.
- The contributions of the Early Years Team and the Educational Psychology Service in delivering a strong foundation and support for children's learning.
- The positive and wide range of partnerships which help staff to meet learners' needs, particularly those of MOD families and refugees.

Main points for action

The education authority should:

- significantly improve young people's attainment across the authority;
- improve the use of data, ensuring greater rigour;
- continue to improve the quality of educational provision with consistently higher levels of support and challenge from central officers and elected members;
- improve relationships and communication, promoting a more positive ethos amongst all stakeholders; and
- improve the quality of strategic leadership and direction at all levels within the education authority.

Alistair Brown
HM Inspector
21 March 2017

Appendix 1

Quality indicators

Quality indicator	Evaluation
QI 1.1 Improvements in performance	weak
QI 2.1 Impact on children, young people, adult learners and families	satisfactory
QI 5.1 Delivering and improving the quality of services	weak
QI 9.2 Leadership and direction	weak
QI 9.4 Leadership of change and improvement	weak

Appendix 2

Meetings with stakeholders

HM Inspectors met with a wide range of officers and stakeholders, including:

- Chief Executive
- Senior officers attending initial scoping meeting
- Council Leader
- Local elected representatives (5), including members of the Community Services Committee and Policy Lead for Education
- Acting Executive Director of Community Services
- Acting Head of Service (Education)
- Cluster meeting of primary school headteachers in Islay and Jura cluster
- Oban: DYW focus group
- Oban: Drug and Alcohol Partnership focus group
- Oban: Youth Engagement focus group
- Performance focus group
- CLD Partnership group
- Cluster meeting of primary school headteachers/senior staff in Oban cluster
- Oban: Pathways Curriculum Group
- CLD Local Youth Forum group and youth worker
- Group of parents who access family learning services and ELC provision
- Early Learning Centre - partner providers group
- Early Learning Centre officers based in Oban
- Area Principal Teachers and GIRFEC adviser focus group
- Rothesay Joint Campus: Meetings with Counsellor, Skills Development Scotland, School Nurse, Refugee Support Worker, Achievement Bute, Community Learning Manager, Adult Learning Worker and Adult Literacies Worker
- Bute Refugee Group: Syrian refugee families and translator
- Cluster meeting of primary school headteachers/senior staff in Cowal cluster
- Mid Argyll Shared Headship focus group
- DYW multi-agency group
- Education Officer group
- Education Management Team Meeting
- Newly appointed headteachers group

- Numeracy group
- Health and Wellbeing group
- Gaelic and ASN group
- Education Manager: Performance and Improvement
- Secondary curriculum design meeting
- Representatives from the Language 1+2 working group
- Mid Argyll moderation facilitators
- Middle leadership group
- Principal Educational Psychologist and other educational psychologists
- Meeting of primary school headteachers in Helensburgh and Lomond cluster
- MOD Family Support Workers
- Literacy forum
- Learning Technologies group
- Community childminder
- Michael Russell MSP
- Jackie Baillie MSP (telephone)

Visits

Visits to schools which involved meetings with various stakeholder groups, including learners, staff (teachers, learning support assistants, support staff, senior leadership teams and headteachers), parents and other partners.

- Islay High School
- Port Charlotte Primary School
- Bowmore Primary School
- Hermitage Academy
- Rosneath Primary School
- Kilcreggan Primary School
- Oban High School
- Tobermory High School (video link)
- Park Primary School, Oban
- Rothesay Joint Campus
- Dunoon Grammar School
- St Mun's Primary School
- Tarbert Academy

- Campbeltown Grammar School
- Inveraray Primary School

Appendix 3

Quality indicators – the six point scale

An evaluation of **excellent** applies to provision which is a model of its type. Learners' experiences and achievements are of a very high quality. An evaluation of excellent represents an outstanding standard of provision which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the council. It implies these very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.

An evaluation of **very good** applies to provision characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish learners' experiences. While an evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to make provision without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the council will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.

An evaluation of **good** applies to provision characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of good represents a standard of provision in which the strengths have a significant positive impact. However, the quality of learners' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the council should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, but take action to address the areas for improvement.

An evaluation of **satisfactory** applies to provision characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of satisfactory indicates that learners have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on learners' experiences. However, while the weaknesses will not be important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they will constrain the overall quality of learners' experiences. It implies that the council should take action to address areas of weakness while building on its strengths.

An evaluation of **weak** applies to provision which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of weak may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strengths, the important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish learners' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for structured and planned action on the part of the council.

An evaluation of **unsatisfactory** applies when there are major weaknesses in provision requiring immediate remedial action. Learners' experience is at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for provision evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside staff from other departments or agencies in or beyond the council.

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