

Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012-2016

Introduction



Welcome to this report on quality and improvement in Scottish education.

This report summarises findings from inspections and other evaluative activities carried out by Education Scotland over the period January 2012 to June 2016. It seeks to draw out some of the key features and trends that we have seen as education providers have sought to develop and improve their services over that period of time.

The report brings together messages from across the full range of sectors in which we carry out inspections and reviews, ranging from early learning and childcare to adult learning. It identifies some key areas of strength. It also identifies some key areas where there is a need for more focused effort to achieve further improvements.

Our intention in publishing this report is to feed back the intelligence we have gained from our broad, nationwide programme of inspection and evaluative activities so that service providers, and those that lead and manage these services, can benefit from our findings as they plan their next steps in continuous improvement.

As the national improvement agency for Scottish education, Education Scotland generates evidence from a wide range of inspections and other evaluative activities. That includes local authority scrutiny and thematic reviews of particular topics as well as our routine establishment and service inspections. We use all of this evidence to report publicly on the quality of education. Our inspectors report on the impact that national policy and guidance is having in establishments and services across the country, and they make professional judgements about the quality of children's and young people's learning, attainment and achievement.

The scope of our activities gives us a unique evidence base drawn from observing practice at first hand across the whole country. This rich evidence base enables us to draw conclusions about what is working well and what needs to improve. We are able to use this perspective to shape the advice we provide Scottish Ministers and their officials to promote improvement in Scottish education.

During the period covered by this report, Scottish education has gone through a period of very significant reform impacting on every part of the system. Across all sectors, establishments and services have focused strongly on developing their provision to take account of key national policies and their associated strategies. Getting it Right for Every Child, Curriculum for Excellence and Developing the Young Workforce have become well established as major drivers for reform, whilst a range of other targeted national programmes have sought to tackle more specific issues.

In early learning and childcare the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 replaced the previous entitlement to 'pre-school education' with a new, flexible entitlement. This delivered an increase in publicly funded hours to 600 for each child annually as part of expansion of early years provision. In early learning and childcare settings, schools and colleges, we saw the continuing development and implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, including the phased introduction of the new National Qualifications. Since the publication of Developing the Young Workforce, Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy, in June 2014, there has also

been a greater focus on developing young people's employability skills across all sectors. There have been improvements to teacher education and continuing professional development flowing from the Teaching Scotland's Future report and the development of new strategies for the youth work and adult learning sectors. There has also been new legislation placing an enhanced duty on all public sector partners to promote community empowerment.

Scotland's colleges have experienced a period of major structural change which involved the merger of many local colleges into regional colleges. Post-16 legislation altered the status of colleges bringing with it alterations in college governance. The move to a regional configuration involving large multi-campus colleges, along with regional outcome agreements and continuing resource constraints, has presented major challenges as well as substantial opportunities for the college sector.

From 2015 onwards, Scottish education has also experienced an emphatic increase in the focus being placed nationally on tackling the gap that exists in attainment between children and young people living in the areas with greatest and lowest levels of socio-economic deprivation. Closing the poverty-related attainment gap has been raised to the very top of the Scottish Government's agenda. To accelerate progress and effective practice, the Scottish Government has dedicated substantial resources to the task through the Scottish Attainment Challenge, with a commitment to making available £750 million over five years to support intervention, proportionate to need, which is likely to involve almost every school in the country.

All these changes have taken place in a context of continuing constraints on public spending. These constraints have naturally been felt at all levels of the education system although teacher numbers have been protected through an agreement between the Scottish Government and local authorities. The capacity of local authorities and schools to deal with the impact of resource constraints has varied substantially. In response to constrained budgets and the need to make savings, we have seen many local authorities make substantial efficiencies at the centre, rather than in classrooms and front-line services. That has resulted in many authorities having a reduced capacity to undertake key functions such as supporting quality improvement, monitoring and challenging school performance and leading and coordinating professional learning. There is now therefore an even greater focus on leaders and practitioners in education establishments and services driving their own improvement through robust self-evaluation and improvement methods.

During the period 2012 to 2016 our programmes of inspection and review also continued to develop and evolve. We introduced new programmes of evaluation such as the external reviews of career information, advice and guidance services that we now undertake in partnership with Skills Development Scotland and our new approach for inspecting educational psychology services. More broadly we increased our focus on Developing the Young Workforce and employability skills in our evaluative activities.

To support the successful implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, we made year-by-year adjustments to the criteria inspectors applied when evaluating the curriculum and arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement. We planned these adjustments to align closely with the Curriculum for Excellence national implementation plan to help promote progress and to provide feedback on how implementation was proceeding. In this context of deep and comprehensive curricular reform, our inspectors found that it proved challenging for establishments and services to move in one bound to establish a curriculum which delivers fully on the aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence. This is reflected in a relatively high level of variability in the quality indicator grades inspectors awarded for 'curriculum' and 'improvement through self-evaluation' during the period of this report.

Looking across the evidence brought together in this report I believe it is clear that there are many strengths in the quality of professional practice and provision across Scottish education. Our inspectors have observed many examples of outstanding and innovative practice which are securing very positive outcomes for children and young people. It is equally clear, however that there are also important areas where leaders' and practitioners' efforts to improve need to be more focused.

This report reflects the distance that Scottish education has travelled since 2012, capitalising on the range of reforms that have been underway. It also shows clearly that there is still further to travel on that journey if we are to realise our collective national ambition of achieving excellence and equity for all Scottish learners.

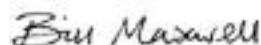
In the years ahead the need for education practitioners to manage change and seek improvement will certainly not cease, but the direction of travel is ever clearer. The National Improvement Framework, launched at the start of 2016 and refreshed again for 2017, is providing, for the first time, a new level of clarity about our collective national priorities for improving education provision. It sets out a clear view of the main drivers that we believe are key to securing that improvement. A major investment of resources by the Scottish Government, committed for the whole term of the Parliament, means that almost every school in the country will receive targeted resource and support to address a key national priority, breaking the cycle of poverty-related underachievement amongst our children and young people.

Following the steer given by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in its December 2015 report, there is a need now to proceed boldly to embed fully Curriculum for Excellence, in order to ensure that its benefits are realised fully. The same boldness is also required in other areas, such as the reforms being undertaken in early learning and childcare and promoting young people's welfare and wellbeing, and the reforms underway in improving post-school education and training provision.

As education establishments and services respond to this next phase of the improvement journey we are adapting our inspection and review approaches. We undertook a major review of inspection models in the schools and early learning and childcare sectors throughout 2015/16 leading to changes we introduced from August 2016. These changes are designed to bring our inspections into close alignment with the National Improvement Framework priorities and its key drivers. Similarly, in the college sector, we have worked with the Scottish Funding Council and colleges to completely redesign the way we review quality in colleges in the new regional college landscape. We are also planning to make more use of some innovative new models of inspection that were piloted as part of the inspection review, such as integrated inspections of all providers of senior phase learning opportunities in a local area and reviews undertaken with other scrutiny bodies of all public services in a locality.

So, the next time we produce one of these summary reports, new and different types of evidence will be available matched to the context of education reform which lies immediately ahead.

In the meantime, I trust you find the report helpful in illuminating key aspects of the journey Scottish education has been through over the last four years. If you are an education provider or practitioner, I hope it gives you food for thought as you plan for the next steps in the improvement journey you are taking to ensure the learners that you serve can realise their full potential.



Dr Bill Maxwell
HM Chief Inspector of Education

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Executive summary

This report provides an analysis of key strengths and areas for improvement in education provision and professional practice based on the inspections, reviews and other evaluative activity our inspectors undertook during the period January 2012 to June 2016.

During the period covered by this report there has been very significant reform across all sectors of Scottish education. At the same time, there have been substantial constraints on public finances. Within this challenging context education providers have continued to develop and improve the quality of education for children and young people in many important aspects. Inspectors found that there were many strengths across all sectors of education and examples of outstanding and innovative practice. Inspectors also found, however, that there were some key aspects of provision and practice which need to be improved for the national ambition of excellence and equity for all Scottish learners to be fully realised.

Early learning and childcare settings

Inspectors found that most early learning and childcare settings were working well to provide experiences which supported children to be motivated, confident and engaged in their learning. Settings worked effectively in partnership with parents, partner agencies and other professionals to help secure positive outcomes for children and families.

Overall, staff were found to have responded positively to national guidance, including Curriculum for Excellence and Building the Ambition. Children have better opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills through play and meaningful real-life contexts.

More needs to be done, however, to meet the aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence and improve the progress children make in their learning. Settings need to improve approaches to self-evaluation, including tracking and monitoring children's progress. Staff also need to ensure they provide consistently high-quality learning experiences, particularly for those children under three years of age, as they implement the expansion of early learning and childcare.

Primary schools

Across primary schools, inspectors found that staff were increasingly skilled at using a broad range of learning and teaching approaches to enable children to be more actively involved in their learning. As a result, children showed high levels of motivation and engagement. We also found that schools have increased the involvement of parents in their child's learning and are working more with other stakeholders and partners.

Schools have taken many positive steps to develop and improve the curriculum. These positive steps should be built upon to ensure the curriculum is reviewed and refreshed to meet the needs of all children and take sufficient account of the local context.

Overall, we found that children's attainment and achievement were too variable. Schools need to ensure that information about children's attainment and achievement is robust and used effectively to make improvements to children's learning. Staff need to work with each other to develop a better shared understanding about what learners need to know and be able to do to achieve Curriculum for Excellence levels.

Secondary schools

In secondary schools inspectors found that young people were generally well motivated to learn, achieve and succeed. Staff were clearly effective at creating a positive ethos which supported young people to enjoy good relationships with staff and their peers. We saw increasing steps being taken by schools to develop partnerships with others, including with parents, universities, colleges and the local community, with a strongly positive impact. The quality of learning and teaching was commonly found to be too variable within schools, however. Many schools need to take more action to spread effective practice and improve consistency.

Between 2012-16, curriculum planning and structures within secondary schools continued to evolve progressively as new qualifications have come into place. As the curriculum has developed, inspectors have found that schools are now providing more opportunities for young people to achieve across a range of areas. There is a continued need to focus on improving young people's attainment and achievement ensuring, for example, the curriculum provides suitably flexible pathways to meet young people's individual learning needs. Many schools also need to do more to develop the quality of the broad general education they offer in the first three years of secondary school, to ensure it provides sufficient depth and challenge to enable all learners to achieve their potential.

Schools should also make better use of evidence gathered through self-evaluation to focus on priorities which will have the greatest impact on improving learning.

Special and residential special schools

Inspectors found that most special and residential special schools that we evaluated were generally performing well. In special and residential special schools particular strengths included the high-quality relationships among children, young people and staff, and the strong commitment of staff to improving children's and young people's care and welfare.

We saw examples of highly-effective practice in the use of technology to support communication for learners with more complex needs. We also found, however, that the quality of learning and teaching was not consistent across the sector with the result that some children and young people were disengaged from learning.

We found that schools were taking some steps to improve their curriculum and, as a result, children and young people experienced more challenging and relevant opportunities to develop skills for learning, life and work. However, the pace of curriculum change was too slow in some schools and children and young people are not yet experiencing its full benefits.

Inspectors also judged that many schools needed to focus on raising attainment further and increasing expectations of what children and young people can achieve. To support this staff need to monitor and track children's and young people's attainment and achievement more rigorously and take action to ensure learners make appropriate progress.

Gaelic Medium Education

Overall, inspectors found that most children and young people in Gaelic Medium Education (GME) were making good progress in developing their fluency in Gaelic throughout the broad general education. By the senior phase, attainment in Gàidhlig as a subject was strong.

In early learning and childcare GME settings, inspectors judged that children could be making better progress if they experienced more consistent approaches to total immersion¹ in the language. At the primary and secondary stages, schools should ensure they provide children and young people with sufficient opportunities to learn through Gaelic. There is a continued need to design pathways to meet the needs of young people in GME.

Interest in the role of Gaelic (Learners) as an additional language and the development of GME in some areas of Scotland is growing. To support this growing demand, there is a continuing need to ensure sufficient numbers of practitioners who can educate through the medium of Gaelic. There is also a need to ensure there are sufficient initial and career-long professional learning opportunities and sufficient teaching resources which are suitable for GME.

Independent schools

Inspectors found that learners in independent schools were generally highly motivated and responsible, with a positive attitude towards learning. We also found that early learning and childcare settings in the independent schools sector generally provided high-quality experiences for younger children.

Almost all the independent schools we evaluated had embedded a culture of self-evaluation and reflection across staff teams. These effective approaches were leading to very positive outcomes for learners, particularly in examination results and in securing positive destinations. There is now a need for schools to track more systematically the skills for learning, life and work that children and young people gain through the extensive and varied out-of-class activities.

Community learning and development

Inspectors noted a number of key strengths in the work of community learning and development services. Young volunteers were having a positive impact in their local communities. Increasingly services were supporting family learning and parenting in partnership with schools.

While approaches to self-evaluation across community learning and development partners were improving, inspectors found there was a need for further improvement to ensure they are effective. Inspectors also identified a need to develop more effective ways of capturing and measuring the impact that volunteering has on individuals and communities.

We found that participation in high-quality professional learning was too variable. More needs to be done to support professional development and training of the community and learning development workforce.

¹ The early stage of learning through the medium of Gaelic, and where no other language is used, is referred to as 'total immersion'.

Career information, advice and guidance services

In the new programme of reviews undertaken in this area, inspectors found that partnership working between career information, advice and guidance services and schools, local authorities and community organisations was strong. We found that Skills Development Scotland (SDS) staff generally involved partners well in contributing to the joint planning and delivery of services. This was ensuring that services were matched to the identified needs of customers, communities and key stakeholders.

Going forward, there should be a continued focus on partners, including schools and local authorities, working collaboratively with SDS to support improvement.

Colleges

Inspectors found that a number of strengths were evident within the college sector. In particular, colleges had well-developed arrangements to gather learner feedback on the quality of provision they receive. Learners were represented well at all levels within colleges and used a range of opportunities to contribute effectively to decision-making and development of college strategy.

While colleges have made some progress with implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, there is more to be done to ensure the full benefits of the senior phase for all learners.

The learner population attending college has changed, with a shift towards full-time programmes and an increased number of 15-18 year old learners. Overall, attainment rates on full-time college programmes have improved. The majority of full-time learners successfully completed their college course.

There is a need for colleges to focus on improving outcomes for learners aged 15-18 on full-time courses, as their success rates are amongst the lowest.

Educational psychology services

Over the period covered by this report inspectors have found that the leadership of educational psychology services (EPS) has improved. There is now a clearer vision for services based around national and local priorities. Inspectors found examples of very good practice in relation to learning and teaching and partnership working across the majority of EPS. EPS were also developing an increasing role in the prevention and early intervention of mental health issues in children and young people. Services now need to be more focused on measuring the impact and outcomes of interventions as they develop their approaches to self-evaluation.

Prison learning

Overall, inspectors judged that prisons offered a good range of purposeful learning activities to match the ability, preference and age of most prisoners. Learning was self-directed with appropriate support from tutors where required. We found that there was room to improve opportunities for prisoners to progress on to more advanced vocational qualifications and approaches to gathering feedback from prisoners on the quality and planning of scheduled activities. The Scottish Prison Service was making good use of external evaluation and research to help inform the learning provision across all 13 of their establishments.

Challenges and opportunities across sectors

Our evidence shows that there are many strengths in the quality of provision and professional practice in Scottish education. However, the quality of education children and young people experience within and across sectors is still too variable. Scottish education does not yet provide all children and young people with consistently high-quality learning experiences. Unless this variability is addressed we will not achieve the national ambition of excellence and equity for all learners. We highlight five key aspects of education which need to improve. Education providers need to:

- exploit fully the flexibility of Curriculum for Excellence to meet better the needs of all learners;
- improve arrangements for assessment and tracking to provide personalised guidance and support throughout the learner journey;
- maximise the contribution of partnerships with other services, parents and the wider community to enhance children's and young people's learning experiences;
- improve further the use of self-evaluation and improvement approaches to ensure consistent high quality of provision; and
- grow a culture of collaboration within and across establishments and services to drive innovation, sharing of practice and collective improvement.

Ensuring the highest quality of leadership at every level of the education system will be vital to ensuring that the necessary improvements across all of these important areas is achieved successfully.



Early learning and childcare settings

Across the early learning and childcare sector inspectors noted many strengths. The quality of children's learning experiences was one of the most common strengths highlighted in inspections. Staff generally promoted children's engagement and motivation in their own learning effectively. This supported children to be confident. Staff have positive relationships with children and families. They know children well and used this knowledge to support children to make progress in their learning.

Overall, staff have responded well to national guidance, including Curriculum for Excellence. As we look ahead to the next stage of the expansion of early learning and childcare, it is vital that staff continue to work to ensure high-quality learning experiences, particularly for those children under three years of age. There is also a need to improve approaches to self-evaluation, including the impact of the curriculum, in developing children's skills for learning, life and work.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Over the period of this report, inspectors increasingly observed children taking more responsibility for their learning. They found that staff were generally skilled at developing warm, supportive relationships with children. Staff listened to children's views and responded to their interests when planning learning. As a result, children were motivated and increasingly engaged. We have seen children becoming more confident in talking about their learning. Inspectors observed children most actively involved in their learning when activities were suited to their stage of development and staff supported them to extend their own ideas and thinking using high-quality questioning and discussion.

In settings where children were less engaged or motivated, inspectors found that activities were too structured and staff were not skilled enough in using learning conversations with children. Staff must now ensure that all children, including those under three years of age, have consistently high-quality learning experiences.

Overall, inspectors found that staff provided appropriate support to enable children to learn and use new vocabulary, including mathematical language in interesting contexts. Most children listened and talked well for a variety of purposes. They showed a keen interest in books and enjoyed sharing stories with adults. This was most evident in settings where regular storytelling was prioritised. We observed children developing their early writing skills in a range of relevant and meaningful contexts. At times, children were encouraged to copy words before they were ready to do so. It is important for staff to have a clear understanding of progression in early writing development. We found that most children were developing their counting skills well through a range of learning experiences. Over the period of this report, increasingly these experiences offered opportunities to develop children's early numeracy skills. There is more to be done to ensure staff develop children's skills and confidence in all areas of numeracy and mathematics.

Overall, children were developing their inquiry and investigative skills well. In the most effective practice, inspectors noted that children could apply these skills when exploring and observing real-life materials and artefacts. In doing so, children talked about their findings, identified similarities and differences and made predictions. This type of learning was helping children make progress in their learning about sciences through real-life opportunities.

How well do early learning and childcare settings support children to develop and learn?

Overall, inspectors found that staff have engaged very well with implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. As settings have reviewed and refreshed their curriculum staff have become more confident in using Curriculum for Excellence principles, experiences and outcomes to plan children's learning to develop the four capacities. In doing so, they have worked well with children, parents and local communities to enhance and enrich the curriculum. Settings should now ensure the curriculum is relevant to the local context and meets children's learning needs. Inspectors noted that, currently, there are still too many instances where the rationale for the curriculum is not clearly defined or understood well enough by staff. Staff need to ensure the curriculum develops children's skills for learning, life and work and provides appropriate levels of choice, depth and challenge across all areas of learning.

We have seen staff increase the opportunities for children to take part in high-quality outdoor play. In the most effective practice, the outdoor environment was used as an integral part of the learning environment. As a result of staff focusing on how to improve children's literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across learning, the majority now plan and provide a literacy-rich environment to support children's learning. Where practice was strong, inspectors noted that staff provided play opportunities that were open-ended and stimulated children to be innovative and creative.

Inspectors have observed children engaging in a broader range of experiences involving technologies and digital technologies. This resulted in children having many opportunities to use computers and tablets to help reinforce their emerging literacy and numeracy skills. Where children benefited from high-quality learning in technologies, inspectors saw a significant positive impact on children's knowledge and skills development.

In settings where children's learning needs were met effectively, inspectors highlighted that staff understood the individual circumstances of children who attended the setting and had high levels of respect for children and their families. They were skilled in recognising and supporting children with barriers to learning, including those who were vulnerable. Staff were making effective use of partnerships with families and other agencies to inform any support or interventions put in place.

There remains scope for staff to improve how they use observations of learning to track and monitor children's progress. Inspectors noted that where this was most effective, staff were skilled at observing children during play and used this information to identify and plan children's next steps in learning. In doing so, they provided learning activities at the correct level of difficulty. However, we observed too many settings where information gathered was not used well enough to plan activities at the right level of difficulty.

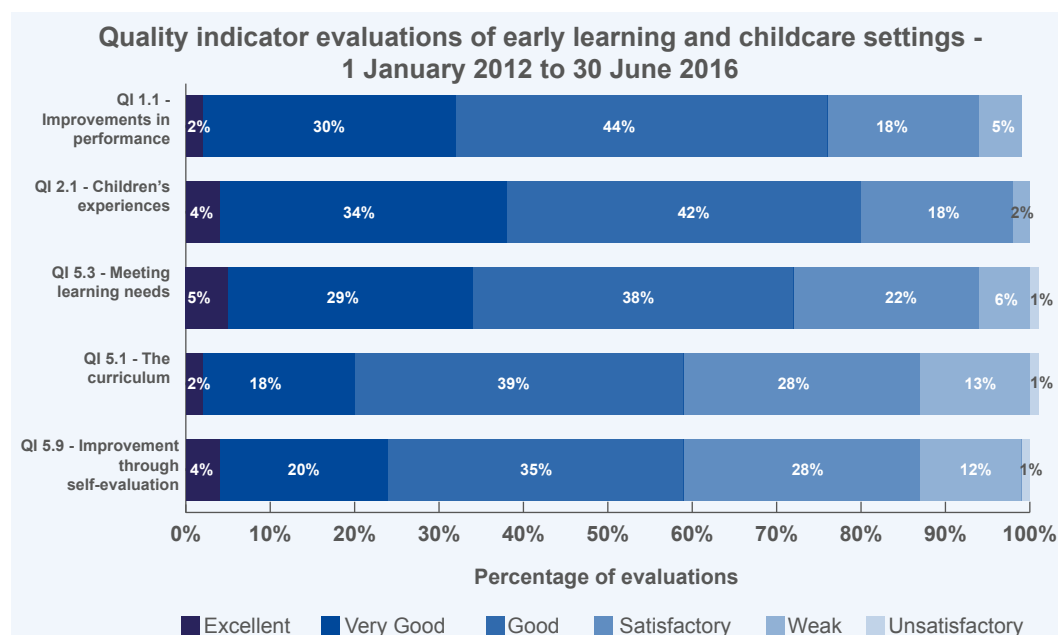
Overall, in settings inspected, staff continued to provide strong pastoral support for children as they moved through early learning and on to primary school. They were flexible in their approaches to support children make a positive move from home or from another setting. Staff now need to continue to improve how they ensure children have continuous progression in their learning during key transition stages.

How well do early learning and childcare settings improve the quality of their work?

We found that most settings were well led. In the most effective settings, staff took on leadership roles to develop their own practice and aspects of the learning environment. In these settings, national guidance, such as [Building the Ambition](#), was used well to support improvement.

Evidence gathered by inspectors shows that the use of self-evaluation to support improvement is a key development need for the sector. Staff were increasingly aware that self-evaluation will support them to improve. They have become more confident in identifying what their setting does well and what it needs to do to improve further. Where this was most effective, individuals took responsibility for contributing to and leading identified improvement priorities. However, overall, approaches to self-evaluation were variable. In particular approaches to tracking and monitoring children's progress were not consistently robust.

While arrangements to support professional learning among early learning and childcare staff have improved, inspectors noted that this was not consistent across the sector. In some cases it was challenging for early learning and childcare staff to access professional learning opportunities to help them take forward identified areas for improvement. Where this was working well, we observed individual staff who were more active and empowered to develop their professional competence and understanding. This resulted in staff contributing more to collaborative improvement and development within settings. There needs to be a continued focus on improving professional development of staff to support the expansion of hours for early learning and childcare. This includes ensuring staff are well prepared to meet the needs of entitled two year olds effectively and provide high-quality learning and development for children over longer daily and weekly sessions.



From 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016 we inspected 709 early learning and childcare settings, including settings run by local authorities such as nursery classes, nursery schools, and family centres. It also included settings run by private and voluntary providers, and independent school nursery classes. Almost all early learning and childcare settings received a positive inspection².

² Satisfactory or better in each of the following quality indicators: improvements in performance, learners' experiences and meeting learning needs in settings inspected between January 2012 and June 2016

Designing the curriculum

At Tynecastle Nursery School, City of Edinburgh Council, children, staff, parents, partners and the wider community work in partnership to support children's learning. Together they developed a shared understanding of what children's learning looks like in their setting. They produced a clear visual 'map' of their curriculum. It reflected their vision that learning is child-centred. The curriculum is designed to enable staff to be highly responsive to children's ideas and interests. For example, children's curiosity about rocks found in the garden led to research about other types of rock and volcanoes. Staff arranged an outing to a museum to extend and deepen children's knowledge further. This approach helps to make children's learning meaningful and challenging and supports children to become confident in sharing their learning. Parents are extremely positive about the work of the setting describing it as 'a temple of learning and a training ground for future citizens'.

Improving learner voice

In Ferguslie Pre-five Centre, Renfrewshire Council, children have personalised, achievable, specific targets for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Parents and children work together with staff to help



identify focused and appropriate next steps in learning. Staff take time to listen carefully to children's and parents' ideas, sometimes using their knowledge of child development to set out smaller more achievable goals. Almost all children talk with ease about what they are interested in and what they would like to learn next. As a result, children talk confidently about what they enjoy learning and how some of their skills such as drawing or counting have developed.

Staff meet with parents regularly to discuss children's progress in achieving their targets. Everyone shares a commitment to, and understanding of, the progress children make in their learning.

Primary schools

In primary schools, inspectors found that staff generally used a good range of learning and teaching approaches which enabled children to be more actively involved in their learning. As a result, children showed high levels of motivation and engagement. Inspectors noted that schools have taken many positive steps to develop and improve the curriculum. In particular the development of interdisciplinary approaches to learning have improved. Schools should build on this and ensure they continually review and refresh the curriculum to meet the needs of all children.

Evidence gathered from inspection shows that schools now need to put in place better arrangements for assessing and tracking children's progress, including having a shared understanding of standards within Curriculum for Excellence levels. As a priority, they should identify and address any gaps in attainment and achievement between their least and most disadvantaged children and take steps to raise attainment and achievement ensuring equity for all learners.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Overall, children were motivated and enthusiastic about their learning. Inspectors observed children who were becoming more actively engaged in their learning and, as a consequence, increasingly aware of themselves as learners. More children were using approaches such as personal learning logs to set targets for their next steps in learning. Over the period of this report, we increasingly saw children talk about their strengths and development needs. In the most effective practice, children were developing an understanding of what they needed to learn. To help them reflect on their own learning children benefited from well-judged feedback from staff and each other.

Increasingly, we have observed children deepen their learning through collaborating with each other. Inspectors found that where this worked well children discussed and explained ideas, solutions and information and, as a result, developed their confidence. Staff now need to ensure they provide consistently high-quality learning experiences which are challenging, enjoyable and support all children to be leaders in their own learning.

Many schools were using rights-based learning approaches very effectively to provide an increased focus on equalities issues. Staff have become more aware of the importance of children's rights and most children reported that they felt positive about the ways in which they have a say in improving their school³, including through pupil councils.

While there have been improvements in children's progress in literacy and numeracy, it is still too variable.

With regard to literacy inspectors found that children listen and talk with confidence in a range of contexts. Where schools ensured listening and talking was developed in a progressive way, children made better progress. Almost all primary schools had structured programmes to support progression in reading skills. Where this worked best children developed skills through reading texts with an appropriate level of challenge. To improve children's attainment in reading staff need to focus on developing children's higher-order reading skills and supporting children to be more analytical when engaging with texts. We noted that most children were writing

³ Based on the responses to Education Scotland's pre-inspection questionnaires over the period 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016

regularly and for a variety of purposes. It is important that schools continue to provide children with regular opportunities for extended writing across other areas of the curriculum and give a high priority to technical accuracy.

We have seen improvements in the quality of children's learning experiences in numeracy and mathematics. Increasingly we have observed children develop their understanding of key mathematical concepts through applying them in relevant contexts. They have become more confident in explaining the strategies they used to solve mental and written calculations. However, more needs to be done to improve children's attainment. This includes identifying aspects of numeracy and mathematics where children's skills are not developed well enough and taking appropriate action. Although children develop a range of problem solving skills, inspectors highlighted there is room to improve children's skills in solving more complex problems. Staff need to ensure they provide a balanced range of experiences in numeracy and mathematics which enable children to both revisit concepts to consolidate learning over time, and build on prior learning to ensure sufficient progress.

How well do primary schools support children to develop and learn?

We found that primary schools have generally worked hard to develop and improve their curriculum over the period of this report. As a result, inspectors noted that the quality of learning experiences for children are improving. Increasingly, schools were working with stakeholders and partners. In the most effective examples observed; they involved stakeholders in designing and shaping the curriculum. Most were beginning to take account of the need to develop children's employability skills when reviewing their curriculum. However, for some schools approaches to re-designing the curriculum to help children experience a challenging and motivating broad general education are not yet effective or in some instances, aligned with expectations. In these schools there has been too much emphasis on 'covering' experiences and outcomes at the expense of depth and challenge. As a result, children do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their higher-order thinking skills well enough or apply skills and knowledge in new and unfamiliar contexts. While inspectors saw examples of schools providing appropriate opportunities for personalisation and choice to support progression in children's learning this varied too much within and across schools.

Most schools inspected now have a framework in place for interdisciplinary learning which supports the development of knowledge, understanding and skills for children as they progress through the primary stages. For example, where science was taught using a planned and progressive programme, which included both discrete as well as interdisciplinary learning topics, children's knowledge, understanding and skills were well developed. When delivering science solely through interdisciplinary learning staff should ensure that there is sufficient depth of learning.

There is an ongoing need to develop staff confidence in making professional judgements about when children achieve Curriculum for Excellence levels. Although we saw examples of effective practice in assessing and moderating standards, overall it was clear that more work of this nature is required.

Across the sector, we found that staff were developing a better knowledge and understanding of Getting it Right for Every Child and were increasingly using the wellbeing indicators to assess, plan and provide appropriate support. They were better at identifying children who need additional support, and how much support they required. In the most effective practice, children and parents were fully involved in setting and reviewing appropriate targets for learning to help ensure that personalised support was effective. This helped children make good levels of progress.

While we saw staff provide lessons and activities which met the learning needs of most children, there were also too many occasions when activities were not at the right level of difficulty to ensure children had appropriate challenge in their learning. At times, inspectors observed whole-class approaches to learning which were not implemented well enough to take account of the range of learning needs.

Overall, schools provided children with effective pastoral support as they moved from early learning to P1 and from P7 to S1. However, they still need to improve their approaches to building on children's prior learning when moving to another stage within the primary school and to secondary school.

How well do primary schools improve the quality of their work?

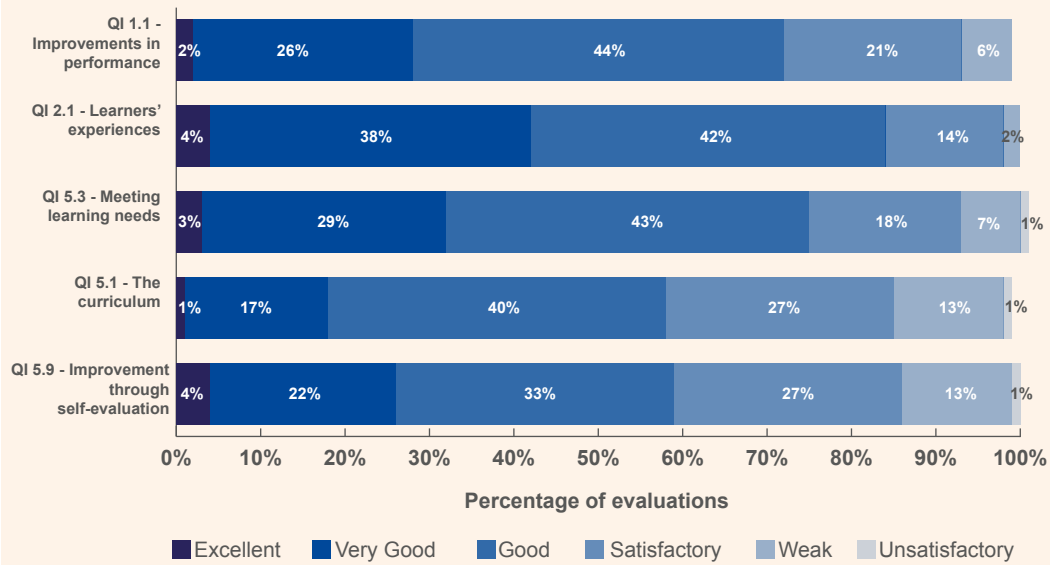
Inspectors identified aspects of leadership as a key strength in many schools. Where schools had highly-effective leadership, the headteacher and senior managers were very well respected by the school community and provided clear and strong direction to support school improvement. They had high aspirations for children and expectations of staff.

Staff commitment and teamwork to ensure children have positive learning experiences was also found to be a strength in most schools. Increasingly, distributed leadership, where all staff take ownership for leading improvements in the school, was found to be having a positive impact on improving learning and teaching.

We have seen notable improvements in approaches and staff engagement with professional learning. The General Teaching Council for Scotland's Standard for Career-long Professional Learning is being used more to support the development of teacher professional learning. In the most effective schools, approaches such as collaborative professional learning and enquiry within and between schools and the use of research now feature more prominently as part of professional learning activities.

Evidence from inspection shows that the majority of schools had a good range of processes in place for evaluating their work and making necessary improvements. In schools where this was most effective staff involved a range of stakeholders and partners from the school community, including children and parents, in establishing priorities for improvement, driving them forward and evaluating their impact on improving learning and teaching. However, inspectors found that too many primary schools do not yet have robust information about children's attainment and achievement. This has a bearing on the quality and impact of self-evaluation. In these schools, approaches to tracking and monitoring children's progress were not effective and, as a result, did not support staff to improve children's attainment and achievement. We also found that, in some schools, difficulties in recruiting replacement headteachers and staff were having an impact on the ability of schools to improve the quality of their work.

Quality indicator evaluations of primary schools - 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016



From 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016 we inspected 514 primary schools across Scotland. Most primary schools received a positive inspection⁴.



⁴ Satisfactory or better in each of the following quality indicators: improvements in performance, learners' experiences and meeting learning needs in primary schools inspected between January 2012 and June 2016

Assessing, tracking and monitoring children's attainment and achievement



The headteacher and staff at St. Kenneth's Primary School, South Lanarkshire Council, have an in-depth knowledge of children's progress. They meet regularly to discuss how well children are learning. The school has robust tracking and monitoring of children's progress and achievement. It is used to plan future learning, interventions and secure the best possible

outcomes for all learners. All staff have a clear picture of how individuals, groups of learners and those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are progressing across their learning.

They use an extensive range of formative assessment techniques as well as active and collaborative learning strategies to assess, track and monitor children's attainment and achievement. Staff working at the same stage and across levels regularly work together to share standards and engage in moderation activities. The senior management team monitor all aspects of classroom practice, sample children's work, carry out focused discussions with children, track children's progress, and interrogate assessment information robustly. This allows them to have in-depth discussions with staff about children's progress and set targets for attainment. As a result of these approaches, attainment across the school is very strong.

Developing the curriculum to ensure high-quality learning

Staff at Middleton Park School, Aberdeen City Council, have focused on improving the curriculum to ensure consistency of approach and progression from nursery through to P7. Staff developed curriculum frameworks and worked closely with stage partners when planning learning experiences. This helped provide consistency across year groups and worthwhile opportunities for children to learn alongside peers in different classes.

The school's community and stakeholders helped to identify priorities to contribute to the contexts for learning for example, one area identified was the use of the outdoor environment. As a result of this focus staff used the local community very well to enhance the curriculum and provide children with opportunities to learn using real-life contexts.

Staff have worked well with other schools in their cluster of schools to develop a shared understanding of standards across areas of the curriculum and approaches to assessment and moderation. This has helped raise expectations of standards within Curriculum for Excellence levels.

Tracking children's achievements



St Michael's Primary School, Dumfries and Galloway Council, took forward a priority to improve how they tracked children's progress in wider achievement, taking into account learning both in and out of school. The school created their SKILL Awards Scheme (Successful, Kind, Individual, Lovers of Learning) which provides support for independent and motivated learning through a challenging and varied framework.

Children from primary one to seven focus on each of the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence under a bronze, silver and gold structure. This approach to recording and accrediting children's skills and achievements throughout the primary stages has impacted positively, encouraging children to engage in high-quality learning experiences which increase engagement and improve motivation. In addition, parents felt more involved and better able to contribute to their children's learning. Staff reflected that this was an effective and straightforward way to record important learning in areas that were often more difficult to capture.

Secondary schools

Overall, inspectors generally found that young people in secondary schools were well motivated to learn, achieve and succeed. In many cases steps taken by schools to develop partnerships with others, including with parents, employers, universities, colleges and the local community were having a positive impact on the range and quality of learning experiences available for young people.

Between 2012-16, curriculum planning and structures within secondary schools evolved progressively as new qualifications replaced old ones and programmes such as Developing the Young Workforce started to be implemented. As a result, inspectors found that secondary schools were providing more opportunities for young people to achieve across a range of areas. There is a continued need to focus on improving young people's attainment and achievement ensuring, for example, the curriculum provides suitably flexible pathways to meeting young people's individual learning needs. Schools should also make better use of evidence gathered through self-evaluation to focus on priorities which will have the greatest impact on improving learning.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

Over the period of this report there have been important improvements in the quality of learning in secondary schools. Overall, inspectors found that young people in secondary education were motivated and had a positive attitude to their learning. The quality of conversations between teachers and individual young people, about their strengths and their next steps in learning has improved significantly. This is helping young people to become more independent in their learning.

In most schools inspected, staff provided young people with relevant contexts for their learning. We saw good examples of schools, along with partners, providing a commendably wide range of learning experiences for young people, including work placements, college learning and career advice. However, the quality of learning that young people experienced varied too much within schools and between schools. In some schools we found that the level of variability was increased by difficulties in recruiting staff. Improving the consistency of learning and teaching needs to be a key priority for all secondary schools.

While most young people felt they are treated fairly and with respect in the secondary sector⁵, inspectors found that some schools had a narrow view of young people's rights. Such schools need to consider new, creative ways of supporting all young people to express their views, and to take these into account.

There is a steady improvement in the percentage of young people leaving school for positive destinations. The percentage of leavers attaining at SCQF 4 and SCQF 5 in National Qualifications in literacy and numeracy has improved as has the attainment of young people living across almost all Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles.

Schools used a wide range of accreditation to recognise achievements. Beyond accreditation, inspectors noted that young people were developing attributes and skills through charity fundraising, voluntary work in their local community and taking on leadership roles in the school such as members of the pupil council, prefects and buddies to their younger peers. They were developing global citizenship skills through their participation in twinning arrangements with schools in other countries.

⁵ Based on the responses to Education Scotland's pre-inspection questionnaires over the period 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016

Our inspection evidence shows that staff were aware of the importance of promoting and developing young people's numeracy skills across the curriculum. However, many schools remain at an early stage of implementing this successfully. In literacy and English, inspectors found that young people were articulate and presented information and ideas well in a variety of contexts. Where talking activities had a relevant and real-life context, such as campaign speeches or persuasive talks, young people applied their learning about language effectively. We also found that young people responded well to the analysis of literature and close reading of non-fiction texts. Schools need to continue to ensure that young people engage with texts of appropriate complexity and challenge, particularly when developing higher-order reading skills.

Inspectors found that schools need to continue to work on assessing progress during the broad general education and to develop a better shared understanding of standards. There were some schools that could not provide robust information about the progress that young people were making in their learning.

How well do secondary schools support young people to develop and learn?

Curriculum planning and structures within the sector have continued to evolve progressively as new qualifications replaced old ones. Over the past four years, the main focus for the sector has been the development of courses in the senior phase. Schools have been reviewing and developing their curriculum structures to take account of their experience of delivering National Qualifications and the need to create greater flexibility in the senior phase to help meet the needs of all young people. Schools should continue to pay particular attention to reviewing young people's experience in S3 to provide the culmination of the broad general education whilst also providing effective transition to the senior phase and courses leading to qualifications. Inspectors have observed that, as yet, opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, work-based learning, creativity and personal achievements were not always being planned well enough to ensure that all young people can apply their learning and progress with sufficient pace and challenge. Towards the end of the period covered by this report we found that many schools were indeed re-visiting the design of their S1 to S3 curriculum in the light of the experience they had gained of designing new senior phase programmes.

We found that many schools have responded well to the challenges of designing pathways for learners through the broad general education and the senior phase, and explaining the changes to parents and learners. In the best practice, schools were very clearly designing the senior phase curriculum as a coherent three-year phase, including pathways involving providers beyond the school as appropriate. All schools need to continue to focus on ensuring all young people have learning pathways to enable them to make the best progress. This includes continuing to work with primary schools to build on prior learning which has taken place at the primary stages. In some cases we found that schools needed to increase significantly the pace and depth of the work they were doing on developing the curriculum.

Since the publication of Developing the Young Workforce, Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy in June 2014, inspectors have noted a greater focus on developing young people's skills. This includes an increased commitment and drive in developing partnerships with families, local businesses and community learning and development organisations to contribute to young people's learning. Some schools need to improve the pace with which they widen their provision to develop young people's experiences and progression in skills. In particular, schools need to work with young people and their parents to ensure that young people have a clear understanding of their own skills and their application and relevance beyond school.

Young people would, for example, benefit from further support in describing the skills they have gained to employers. We have observed that Skills Development Scotland Careers Coaches support school staff to gain an understanding of the pathways available to school-age young people. To improve these further, schools now need to make better use of career-planning resources such as [My World of Work](#)⁶.

There remains room for improvement, particularly in providing young people with appropriate levels of challenge and opportunities to apply their learning in different contexts. As yet, approaches to personalising learning to meet the increasingly diverse needs of learners are not always effective. Further work is required to ensure that all groups of young people, including those with additional support needs, move on to a positive destination.

Across the sector, inspectors have highlighted the school ethos, pastoral support provided to young people, and the quality of help for young people requiring additional support as areas of strength. Schools used a wide range of approaches to encourage positive relationships and behaviour. Overall, we found that staff promoted positive relationships and behaviour, and responded to negative behaviour appropriately. There has been a steady reduction in the number of temporary exclusions from schools over the period covered by this report.

We have seen schools become aware of their roles within Getting It Right for Every Child and work with partners to develop a more consistent, shared language to describe health and wellbeing. More work now needs done to ensure that Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education provides young people with knowledge and skills to make informed, responsible and healthy choices about their lives, the real world and online world.

How well do secondary schools improve the quality of their work?

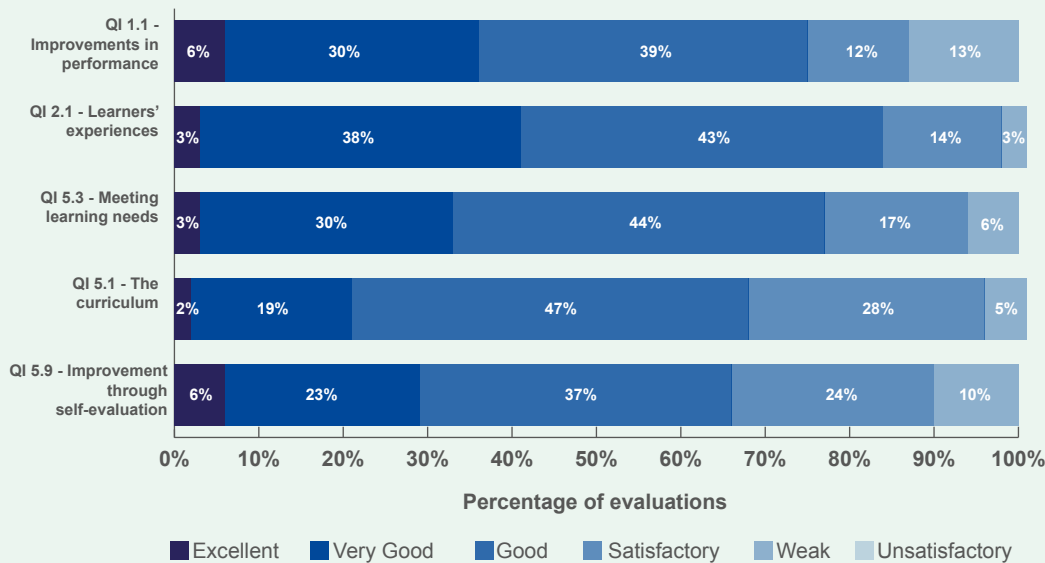
In many schools inspectors judged aspects of the leadership of the headteacher and the senior leadership team as key strengths. In particular, many headteachers showed skill in leading improvement with clear vision and drive. We found that the most effective headteachers used data and research well to inform improvement. In most secondary schools inspected, leadership at all levels was generally effective. This included the leadership of all staff, including faculty heads, principal teachers and newly qualified teachers, and the leadership of young people. In the best cases, a focus on distributed leadership was strengthening the capacity of these schools to work collaboratively and empowered leaders at all levels to drive change resulting in positive outcomes. Professional relationships between schools and their partners were also often found to be strong.

Over the course of the period covered by this report we have seen positive improvements in approaches to career-long professional learning (CLPL). In most secondary schools, leaders and teachers were committed to and engaged in a wide range of CLPL opportunities in school, within their local authority and nationally.

Inspectors found that most schools had a range of effective processes in place for gathering evidence about the quality of their work, but this was not always used effectively to plan for and secure improvements in outcomes for young people. There remains a need for schools to improve how they work with partners to evaluate the impact of joint working on improving outcomes for young people. The quality and impact of assessment, monitoring and tracking of young people's progress during the broad general education is an area requiring on-going development. Too many of the schools inspected were unable to provide whole-school data on achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels during S1 to S3.

⁶ Web service to support effective career planning

Quality indicator evaluations of secondary schools - 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016



From 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016 we carried out inspections in 109 secondary schools across Scotland. Most secondary schools received a positive inspection⁷.

Improvement through self-evaluation and learner voice

In Bearsden Academy, East Dunbartonshire Council, the headteacher and depute head with responsibility for self-evaluation have a very clear vision for school improvement. They give self-evaluation and improvement activity a very high priority in the school's day-to-day work. Principal teachers and other staff play a very important role in school improvement. Staff and young people support this vision, and understand that school improvement is the responsibility of all. As a result, there is a very strong culture of continuous improvement focused on ongoing drive to maintain very high standards of attainment and ensure positive destinations for all.

Young people are central to self-evaluation processes and outcomes. They are insightful, open and keen to improve their school. Learner voice has been an ongoing priority across the school for a number of years. Recently it has included the creation of the Bearsden Aspirational Team, which involves 30 young people from S1 to S6. Young people are skilled in sharing evaluative comments on the quality of their learning with staff in a respectful, helpful and positive manner. Young people complete a pupil improvement plan and work collaboratively to take responsibility for the delivery of that plan.

From this work, staff explore their practice and identify actions for change. There is clear evidence that these processes are leading to improvement in the school. Young people are learning more about school improvement through producing their own version of the Standards and Quality report. Pupils presented to their parents on 'growth mind set'. As a result, parents have a better understanding of their children's learning experiences in the school. This work was followed by visits by parents to subject departments to participate in typical lessons to get an experience of a Curriculum for Excellence classroom.

⁷ Satisfactory or better in each of the following quality indicators: improvements in performance, learners' experiences and meeting learning needs in secondary schools inspected between January 2012 and June 2016

Partnership working to enhance young people's personal achievements



In Eastwood High School, East Renfrewshire Council, effective partnership working with community learning and development services and others is successfully supporting young people to increase their personal achievements. Young people are engaging positively with a range of experiences beyond the classroom, many of which are supported by partners. These experiences offer opportunities for young people to develop and apply their knowledge and skills in relevant and purposeful contexts.

Young people in S5 and S6 are developing their skills for life and work through a range of leadership opportunities including leading after-school and lunchtime activities such as Bollywood dance and cheerleading groups and the Scalextrics club. Young people in the drama group are writing scripts and leading the group to produce a school show. As a result, they are developing their confidence and self-esteem. Young people who attend the 'Style Academy' took full responsibility for organising a fashion show and further developed their skills in organisation and teamwork.

A 'Schools to Market' class ran in conjunction with the Soil Association and a local business. This provided the opportunity for young people to work with children from associated primaries and with a chef to produce a product for sale to the public. In response to interest from young people in S6, the school has developed a programme to build capacity in supporting the mental health of their peers by training a group of young people in mental health first aid. Senior pupils organised activities to raise funds to undertake a qualification in Emergency First Aid with St Andrew's First Aid and raised awareness of the work of this service in the school's community.

Special and residential special schools

Overall, inspectors found that special schools and residential special schools generally performed well. In both residential and non-residential special schools the high-quality relationships among children, young people and staff, and the commitment of staff to improving children's and young people's care and welfare were found to be particular strengths.

We saw evidence that schools had improved their curriculum and we found that children and young people are now experiencing more challenging and relevant opportunities to develop their skills for learning, life and work. Inspectors saw a range of examples of highly-effective practice in the use of technology to support communication for learners with more complex needs.

In a number of cases, however, inspectors found that schools needed to raise attainment further and increase expectations of what children and young people can achieve. To support this, staff need to monitor and track the attainment and achievement of children and young people more rigorously and then take appropriate action to ensure they make appropriate progress.

How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

In both the residential and non-residential schools inspected, we generally saw children and young people learning in a positive and stimulating environment. There were examples of staff using creative approaches to engage children and young people with complex learning needs through using real and relevant contexts for learning. To improve learning experiences further, children and young people need to be more involved in making choices regarding their learning and planning their next steps. This would support children and young people in leading their own learning.

Inspectors observed staff using an appropriate range of tasks and styles of learning to engage learners who were finding it difficult to concentrate for too long. In the most effective special schools, learners had a clear understanding of the purposes of lessons and what they were expected to learn. However, this was not consistent across the sector and, as a result, inspectors noted occasions when some children and young people were not motivated and were often disengaged.

In most residential special schools inspected, the learning of children and young people was well supported by care staff. In schools where this worked best, we found that care staff knew the areas where children and young people needed more support to help them achieve in their learning through practical guidance. Examples included helping children and young people gain confidence in working with money when shopping or going for a meal.

A particular strength of the sector was found to be the way staff used visual prompts such as pictures and symbols to support learners' understanding. This approach was used effectively to support children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders or complex learning needs who were not always able to follow verbal communication. Inspectors also saw impressive examples of staff making effective use of sophisticated technology to support communication for learners with more complex needs, including signifiers, voice output communication aids and eye-gaze technology.

Inspectors found that almost all special and residential special schools had a clear and appropriate focus on health and wellbeing. As a result, most children and young people were developing skills in expressing and communicating their feelings. In these schools, most children and young people were making good progress in developing their mental health and wellbeing, particularly in relation to personal relationships and growing independence and confidence.

Across the sector, more young people are now achieving National Qualifications, particularly at SCQF levels 1 and 2. Young people with additional support needs also achieve well at SCQF levels 3 and 4. There is room to improve how well young people achieve at levels 5, 6 and 7.

Evidence from inspection shows that children and young people experienced success through a wider range of community initiatives. In particular, they are now participating more in work placements and sporting activities. Their achievements were recognised through a range of accreditation, including The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Dynamic Youth Awards and John Muir Trust Awards.

Although it is an improving picture overall, there continues to be scope to further raise attainment and increase expectations for some children and young people who face additional challenges, for example those who are young carers or are living with financial hardship. Schools should also take more proactive steps to minimise barriers to learning of at risk children and young people such as looked after children and those with social and emotional needs.

How well do special schools support children and young people to develop and learn?

During the period covered by this report, we found that all special schools had reviewed and developed their curriculum to a substantial extent. We observed schools that have a fully integrated and highly-effective approach to planning children's and young people's learning. This is having a positive impact on attainment and achievement. In these schools, children and young people experienced a coherent approach to learning across the curriculum and have increased choice and personalisation which was helping to meet their needs more effectively.

In almost all special schools inspectors noted improvements in the curriculum at the senior phase. Young people were increasingly being offered more challenging and relevant opportunities to develop skills for learning, life and work, in ways which took account of prior learning and ensured progress at an appropriate pace.

Inspectors also found, however, that in some schools the pace of curriculum development had been too slow. In these schools, staff were not yet skilled enough in planning learning which takes account of the four contexts of learning. As a result, children and young people were not experiencing an appropriate balance of learning relevant to their learning needs. There were examples of children's and young people's learning experiences and opportunities for achievement being diminished by a limited curriculum. This included children and young people not having the opportunity to learn a modern language in a significant number of special schools.

In most special schools, inspectors observed children and young people benefiting from a positive, nurturing and communication-rich environment. Staff were making good use of the outdoor environment and the local community to enhance learners' experiences. As a result of curriculum improvements, most young people were being given better opportunities to choose subjects which would help them achieve a wider range of National Qualifications and personal awards.

The majority of schools inspected had a good range of community links, business partners and training providers who provided meaningful work placements. In residential special schools, these included placements which were local to the school and, on some occasions, appropriately local to the young person's home area. We found that children and young people were benefiting from increased personalised planning which was helping them engage more fully with their learning and increase their motivation.

Inspectors identified examples of outstanding practice in both special and residential special schools where staff used nurturing approaches skilfully to help children feel secure, cared for, and to enable them to maximise their potential. Staff had a sound understanding of their individual responsibilities to support children. In such schools, learners settled well when coming into class through well-considered activities that were carefully matched to individual needs and interests.

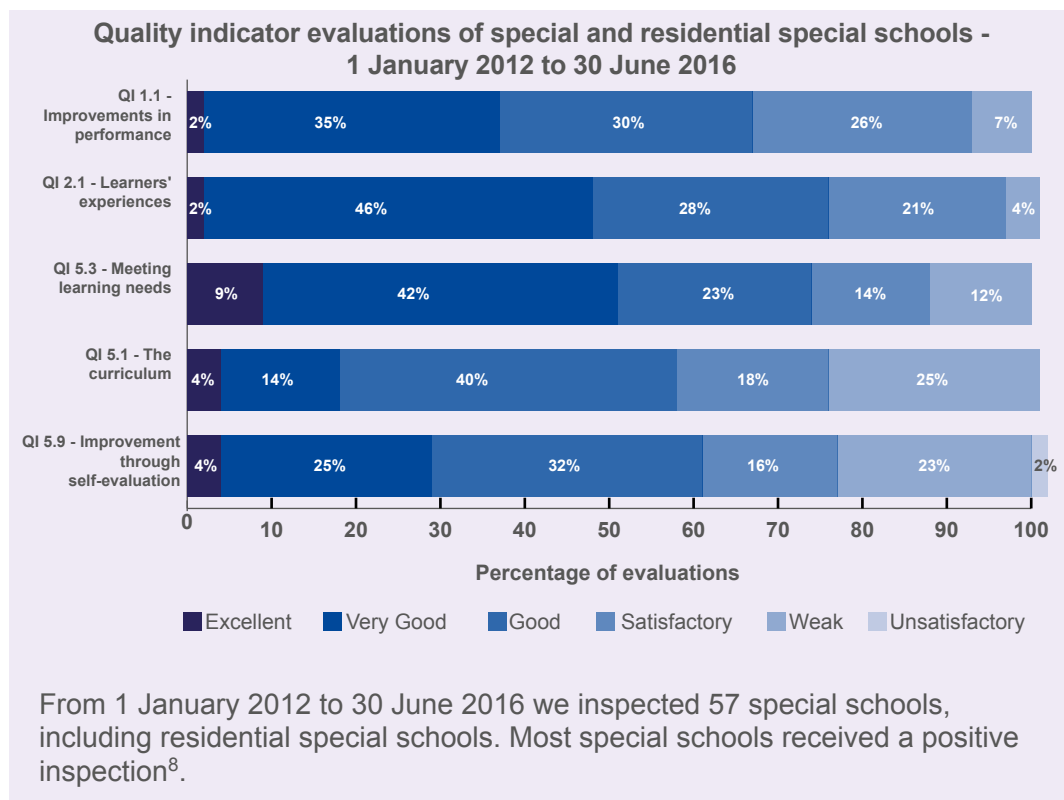
While personal support for young people moving on from the service was appropriate in most schools, we identified occasions when young people did not always have adequate access to advice. In the best examples, schools worked in partnership with key agencies, including Skills Development Scotland, adult services, community facilities and colleges to provide a range of pathways to meet young people's needs and help them progress.

How well do special schools improve the quality of their work?

Inspectors found that the leadership and management of most special schools and residential special schools was effective. In the best examples, we noted that the high-quality leadership empowered and developed the capacity for leadership across the senior management team and staff. Senior leaders encouraged creative and innovative approaches to meeting the needs of learners with complex needs and developed strong and effective working relationships with a wide range of partners in the local community.

In residential special schools and secure care services, most senior leaders promoted a culture that was consultative and collegiate. They established a culture of continuous improvement which focused on improving the outcomes for children and young people across care and education. However, inspectors found a few instances where senior leadership teams did not provide clear enough direction for education staff or monitor and evaluate the quality of learning and teaching effectively.

Across the sector, inspectors judged the impact of self-evaluation on children's and young people's progress as being variable. Many special schools and residential special schools remain at an early stage in implementing effective approaches to tracking learners' progress through the broad general education. They have not yet developed robust approaches to moderating standards of attainment.



⁸ Satisfactory or better in each of the following quality indicators: improvements in performance, learner's experiences and meeting learning needs in special schools, including residential special schools inspected between January 2012 and June 2016.

Gaelic Medium Education

Education Scotland is required by legislation to inspect Gaelic Medium Education (GME). From 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016, we inspected Gaelic provision in 42 early learning and childcare settings, and primary and secondary schools. This included Gaelic Medium schools and early learning and childcare settings, and schools where there is English and Gaelic Medium and Learner Education within the same setting.

Overall, we found that most children and young people in GME were making good progress in developing their fluency in Gaelic throughout the broad general education. By the senior phase, attainment in Gàidhlig as a subject is strong. In early learning and childcare settings, however, children could be making better progress by having more consistent approaches to total immersion⁹ in the language.

Interest in the role of Gaelic (Learners) as an additional language and the development of GME in some areas of Scotland is growing. To support this demand, there is a need to ensure the availability of sufficient practitioners and initial and career-long professional learning opportunities, and good quality teaching resources which are bespoke to GME.

How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Across most stages, inspectors found that staff were working effectively to create supportive relationships in which children and young people were motivated to learn.

In the most effective early learning and childcare settings we visited, staff planned a rich variety of activities through the medium of high-quality Gaelic. This was helping children learn the language as part of total immersion. However, in many cases further improvements were required in the way staff interacted with children in Gaelic during play activities. In too many settings inspectors noted that staff only provided a few learning activities through Gaelic, such as 'welcome time' or singing songs. As a result we found that children were not making enough progress in learning Gaelic.

Most of the primary schools we inspected were making good use of [national advice](#) to improve the opportunities children have to learn through Gaelic. However, we noted that in secondary schools, staff needed to make much more use of national advice to ensure that young people have significantly greater opportunities to learn through Gaelic. Across sectors, factors which we found to be preventing children learning consistently through Gaelic included a lack of shared understanding of best practice in GME, staffing shortages and, on occasion, teachers' limited fluency in Gaelic.

At the primary stages, children's experiences were frequently enhanced by working with partners who were very fluent in Gaelic. Inspectors highlighted that a useful next step would be to ensure clear progression in children's learning through these Gaelic-rich activities which continues through the secondary stages. This should include the use of formal award schemes. Staff should support children and young people to recognise the important skills for learning, life and work which they are developing. They should also work with partners, to help young people understand the career opportunities available to people who are fluent in Gaelic.

⁹ The early stage of learning through the medium of Gaelic, and where no other language is used, is referred to as 'total immersion'.

Overall, at the primary stages and from S1 to S3 inspectors found that most children and young people in GME made good progress in developing their fluency in Gaelic. Children's and young people's skills in talking in Gaelic were often strengthened by participating in learning experiences such as debating and drama. We observed that on most occasions, staff used clear criteria to help children and young people know how to be successful in developing their skills in writing.

We found that at the primary stages staff now have a clearer understanding of the importance of developing strong and fluent skills in reading Gaelic before beginning to read in English. Inspectors noted that children and young people needed to engage with a range of Gaelic texts in order to develop the necessary language to analyse the writer's craft through the medium of Gaelic.

Our evidence shows that within the broad general education schools need to have better arrangements in place for assessing and tracking children's and young people's progress and attainment in GME. Staff should continue to plan a range of assessment which takes account of the distinctive approaches to GME. When assessing English language, staff need to recognise that children develop English language later in the curriculum than their peers learning through English-medium education.

Overall, attainment in Gàidhlig in the senior phase is strong. Most young people entered for National Qualifications from SCQF level 5 to 7 for Gàidhlig attained a pass at A-C.

How well are children and young people supported to learn and develop?

Inspectors found that children and young people in primary and secondary schools were generally supported well in their learning and development of literacy and Gàidhlig. In most cases observed, staff provided most children and young people with activities which were appropriately challenging.

Where available, Gaelic-speaking language assistants provided effective support for learners. This worked well when the support was planned along with teachers. We found that this helped teachers plan learning for multi-stage classes.

Across sectors, there remains much scope to improve the support provided for learners with additional support needs. We found that many secondary schools were using personal support time to have regular conversations with young people about their learning and progress. These conversations now need to be specific to young people learning Gaelic, and undertaken in Gaelic.

In early learning and childcare settings, we have identified that children need to experience more of the curriculum through Gaelic in order to better meet their learning needs.

Inspectors found that in primary schools, most staff used Curriculum for Excellence well to plan learning experiences which were broad and balanced. However, they noted that improvements are required in secondary schools to ensure personalised learning pathways for young people in GME. Staff need to make better use of digital technology, partnerships with the local community and businesses and colleges to support delivery of some of the curriculum through Gaelic.

Across sectors, inspectors identified the need for a wider range of resources to support GME. These resources need to keep abreast of developments in the curriculum, digital technology and new programmes such as those focusing on raising attainment.

Inspectors have observed staff making good use of advice within, [Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach to Languages](#) to increase the uptake of Gaelic (Learners) across the primary stages. However, they noted a reduction in the numbers of young people studying Gaelic (Learners) and Gàidhlig in the senior phase. It is important to ensure that young people can continue learning Gaelic into and throughout the senior phase. This would support more young people to undertake National Qualifications through the medium of Gaelic.

How well do schools improve the quality of their work?

We found that staff have responded well to career-long professional learning opportunities which are specifically focused on leadership in GME. However, there is scope for providers to make more use of national advice on Gaelic, for example when developing their vision. Schools often need to make better use of self-evaluation approaches to identify priorities which will lead to improvements to the quality of GME. They should continue to ensure that families are meaningfully involved in supporting improvement activities. It is also important that the benefits of bilingualism, as accrued through GME, are promoted with families.

Within GME early learning and childcare settings there is a need to provide appropriate professional learning to ensure staff are well prepared to respond to the forthcoming expansion of hours for early learning and childcare.



Independent schools

Education Scotland inspects a small sample of independent schools each year. The inspection sample covers age 3-18, boarding and day schools, preparatory and primary schools, Steiner schools, international schools, Ministry of Defence schools and faith schools. Inspectors also carry out quality improvement and professional engagement (QUIPE) visits and inspections of newly registered schools. During the period January 2012 to June 2016 we carried out 10 inspections, 25 QUIPE visits and 9 post-registration inspections.

Inspectors found that learners in independent schools are generally highly motivated and responsible, with a positive attitude towards learning. Early learning and childcare settings provide high-quality experiences for younger children. Almost all schools have embedded a culture of self-evaluation and reflection across staff teams. These effective approaches were leading to very positive outcomes for learners, particularly in examination results and in securing positive destinations. There is now a need for schools to track more systematically the skills for learning, life and work that children and young people gain through the extensive and varied out-of-class activities.

How well do children and young people in independent schools learn and achieve?

In almost all schools, a key strength was found to be the motivation and positive attitudes of learners of all ages. In the most effective practice, inspectors noted that children and young people had regular opportunities to collaborate and share their learning with their peers, and were clear about their own targets and next steps in learning. In most schools, we saw learners benefit from ready access to digital technology which enhanced their learning. However, we found the quality of learning and teaching varied across and within departments in the majority of schools. There is scope for staff to share highly-effective practice in learning and teaching more widely. This should include taking an outward-looking approach, for example by visiting other schools.

We highlighted the importance of pupil voice as an improving feature in independent schools. In almost all schools, learners had worthwhile opportunities to influence aspects of school life, for example through committees and focus groups. They should now have more say in shaping and leading their learning in classes.

High numbers of children and young people achieved very good or excellent standards of attainment in most schools and, in almost all schools, young people performed well or very well in examinations. Schools were providing learners with extensive and rich opportunities to achieve more widely by participating, for example, in sports, musical, cultural, outdoor residential and international experiences and this continues to be a key strength of the sector.

How well do independent schools support children and young people to achieve?

Overall, inspectors saw children at nursery and primary stages benefit from stimulating and nurturing environments for learning. Many young people at the senior secondary stages spoke highly of the commitment of their teachers to providing them with individualised, tailored support when they needed it. We found that children and young people had highly-supportive relationships with teachers and other adults, such as staff in boarding houses.

Overall, we found that staff in independent schools worked with parents, partners and agencies effectively in order to support individual learners. In almost all schools, staff were embedding the principles of Getting it Right for Every Child successfully. In the best practice, we noted that children and young people had a well-developed sense of their own health and wellbeing and could articulate their own strengths and needs. Most schools reviewed and refreshed their programmes and courses for personal and social health education regularly. However, inspectors identified weaknesses in approaches relating to child protection and safeguarding in a few schools. This included staffing issues such as disciplinary procedures and safe recruitment practices.

The vision and aims of individual independent schools influence whether or not they implement Curriculum for Excellence. We have found that in almost all schools, staff reviewed the curriculum regularly. In the best examples, leaders have involved whole school communities in revisiting the rationale for the curriculum to meet the needs of children and young people successfully. As a result, we have found that a growing number of schools were widening the learning pathways available to young people at the secondary stages, including offering new courses and subjects. Schools offered Scottish or English-based examinations and qualifications, or a blend of both. A few schools provided young people with the opportunity to undertake the International Baccalaureate. Over the period of this report we increasingly observed schools taking a closer look at the breadth of experiences for young people at the early stages of secondary education in order to provide more opportunities for learning in depth. Schools have provided learners with high-quality opportunities for personal achievement to develop skills in leadership and citizenship through the life of their school and community.

Inspectors found that in schools providing 3-18 provision, children were generally very well supported to make a smooth transition from early learning to primary school, and from primary to the secondary stages. However, there is still room for schools to build on children's prior learning more effectively as they make transitions from stage to stage.

How well do independent schools ensure continuous improvement?

Leadership of change and improvement in independent schools was found to be a strength. In a very few schools we identified weaknesses in the arrangements for governance and in approaches to communicating with and engaging parents.

In most schools senior leadership teams have developed good or better approaches to planning for improvement, based on accurate self-evaluation. In those schools sampled, we found that almost all young people went on to secure a place at university or college. There is scope for the majority of schools to improve how they involve learners, parents and their partners in identifying and reviewing priorities for improvement.

Overall, staff in independent schools have benefited from regular opportunities to engage in high-quality, career-long professional learning to improve their practice. We found that most schools tracked the academic progress of children and young people well. There is now a need for schools to track equally well the skills for learning, life and work that children and young people gain through the extensive and varied out-of-class activities that are often such a strong feature of the sector.

Children leading their learning



In the nursery class in Beaconhurst School, Stirling, young children have a genuine voice and are leading aspects of their own learning and development in innovative ways. For example, children told staff they were keen to improve their own cycling skills. Staff skilfully supported children to develop their own plan of action to help them to learn to cycle safely and effectively. As a result, children assessed risks, learned about bike maintenance and road safety and evaluated their own cycling

skills in a meaningful and highly relevant way. They recorded their own learning independently in floor books and in their own learning journey folders. Their resilience and motivation to learn has resulted in all children in their pre-school year being able to cycle around the school grounds, safely and unaided by adults.

Health and wellbeing - meeting the needs of the school community

George Heriot's School in Edinburgh was founded in 1628 to educate the sons of vulnerable widows. Nearly 400 years on, the school provides very high-quality learning experiences and personalised support for its current community of children and young people, including around 80 boys and girls who have lost their mother or father.



George Heriot's School has gained national recognition as a Rights Respecting School. As a result of their highly-effective work in this area, the school has a particularly strong focus on supporting vulnerable groups of learners and their parents/carers.

As well as bespoke programmes which deal with the issues of bereavement and loss, staff at George Heriot's have established support groups which deal with many other areas of health and wellbeing relevant to the school's community. For example, there is a flourishing Young Carers' group which offers mutual support for children and young people and a very active LGBT group. Parental workshops are offered regularly on areas including 'Mindfulness', 'Raising Teens', 'The Teenage Brain' and on-line safety. There is a very strong emphasis throughout the school community on the importance of mutual respect and of the empowerment of children and young people.

Community learning and development

Until 2015 we inspected the learning community¹⁰ surrounding non-denominational secondary schools at the same time as the school was inspected. From 2015 onwards we moved to carrying out inspections which had a focus on learning within a wider local authority area. This included three reviews of Creative Place, in partnership with Creative Scotland; and three reviews of Development Trusts in partnership with Development Trust Association Scotland.

Inspectors identified a number of key strengths in the work of the community learning and development services (CLD). We found that young volunteers were having a positive impact in their local communities and that, increasingly services were supporting family learning and parenting in partnership with schools.

Inspectors found that, while approaches to self-evaluation across community learning and development partners are improving, there is more to do. There is also scope to capture and measure the impact that volunteering has on individuals and communities. The sector now needs to consider what provision can be put in place to support professional development and training of the workforce.

How well are partners improving learning, increasing life chances, promoting and securing wellbeing?

Inspectors identified some key strengths in the work of CLD. These included effective support for increasing learners' employability and life skills, and well designed activities which improved individuals' mental health and wellbeing and increased confidence and self-esteem. We found that most CLD provision was targeted appropriately at those most in need. Most provision also made a strong contribution to increasing the number of young people achieving a range of accredited awards. For some vulnerable, disadvantaged or less confident young people, we found that participation in accredited youth awards was helping to build their resilience and for a few, this was positively life-changing.

Overall, the number of young people gaining youth awards has increased, including the numbers of young people volunteering through award schemes such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Youth Achievement Award and Saltire awards. As a result, nationally, volunteering is strong in many learning communities. We found that volunteers, including young volunteers, were helping to increase life chances and build a stronger sense of community.

We noted that many young people who attended youth groups and other out-of-school activity were gaining a wide range of skills that complement those they were gaining elsewhere. Increasing numbers of young people could articulate what they were learning. Inspectors found that volunteers and community groups were building their skills, confidence and capacity through good quality support and training from a wide range of CLD providers in the public and third sectors.

¹⁰ The range of publicly funded CLD providers within the geographical areas surrounding non-denominational secondary schools

In many learning communities, inspectors found that adult learners benefited from provision that was increasing their literacy and numeracy skills, including well-targeted learning aimed at the most disadvantaged and those with low levels of qualifications. Many adults progressed to other learning and employment as a result of the support from CLD providers. Inspectors judged the provision that was helping learners whose first language is not English progress to other learning, employment and further and higher education to be of good quality. However, we identified gaps in the provision of opportunities for family and adult learning in a few learning communities.

In almost all learning communities, inspectors identified that a common strength was the way in which community-led organisations engaged effectively with their local community. We highlighted that in the most effective examples, local people were empowered to influence decision-making in their local communities. Local people increasingly secured new services and created employment opportunities in disadvantaged areas, for example through the creation of development trusts. There is scope for providers to involve local people and community groups more in decision-making processes, including Community Planning Partnerships.

How well are partners working together and improving the quality of services and provision?

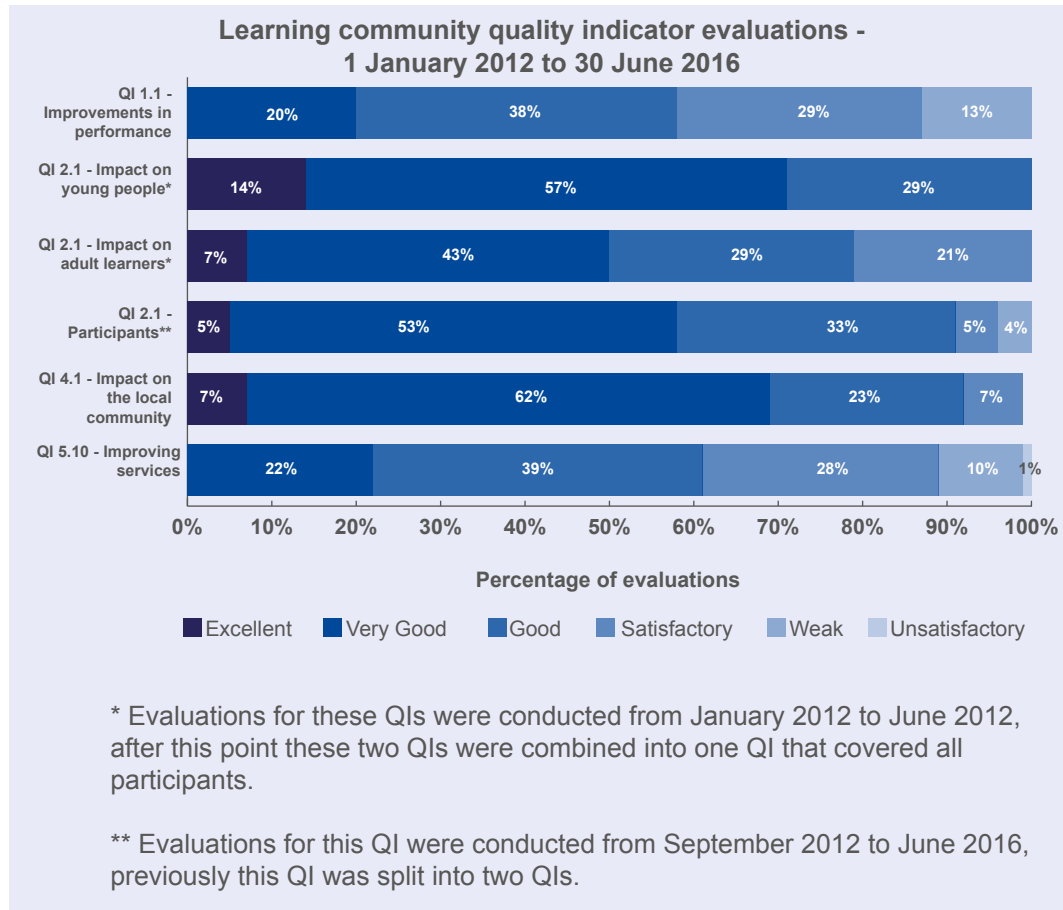
Across CLD, inspectors have seen growing evidence of partners working together more effectively to improve the quality of provision over the period of this report. In most learning communities, partners were clear about their roles and how they contributed to community learning and development locally. In the best examples, we saw partnerships that were well-developed and based on mutual trust and respect. In a few learning communities, there is more to do to ensure coherent delivery of services and to minimise duplication.

We have also seen increasing evidence of effective partnership working between community learning and development providers and schools. We found that, in secondary schools, local businesses and community organisations are increasingly contributing to the curriculum. This is leading to a clearer focus in some schools on improving skills for learning, life and work. This was most effective when teachers and community learning and development staff planned and evaluated learning experiences together. Inspectors often noted that CLD staff working in schools were making a valued contribution to supporting young people's learning, in particular those who face additional challenges. Examples included home/school partnership officers working directly with families to improve attainment and achievement, and family learning.

While planning for improvement was strong in a few local authority CLD services, many others need to make better use of evidence to inform future priorities. Joint self-evaluation and planning between CLD services and their partners remains an under-developed area.

In June 2012, the Scottish Government issued the [Community Learning and Development Strategic Guidance](#) directed at Community Planning Partnerships. This in turn led to the requirement that all local authorities must produce a Community Learning and Development plan. In the most effective examples we saw, partnership structures were supporting the development of these plans. As a result, a shared sense of purpose and ownership has been developed. In a few cases, however, plans were not sufficiently specific or measurable.

In a majority of local authorities there has been a decline in numbers of staff in community learning and development roles in the past five years. With more demands, fewer full-time staff and greater reliance on part-time staff and volunteers, more needs to be done to support professional development and training at all levels of the community learning and development workforce to maintain the quality of service, including investing further in the development of leadership.



Partners working together in community learning and development to support young people

In Midlothian Council, learning pathways provided by Lifelong Learning and Employability (LLE) are improving the life chances of young people. These targeted programmes cover 10 career areas and are supporting those in greatest need effectively. The Learning Pathways, Pave and Pave 2 are an integral part of the learning provision of the council and work closely with all the high schools in the area. The service uses a joint approach to meet the needs of children and young people experiencing a range of social, emotional and behavioural needs and who are disengaged from mainstream education. The team offers flexible support to re-engage young people with learning and careers helping them to achieve their potential. The learning is tailored to individual need and is regularly reviewed. There is a high level of commitment and intensive support from the team towards building up strong, trusting relationships with young people. Some young people are going on to gain Saltire and Youth Achievement awards. The pathways are progressive, supporting and rekindle the interest and belief of young people to secure their next steps whether that be increased accreditation, volunteering, college or sector specific jobs such as retail, admin, green pathway, or music.

Quote from Mum: *"She has went from lying around all day and being quite depressed and unhappy to having more of a spring in her step and is much more motivated. I'm really glad your workers knocked on the door and helped my daughter access the green pathway."*

Quote from an LLE worker: *"One of the young people I have supported was very quiet and did not speak very much. I liaised with CITB and his brother's painting company to set up a modern apprenticeship. He is now working five days a week, some night shifts and also weekends. I noticed a massive change, he appeared more confident, talkative and working everyday was having a positive impact on his self-development. The young person and his family were very appreciative of the support from me and the social work team."*



Career information, advice and guidance services

Education Scotland has carried out external reviews of career information, advice and guidance (CIAG) services in partnership with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) since April 2014.

Across all service areas, we found that partnership working with schools, local authorities and community organisations was strong. SDS staff involved partners well in contributing to the joint planning and delivery of services. This ensured services were matched to the identified needs of customers, communities and key stakeholders.

Going forward, there should be a continued focus on partners, including schools and local authorities, working collaboratively with SDS to support improvement.

Outcomes and Impact

Overall, there is continuous improvement in the numbers of young people moving to positive destinations on leaving school. SDS careers staff are supporting the implementation of the recently-introduced national Participation Measure¹¹ well. Although the new measure was introduced in 2015, local authorities and secondary are not always aware of it.

Inspectors found that careers staff had a strong presence in local secondary schools and worked very effectively with school staff to promote CIAG services. Careers staff were highly visible and accessible to pupils. Young people were supported well to develop career management skills and make appropriate decisions about their next steps on leaving school. As a result of strong partnership working, the number of young people who enter a positive destination nationally has improved over the period covered by this report.

We found that careers staff made good use of information from schools to provide appropriate and targeted support for the most vulnerable pupils who are at risk of not progressing to a positive destination. However, our evidence shows that there were occasions when SDS careers staff did not have sufficient access to young people in secondary schools to enable them to deliver career information and guidance services. As a result, some young people did not receive the level of service they required.

Inspectors judged that the service areas¹² we reviewed provided a well-considered range of provision to meet the needs of communities, stakeholders and customers. Almost all adult customers who received support from careers staff were found to be highly satisfied with the range of services. The support offered through one-to-one coaching and guidance, and help with job-seeking skills, has assisted many adults at risk of losing their job to gain alternative employment. Managers provided a good level of support to help engage with hard to reach customers. They developed and delivered services which took account of different social and cultural groups, and helped customers overcome barriers such as rurality and transport issues.

¹¹ The participation measurement replaces school leaver destinations as the official data source for the Scottish Government National Performance Indicator, 'Increase the proportion of young people in learning, training or work'

¹² Service areas are the geographic areas each CIAG service supports

Service delivery

Inspectors highlighted that, across all service areas, partnership working was strong. SDS staff involved partners well in contributing to joint planning and delivery of services. SDS managers and staff worked well together to provide a team approach to meeting the needs of customers and key stakeholders. We identified positive and supportive relationships between staff to help ensure productive team working and effective communication and information sharing with partners. SDS staff worked well with local partners to ensure services were matched to the identified needs of customers, communities and key stakeholders. Overall, we found the range of services made available to customers and partners to be well-considered and take good account of national priorities and local needs. In almost all local authority areas reviewed, there were good arrangements in place to engage with customers who are vulnerable and those with specific additional needs. SDS staff took care to ensure that accommodation was of an appropriate standard and provided sufficient, reliable access to information and communications technology (ICT). However, inspectors noted that, in schools, the delivery of CIAG services was sometimes affected adversely by unreliable access to ICT which limited the impact of group-work sessions and access to services such as [My World of Work](#)¹³.

Leadership and quality culture

Inspectors judged that, overall, managers and team leaders worked productively with partners to plan delivery of services. SDS managers contributed well to local Community Partnership Planning groups and supported well the implementation of Developing the Young Workforce and development of employability skills.

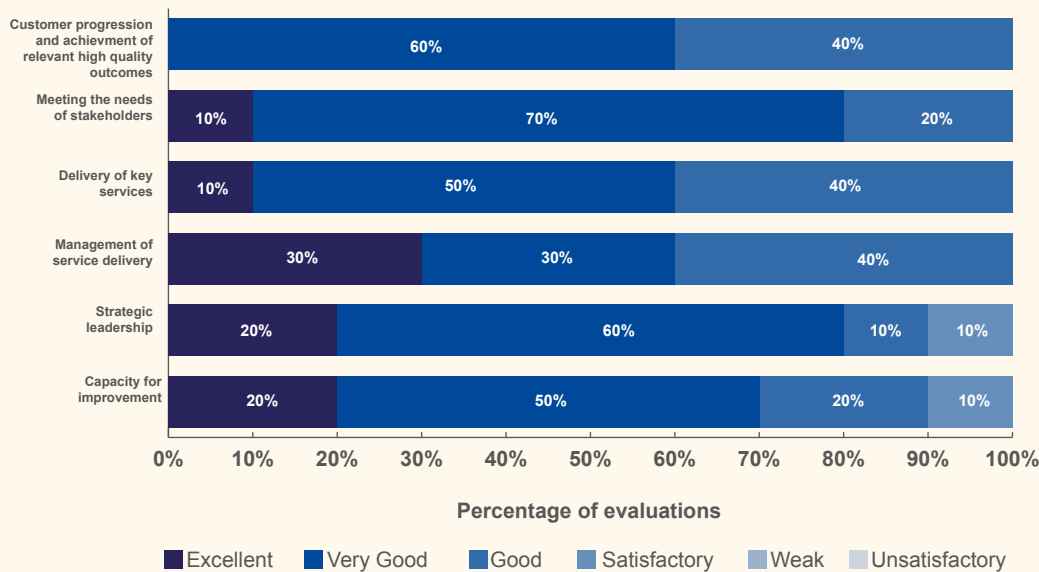
Local teams and area managers made effective use of the team leader role to develop and maintain relationships with partners. Staff were encouraged to bring forward ideas and develop these in ways that improved the effectiveness of services. As a result, inspectors found staff who were motivated to deliver high-quality services. The introduction of '*Everyday Leadership*'¹⁴ has had a positive impact on the development of leadership skills across the teams and staff ownership of service delivery.

SDS extended CIAG services within schools to include all year groups and provide more opportunities for joint planning and career-long professional learning. This was due to be implemented from August 2016. However, as yet we have found that most young people in school are not sufficiently aware of the types of employment opportunities that might be on offer in their local area. In addition, in most schools, the introduction of the [Career Education Standard \(3-18\)](#) was at an early stage and has yet to permeate learning and teaching activities.

¹³ Web service to support effective career planning

¹⁴ SDS approach to leadership

CIAG quality indicator evaluations - 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016



Education Scotland has carried out external reviews of career information, advice and guidance services in partnership with Skills Development Scotland since April 2014. From 1 April 2014 to 30 June 2016, HM Inspectors have reviewed 10 services. The majority of services were evaluated as very good across the quality indicators.

Working with parents to raise awareness of Careers Education Standard

The Skills Development Scotland (SDS) Career Information, Advice and Guidance team in Renfrewshire Council identified a need to improve parents' awareness of the Careers Education Standard (CES) and the range of post-school pathways available to young people. Careers staff worked with partners to arrange a series of events to promote and increase parental engagement. These included delivering presentations to the chairs of all primary and secondary school parent councils to explain career management skills (CMS) and the CES entitlements.

SDS staff initiated a partnership with West College Scotland and local employers to host a modern apprenticeship event for parents and young people. The event focused on providing accurate, up-to-date information on routes into modern apprenticeships and the range of local opportunities. As part of the Early Demonstrator project, SDS staff identified a school which had a pattern of low parental engagement. SDS staff worked with the school to host a parents' evening in a local community centre. The event raised awareness of SDS services and CMS. SDS staff working in schools identified an opportunity to engage with parents of young people in S2/S3 who were making subject choices. These events have broadened and deepened pupils' and parents' understanding of the range of post-school opportunities available to young people in the area and developed understanding of CMS.

Developing senior phase pathways across a locality

Inspectors carried out a thematic review of an aspect of provision across the Moray area. Thematic review was one of a range of new approaches to inspection and review being tried out during 2015-16. It involved a team of inspectors working across a local authority area to explore a particular theme with a focus on the experience of the learner rather than any individual educational establishment or service. Inspectors reviewed how well learning pathways in the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence have led to positive destinations for young people.



Across secondary schools in Moray Council, partnership working with Skills Development Scotland careers staff is strong. Young people value the support they receive from their link career coach. Learning experiences are increasingly tailored to their individual needs. Career coaches work well with guidance staff to embed the development of career management skills in personal and social education programmes.

Effective partnership working enables young people to sustain a positive destination on leaving school. Continual improvements in partnership working are enabling young people to access programmes or experiences such as Career Ready, Skillforce or Reach programmes in addition to learning at school, college or work experience. Through these opportunities young people are developing their skills for learning, life and work and they are well supported during the transition to life beyond the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence.

Colleges

In the period between 2012 and 2016, Education Scotland undertook 36 external reviews of Scotland's colleges. College reviews were underpinned by 100 evaluative Annual Engagement visits across all colleges.

The transformation to a regional configuration through the creation of large multi-campus colleges, along with new regional Outcome Agreements and public sector funding constraints, have together presented a significant set of challenges for the college sector to address. They have also presented important new opportunities. While colleges have made some progress with implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, there is more to be done. The learner population attending college has changed, with a shift towards full-time programmes and an increased number of 15-18 year-old learners.

Inspectors identified a number of strengths which are evident within the college sector. In particular, colleges have well-developed arrangements to gather learner views. Learners are represented well at all levels within colleges and use a range of opportunities to contribute effectively to decision-making and development of college strategy.

Overall, attainment rates on full-time college programmes have improved. The majority of full-time learners successfully complete their college course.

Going forward there is a need for colleges to focus on improving outcomes for learners aged 15-18 on full-time courses, as their success rates are amongst the lowest.

How well are learners progressing and achieving relevant, high-quality outcomes?

Overall, attainment rates on full-time college programmes have improved. The majority of full-time learners successfully complete their college course. Pass rates for Higher Education programmes tend to be higher than Further Education programmes. Across the sector, almost half of learners on full-time college programmes are aged 15-18 years. However, success rates for this group are amongst the lowest. This age group also has the highest number of learners withdrawing from their programme prior to completion, and the highest number completing with partial success. Inspectors identified some colleges who do not yet have in place robust mechanisms to identify learners who are most at risk of withdrawal and some were reactive rather than proactive. As a result, some learners did not receive early enough intervention to help them resolve issues affecting their learning.

Inspectors found that college provision was generally designed well. It meets a diverse range of learner needs, including young people with a range of additional support needs. Almost all colleges offered programmes across a wide range of subject areas. Many achieved external accreditation for the arrangements to support young people. We saw good examples of colleges working closely with social work departments and local schools to share information to support vulnerable learners.

How effective are college learning and teaching processes?

We noted that almost all colleges planned the curriculum well. They worked effectively with a range of external partners and were represented well on key planning groups within their regions. Increasingly, colleges drew on '*Skills Investment Plans*'¹⁵ produced by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and feedback from industry bodies to influence and inform strategic planning of provision. Through the development of a shared vision and understanding of the needs of learners, we have observed colleges working collaboratively to anticipate and accommodate the needs of both the local and national economy.

Inspectors have judged that, across the college sector, progress with implementation of Curriculum for Excellence varied too much. Colleges are expanding their senior phase offer to meet the needs of young people. As a result, an increasing number of vocational programmes were being delivered across a wide range of subject areas. However, we have identified that most colleges do not identify clearly enough how senior phase entitlements for learners will be developed during programme delivery. There is still more work to be done to ensure programmes provide all young people with meaningful work-related experiences. Consequently, some learners did not benefit from direct experience of the world of work to support them in developing skills for employability.

A few colleges have started to deliver Foundation Apprenticeships, which include the piloting of shared delivery models with local schools and employers. Although at an early stage in the pilot, we have found that these models are leading to better integrated provision and a more rounded vocational experience for young learners, particularly in relation to the requirements of the world of work.

The development of skills for learning, life and work was embedded in the curriculum in almost all colleges. Inspectors observed learners being encouraged by staff to reflect regularly on the development of these skills and track their progress during their programme. In most programmes, staff supported learners well to make connections between their classroom learning and the world of work. In the majority of classes inspectors observed, staff used questioning techniques effectively to check learner understanding. They provided learners with helpful, written and oral feedback on what they have to do to improve or further extend their knowledge. This helped learners to reflect on their progress.

Inspectors highlighted that colleges used digital technologies effectively to support and enhance learning and teaching. Almost all have well-developed Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) that enabled learners to study independently and access resources outwith formal lessons. Teaching staff used VLEs well to support approaches to ongoing assessment, provide access to learning materials, and enable learners to collaborate on learning activities and tasks. Many colleges have well developed arrangements for internet access. As a result, we saw learners who were supported to use their own devices such as tablets and smartphones in their learning.

Evidence from our reviews shows that college staff and SDS career coaches provided comprehensive guidance services to help ensure that learners in the senior phase were kept informed about next steps in their learning or routes to employment. A few colleges made very effective use of [My World of Work](#)¹⁶ to raise awareness of a wide range of opportunities with learners. However, the potential of this service has not yet been fully realised across the college sector as a whole.

¹⁵ '*Skills Investment Plans*' give a picture of the economic and labour market situation, trends in skills and qualification supply and employers' perspectives on the big skills issues affecting sector growth

¹⁶ Web service to support effective career planning

How well are learners engaged in enhancing their own learning and the work and life of their college?

Inspectors found that colleges frequently had well-developed arrangements in place to gather learner views. Learners were represented well at all levels within colleges and used a range of opportunities effectively to contribute to decision-making and development of college strategy. Where learner engagement was highly effective, colleges had a culture of engagement, considered learners to be partners, and valued their contribution.

Overall, learners were found to value the support they received from college staff very highly. They welcomed the opportunity to learn theory alongside practical skills and undertook work-based experiences to help them develop skills for employment. They enjoyed the social aspects of college life and the contextualisation of college programmes that focus on a particular vocational area that interests them. Younger learners benefited from the supportive culture of colleges and the opportunity to learn alongside peers of all ages.

How well are the colleges led and how well are they enhancing the quality of their services for learners and stakeholders?

Leadership in colleges has undergone a significant period of change over the last three years. The sector has experienced a very substantial loss of staff expertise and experience, particularly at middle and senior management levels. The scale of the number of staff undertaking new roles at senior and middle management levels is significant. We have identified that the effect of mergers has resulted in staff across multiple campuses needing to adapt to new ways of working, such as applying revised quality arrangements and adhering to new communication and reporting arrangements.

While, overall, inspectors have found that the leadership of colleges is effective in securing improvements for learners, we have noted that a few colleges were experiencing challenges in relation to leadership which may impact negatively on learner progress and outcomes if they are not addressed. Almost all colleges we reviewed engaged well with a wide range of external partners, including local employers and secondary schools. They made good use of these relationships to plan vocational career pathways and support young people to make the transition from school. However, in a few colleges, joint planning of provision between college and partners is not yet sufficiently robust to support fully-developed regional strategic approaches.

We found that colleges generally used self-evaluation well to reflect on all aspects of activity and support action-planning for improvement. This has been particularly evident in colleges which have not experienced a merger as a result of regionalisation. However, where merger has resulted in the formation of new, larger institutions, college staff have experienced challenges in the development and implementation of new college-wide arrangements for self-evaluation. Team-working across and between senior and operational managers has on occasions proved difficult and in some cases has impacted negatively on the overall quality of self-evaluation and action plans for improvement.

Many colleges have identified the need to improve learner success rates for learners on full-time Further Education programmes as a priority. We found that, where course team meetings focused specifically on retention and attainment for learners aged 15-18 years, performance indicators had improved significantly. However, most colleges do not yet analyse the performance of learners in the senior phase as a discrete group. This limits the ability of course teams to identify actions for improvement which are specific to the needs of learners aged 15-18 years on full-time college programmes.

Supporting transition to positive destinations for school leavers through effective data sharing



Partnership working between Forth Valley College and the local authority has made significant improvements to transition planning arrangements for school pupils in the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence. The schools data sharing portal supports partners to track, manage and support transition to college programmes by providing direct access to

real-time information about the application process for each pupil. School staff are enabled to react quickly and provide tailored support for individual pupils in, for example, preparing for interviews, arranging release from school, planning travel to college, attending interviews, or achieving entry conditions. This enables school staff to provide targeted assistance and support pupils to identify an alternative positive destination. Greater analysis of data by both the college and local authority is helping partners to identify trends and support joint planning arrangements for sharing of good practice between schools. The college has also identified those programmes where school pupils are less successful in obtaining a place. This has enabled the college to review recruitment processes for these programmes and remove any unintended barriers to access.

Embedding entrepreneurship and enterprise in the curriculum

Staff in North Highland College recognised the promotion of skills in entrepreneurship and enterprise is particularly important in communities experiencing economic change. The development of these skills is deemed a key priority to encourage young people to create their own employment opportunities and contribute to the economy of the local area. This is achieved by a number of interventions which ensure that every college-based learner has the opportunity to acquire these skills, regardless of their vocational specialism. A calendar of events supports learners to participate in activities such as essential skills development, career management skills workshops and visiting employers. In addition, all full-time programmes incorporate an enterprise project which is tailored to each curricular area. Many of these activities are coordinated and promoted by a '*Scottish Institute for Enterprise*' intern who manages and promotes enterprise opportunities across the college. Staff enterprise champions work with voluntary champions from the learner body to ensure that these activities are supported and promoted effectively to learners.

Educational psychology services

Education Scotland introduced a new approach for inspecting educational psychology services (EPS) in April 2015 using a model of scrutiny which is strongly focused on validating the findings of self-evaluation activities undertaken by the services themselves. Over the period covered by this report we found that the quality of leadership of EPS improved. There is now a clearer vision for services based around national and local priorities. We also found that EPS were becoming better integrated into local authority planning. Inspectors noted that while services had better self-evaluation processes in place, they need to be more focused on measuring the impact and outcomes of interventions.

Inspectors identified that in the majority of EPS there were examples of very good practice in relation to learning and teaching and partnership working. The majority of services were developing an increasing role in the prevention and early intervention of mental health issues in children and young people.

How well do educational psychology services support children and young people to learn and achieve?

Inspectors found that EPS offered a wide range of services to parents, families and carers. They identified EPS involvement in multi-agency work with parents and carers to support children and young people as a particular strength. This included working with others to provide family learning programmes such as 'Triple P' and 'Mellow Parenting'. Almost all EPS inspected provided very effective advice and consultation services to parents with pre-school children who have additional support needs. They also engaged very well with parents of older children and young people to provide advice on supporting learning and socio-emotional development. As a result, almost all local authorities and the majority of other stakeholders such as parents/carers, social workers, and health professionals were found to value the contribution of EPS.

Our evidence shows that services provided a range of very good capacity-building activities for teachers and other professionals, including advice, consultation and career-long professional learning. These activities supported staff to help meet children's and young people's learning needs in areas such as the development of literacy skills, implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child and promotion of positive behaviour such as nurture and restorative approaches.

Inspectors judged that the work EPS were doing to support the development of early literacy skills was often a key strength. Many services produced high-quality materials for schools, engaged directly with staff, and developed policy and practice guidelines for local authorities to improve the quality of learning, teaching, and assessment of children's early literacy skills. We found that these approaches were helping to build capacity in schools to improve attainment in literacy for children, particularly at the early stages. More recently, EPS have supported local authorities to develop learning and teaching approaches to help address the poverty-related attainment gap. EPS now need to continue to build on these strengths to impact on higher-order comprehension skills and other areas of learning, including numeracy and the measurement of health and wellbeing.

We found that EPS have increased their involvement in supporting the mental health of children and young people significantly. Almost all of this work is preventative or early intervention with individuals, families and schools. Work on self-harm, suicide prevention, developing nurturing relationships and enhancing vulnerable children's and young people's self-efficacy is helping to reduce the number of referrals to other agencies such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Inspectors noted that the quality and depth of work in this area has also improved with a growing number of therapeutic interventions being offered such as cognitive behavioural therapy, video interactive guidance and solution focused approaches. More robust data is now required to illustrate the preventative impact of early intervention on reducing more serious mental health problems.

Previously, EPS worked with post-school providers to support young people up to the age of 24 years. This included providing assessment information and advice on appropriate intervention strategies for young people with additional support needs. Financial constraints have had an impact in this area of work. While the majority offer advice, inspectors identified only a few services that now provide a systematic and comprehensive service across the five core functions of consultation, assessment, intervention, training and research to those aged 18-24 years.

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

Our inspections indicate that the leadership of EPS has improved. We found most services now have a clear vision which is aligned with national and local priorities. Services are also more integrated into local authority planning which is helping them to contribute more and have greater impact on the key improvement priorities identified by councils.

Our evidence also shows, however, that too many services measure the effectiveness of the self-evaluation processes rather than the impact and outcomes of their work. Services need to continue to develop their research role more comprehensively and link more closely with academic research literature so that they can continue to innovate and help translate new theories into educational practice.

The number of educational psychologists is declining and this is impacting on services' ability to continue to deliver their core functions across the three levels of engagement. We found that many services were carrying vacancies and finding it difficult to recruit replacement staff. In response to this, almost all services are looking at how they can reconfigure their models of service delivery to ensure equity for all stakeholders.

Developing higher-order literacy skills

West Dunbartonshire Educational Psychology Service (WDEPS) has been supporting the education authority in improving children's higher-order reading comprehension skills by using a reciprocal teaching (Palinscar and Brown 1984) approach. All primary and secondary schools receive training and resources from the EPS and follow up coaching sessions.

Data has been collected each year since 2012 to evaluate impact on children and teachers, and to measure improvements in attainment, with a focus on closing the attainment gap for the most disadvantaged.

WDEPS found that the approach (informed by improvement science):

- improved reading comprehension (16 month gain over a 6 month period) and decoding of print (12 month gain over a 6 month period) in those who participated;
- contributed to closing the attainment gap between the lowest performing 30% of primary school aged pupils and the highest performing 30% of primary aged pupils;
- improved pupils' use of metacognitive strategies;
- improved teacher knowledge and understanding of teaching reading comprehension;
- improved teacher confidence in teaching reading; and
- was most successful for those children who found reading comprehension difficult.



Prison learning

Inspectors from Education Scotland evaluate the quality of out-of-cell activities for prisoners on every prison inspection carried out by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in Scotland. During the period January 2012 to June 2016, Education Scotland participated in 14 inspections of prisons.

Overall, inspectors found that prisons offered a good range of purposeful learning activities to match the ability, preference and age of most prisoners. Learning was self-directed with appropriate support from tutors where required. A key area noted for improvement by inspectors is the need to improve opportunities for prisoners to progress on to more advanced vocational qualifications, and approaches to gathering feedback from prisoners on the quality and planning of scheduled activities.

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) is making good use of external evaluation and research to help inform the learning provision across all 13 of their establishments.

How well do prisoners learn and achieve outcomes?

Overall, we found that prisons offered a good range of purposeful activities to match the ability, preference and age of most prisoners. That range included employment opportunities in a range of areas such as wood assembly, recycling and waste management, grounds maintenance, catering and laundry. Prisons usually also provided vocational training opportunities in construction, horticulture, industrial sewing, cleaning, catering and painting and decorating.

In the Learning Centres, inspectors found that prisoners participated and were successful in a good range of programmes at SCQF levels 2-7, including literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology and core skills courses. However, inspectors found that there were too few opportunities for prisoners to progress on to more advanced vocational qualifications and, in many cases, the awards offered were individual modules rather than full awards.

Many prisoners gained useful employability certificates in industrial cleaning, health and safety, core skills, first aid at work (including CPR), manual handling and fire safety. Smaller groups of prisoners trained for construction site cards and were successful in gaining forklift certificates in preparation for their release. Our evidence shows that there were opportunities for prisoners to participate in work experience outside of their prison, based upon their behaviour inside prison and their proximity to release. However, the range of these experiences, while expanding, was very limited.

How well does the prison service support prisoners to develop and learn?

Inspectors judged that, overall, the quality of activities in the Learning Centres and in vocational programmes was good and engaged most of the prisoners who participated in them. Two colleges delivered the educational programmes in each of the prisons in Scotland. They provided training for teaching staff to deliver a good range of appropriate qualifications. Much of the learning was self-directed, with appropriate support from tutors as required. We found that Learning Centre staff were available on an outreach basis to support theory aspects of the vocational training and to help engage prisoners in basic literacy and numeracy within residential halls, particularly those prisoners classified as protection-regime prisoners.

We highlighted a few examples of digital learning and associated qualifications being offered across the SPS Estate. However, we noted that there was no internet access in any of Scotland's prisons and this was having a major impact on the use of digital skills to support learning.

Inspectors found that the range of activities for those prisoners on remand has improved in the last few years, but there was still a large group of remand prisoners who did not participate in education and vocational programmes. We noted that the low uptake was as a result of poor promotion of activities or their unavailability to remand prisoners.

We observed mostly positive and mutually respectful relationships between prisoners and staff. Prisoners felt that staff supported them well in their activities. Although classes included prisoners of very mixed ability, we saw teaching staff provide good pace and challenge during learning activities. Inspectors noted that many Learning Centres did not have sufficiently robust or systematic processes to identify and support prisoners with additional support needs and staff relied on prisoners disclosing their needs if required. In a number of prisons, activities for protection-regime prisoners were limited.

How well does the prison service improve the quality of its work?

Our evidence shows that SPS made good use of external evaluation and research to help inform the learning provision across all 13 of their establishments. This included a number of recent internal reviews to inform the development of their first Strategy for Learning and Skills and their New Generation Contract, currently delivered by Fife College and New College Lanarkshire.

Within HMYOI Polmont, inspectors were impressed with a major initiative that was being undertaken in redefining the institution as a learning environment. Curriculum for Excellence is being adapted and applied to help meet the learning needs of young people in custody. The Learning Environment Steering Group, comprising key partners, provided effective strategic oversight of education and training provision. It has improved and extended the range of learning provision that it offers, and provided staff with professional development to enable them to meet further the young men's learning needs. This has increased the number of young men who take up opportunities to have their learning recognised and accredited.

Across other prisons, we found that learning activities were planned by staff to meet prisoner needs. Within the restricted environment, we noted the challenge for prisons to involve prisoners in giving feedback on the quality and planning of scheduled activities. As a result, there were limited opportunities for prisoners to influence or shape aspects of their own learning or contribute to the planning of activities offered. Systems and measures to record how many offenders were taking part in learning and what impact this was having are not yet robust. To improve learning further, inspectors identified that the SPS should take a more joined-up and consistent approach to supporting learning across its estate.

Her Majesty's Prison and Young Offenders Institution Polmont

HMYOI Polmont has carried out significant work with a wide range of partners to create a learning environment. Curriculum for Excellence has been adapted to help meet the learning needs of young people who are experiencing their senior phase entitlements in custody and who, in many instances, have specific learning needs.

This, alongside other activities and programmes, which support their social and emotional needs as a result of disadvantage or childhood trauma, has had a positive impact. A now wide-ranging curriculum has resulted in a gradual increase in young men and young women taking up learning activities. There is also an increase in accreditation opportunities, and achievement is recognised and celebrated regularly.

A Learning Environment Steering Group made up of key partners acts as a source of advice and support to the establishment. This helps ensure that the curriculum continues to meet the needs of the young people and equips them with the knowledge and skills to achieve and contribute upon release from custody. The recent introductions of an employability area and throughcare officers are also improving the transition from custody to community by linking young people to support and employability services. This includes housing and benefit services, employment or further education.



Key challenges and opportunities across sectors

The previous sections of this report have charted a range of strengths and development needs in each of the sectors in which we undertake inspections and review work. In a number of cases these strengths and weaknesses are specific to the sector, reflecting the distinct characteristics of the provision, the learners and the workforce involved.

Overall, inspectors have observed a strong commitment across leaders and staff to improving outcomes for children and young people. In many of the establishments and services inspected we have identified aspects of leadership as a strength.

Scottish education is highly inclusive. Staff across all sectors have improved their knowledge and understanding of Getting it Right for Every Child and many are using the wellbeing indicators well to assess, plan and provide appropriate support.

Learning experiences for children and young people have continually improved during the period of the report. Children and young people benefit from positive relationships with staff and other learners. As a result, overall, we observed children and young people who were motivated, engaged and actively involved in their learning. More young people are having a wider range of their learning and achievements accredited through youth award schemes.

Looking across all of our evidence we see five key aspects of education provision and practice which we believe should be priorities for improvement across many or all sectors if Scottish learners are to achieve their potential. These are:

- exploiting fully the flexibility of Curriculum for Excellence to meet better the needs of all learners;
- improving arrangements for assessment and tracking to provide personalised guidance and support throughout the learner journey;
- maximising the contribution of partnerships with other services, parents and the wider community to enhance children's and young people's learning experiences;
- improving further the use of self-evaluation and improvement approaches to ensure consistent high quality of provision; and
- growing a culture of collaboration within and across establishments and services to drive innovation, sharing of practice and collective improvement.

We will now expand on each of these in turn.

Exploiting fully the flexibility of Curriculum for Excellence to meet better the needs of all learners

Inspectors have identified many aspects of learning, across sectors, which have been transformed through implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. Year on year we have observed how the curriculum has evolved and developed. In best practice, providers have developed their curriculum in line with the updated expectations produced by inspectors to support the pace of implementation. However, we have noted that some establishments and services have not adapted and developed their curriculum as quickly or coherently as expected.

Providers now need to make full use of the new areas of flexibility presented by Curriculum for Excellence to design a curriculum which is dynamic and customised to take account of the local context and to meet the needs and aspirations of children and young people. This should include ensuring that all learners are sufficiently challenged and stretched by their learning with an emphasis on promoting deep learning and understanding rather than simply covering a large amount of content.

Providers need to design a curriculum which provides progression pathways for their children and young people through the broad general education and senior phase which enable all learners to make the best possible progress. This includes developing new pathways and customised programmes for groups of children who need additional support to ensure they are motivated and engaged in learning. Many schools also need to do more to develop the quality of the broad general education they offer in the first three years of secondary school, to ensure it provides sufficient depth and challenge to enable all learners to achieve to their potential.

As providers make use of the flexibility they now have in designing learning, teaching and assessment, care needs to be taken to ensure that these local arrangements do not create unnecessary workload demands for staff and learners.

As yet, the potential impact of establishing literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing areas as cross-cutting priorities for all teachers has not been fully realised. There needs to be a more consistent and effective focus on improving attainment in literacy and numeracy and on developing children's and young people's health and wellbeing. Providers need to fully consider how to develop children's and young people's health and wellbeing, and literacy and numeracy skills across all areas of the curriculum.

Improving arrangements for assessment and tracking to provide personalised guidance and support throughout the learner journey

Providers should do more to ensure that the individual needs of children and young people and their particular interests and aspirations inform the decisions that are made about the progression pathways they follow through the broad general education and into the senior phase. Effective approaches to assessment, monitoring and providing personal support are key to informing these decisions. Having this information will enable providers to build effectively on children's and young people's prior learning, to ensure learners engage in learning at the right level of difficulty.

Within the broad general education, the introduction of more consistent moderation of professional judgement, backed up by national standardised assessments at the primary and early stages of secondary, as part of the National Improvement Framework, provides an opportunity for providers to address this area. These approaches will support them to make more informed professional judgements about how well children and young people are progressing in their learning.

Providers need to make important judgments about the most appropriate National Qualifications pathway for each learner. These decisions must be informed by close tracking and monitoring of learners' progress through the broad general education. A clear understanding of the curriculum level achieved in each subject area towards the end of the broad general education is critical to informing this decision and to ensure a smooth progression in learning for all learners as they move into the senior phase.

Maximising the contribution of partnerships with other services, parents and the wider community to enhance children's and young people's learning experiences

Our evidence often highlights partnerships as a growing strength of education provision. Establishments and services across sectors are increasingly looking to strengthen their engagement with stakeholders and the wider community. However, there is more to do to establish the widespread establishment of strong partnership working in ways that improve learning provision and benefits children and young people to the maximum extent.

Between education providers, for example, further progress needs to be made towards collaborative curriculum planning in local areas, not least so that young people can make choices and progress smoothly through coherent senior phase pathways which may involve a mix of school, college and/or training provider provision.

Whilst significant progress has been made in recent years, there is also a need for increased commitment and drive to strengthen partnership working with families, local businesses and community learning and development organisations to support the development of children's and young people's skills for learning, life and work.

In particular, providers should strengthen further the involvement of parents and families in their child's learning and look at ways to involve those who are more difficult to reach.

With the publication of Developing the Young Workforce, Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy, came an increased focus on the importance of partnerships to developing an effective approach to careers education. Providers need to have a very clear focus on improving learning provision, progression and pathways for learners with employability in mind, when growing existing partnerships and establishing new partnerships. These should be jointly evaluated regularly to ensure improved outcomes for learners.

Improving further the use of self-evaluation and improvement approaches to ensure consistent high-quality provision

Whilst a commitment to the principles of self-evaluation is now a well-established feature of Scottish education, we found that, across almost all sectors, the use and impact of self-evaluation for self-improvement still varied too much. For some providers this means that they need to put better processes in place. For others there is a need to analyse the evidence gathered from self-evaluation more effectively in order to identify the most appropriate priorities for improvement.

There now needs to be a sustained and consistent focus across the country on using self-evaluation and improvement methodologies to address the variability in the quality of learning which exists within establishments and services as an important step towards securing better outcomes for children and young people.

This means ensuring the culture within establishments and services is one which promotes improvements in pedagogy, which is committed to developing a collective understanding of high-quality provision and which puts in place a range of approaches to self-evaluation to ensure all children and young people experience the highest quality of learning on a consistent basis.

Enhanced approaches to self-evaluation should also ensure staff are confident in methods such as 'practitioner enquiry' and good use of data which enable them to develop a deep understanding of highly-effective learning and teaching and ask critical questions about their own practice.

Staff within establishments and services need to engage in professional learning opportunities individually and collectively which will support them to improve their practice. This includes sharing highly-effective practice more widely so that it spreads and creates greater consistency in the quality of learning that children and young people experience.

Growing a culture of collaboration within and across establishments and services to drive innovation, sharing of practice and collective improvement

Effective collaboration within, across and beyond establishments and services has significant benefits. The value of collaboration as a strategy for securing improvement was reflected very directly in the recommendation in the OECD review that Scotland should focus on strengthening 'leading from the middle'. How to promote collaboration is also one of the key issues on which the Scottish Government has sought views through its consultation Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve Excellence and Equity – A Governance Review.

Inspectors have seen some good examples of establishments and services collaborating to promote mutual improvement, but these were too limited overall. The wider spread of high-quality learning and teaching approaches through effective collaboration between education providers, potentially in many different forms and formats, will be crucial to reducing the variability in the quality of provision which currently exists.

Inspectors have observed improvements in approaches and impact of career-long professional learning. More leaders and practitioners are engaging in collaborative professional learning and enquiry. This is helping them to undertake action research and use it to reflect on their own practice, make changes informed by evidence and to evaluate the impact of the changes made.

Providers now need to build on the progress made so far and promote the use of effective collaboration as a regular part of their approach to undertaking systematic improvement and professional learning, with a focus on improving consistency in learning and teaching.

Conclusion

We believe that addressing these five priority areas for improvement effectively will make a decisive contribution to achieving the twin aims of excellence and equity for Scottish learners which sit at the heart of the National Improvement Framework.

We know high-quality leadership will be essential to ensuring that sufficient progress is made, across all sectors, and at all levels in the system. Whilst we have often noted leadership as a strength in inspections where provision is strong or improving, a continued focus needs to be placed in every sector to ensuring that high-quality leadership is a feature of every educational establishment and service. It is key to achieving the progress and success that our learners deserve.

As the national improvement agency, Education Scotland has a key role to play to support leaders and practitioners to address these key areas through providing a blend of guidance, support and direct engagement through a range of clear and focused activities, and inspection and review. Our resources and activities will be aligned to support improvements in these areas.

We will keep under review the arrangements for inspection and reporting on the quality of education across sectors. This will enable us to respond with agility and flexibility as key educational policies and priorities develop. We will also regularly review the focus and purposes of thematic inspections of specific aspects of education at a national level based on key priorities. In that way we aim to ensure that inspection continues to make a strong contribution to the next phase of Scotland's education improvement journey.

Appendix 1: Evidence base and terminology

The evidence highlighted in this report comes from a wide range of activities undertaken by Education Scotland during the period January 2012-June 2016. The findings from establishment and service inspections across sectors are complemented by information derived from reviews on thematic aspects of education; follow-up and focused visits to establishments and services; a wide range of engagement with the education sector and interaction with stakeholders at local and national levels.

Qualitative and quantitative terms

The following terms are used in inspection and review reports and are also reflected in this publication.

Excellent	outstanding, sector-leading
Very good	major strengths
Good	important strengths with areas for improvement
Satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Weak	important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

The following standard terms of quantity are used by Education Scotland

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

Other quantitative terms which may be used in this publication are to be understood as in common English usage.

The percentages in the graphs may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Bibliography of inspection and review thematic reports

Education Scotland has published a range of relevant thematic reports on aspects of education based on evidence gathered during the period January 2012-June 2016.

2016 Publications

Thematic review of the Moray Area (May 2016)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/ThematicReviewMorayArea160516.pdf>

Hairdressing Modern Apprenticeship report: A report on the review on the review of off-the-job training in Hairdressing Modern Apprenticeship (November 2016)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/MAreport-hairdressing-nov16.pdf>

The development of learner employability in Scotland's colleges: Aspect report (September 2016)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/LearnerEmployabilityColleges300916.pdf>

Curriculum planning and alignment in Scotland's colleges: Aspect report (September 2016)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/CurriculumPlanningAndAlignmentInColleges300916.pdf>

Secondary school fieldwork summary report (September 2016)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/frwk12-secondary-school-fieldwork-summary2016.pdf>

2015 Publications

Engineering modern apprenticeship pathfinder report: A report on the review of off-the-job training in Engineering Modern Apprenticeships (November 2015)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/MAreport-engineering.pdf>

A review of youth awards in Scotland: Helping young people to be successful, confident, effective and responsible citizens (November 2015)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/youth-awards-review-2015.pdf>

Annual report to SFC on the findings of Education Scotland evaluative activity in Scotland's colleges during the period 1 August 2014 - 31 July 2015 (December 2015)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/AnnualReporttoSFC181215.pdf>

Community Learning and Development in Curriculum for Excellence: 1. Senior Phase (September 2015)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/CLDinCfEtaskreportSept2015.pdf>

Understanding learners achieving with partial success: A thematic aspect report on provision in Scotland's Colleges on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council (September 2015)

<https://www.education.gov.scot/Documents/UnderstandingLearnersAchievingPartialSuccessReport.pdf>

The use of My World of Work web service to support effective career planning (September 2015)

<https://www.education.gov.scot/Documents/UseMyWoWThematicTaskReport.pdf>

Aspect review of the Education Authority and University ITE partnership arrangements (phase one) (September 2015)

https://education.gov.scot/Documents/AspectReview_ITEPartnershipArrangements1.pdf

Preparing young people for the future: An evaluation of the arrangements made by Scottish colleges to deliver the entitlements of the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council (September 2015)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/PreparingYoungPeopleAspectReportFinal2.pdf>

Literacy and English 3-18 curriculum impact review (April 2015)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/lit18-3to18-Curr-Review-Lit-and-Eng.pdf>

Technologies 3-18 curriculum impact review: Building Society – Young people's experiences of and outcomes in the technologies (March 2015)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/tec8-technologies-impact-report.aspx>

Secondary school fieldwork summary report

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/frwk12-secondary-school-fieldwork-summary2015.pdf>

2014 Publications

Supporting learners to succeed: A thematic report on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council on provision of services delivered by Scotland's colleges to support learners to succeed in their learning (October 2014)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/Supportinglearnerstosucceed.pdf>

Computing and digital media: A subject-based aspect report on provision in Scotland's Colleges on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council (September 2014)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/ComputingDigitalMediaAspectReport.pdf>

Maximising learner success in Scotland's colleges: A thematic aspect report on provision in Scotland's Colleges on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council (September 2014)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/MaxisingLearnerSuccess.pdf>

Renewables (Energy): A subject-based aspect report on provision in Scotland's Colleges on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council (September 2014)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/RenewablesReport260914.pdf>

English for speakers of other languages in Scotland's colleges: A subject-based aspect report on provision in Scotland's colleges on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council (June 2014)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/ESOLScotlandsColleges.pdf>

Business, Management and Administration: A subject-based aspect report on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council on provision in Scotland's Colleges (June 2014)

https://education.gov.scot/Documents/BMA_AspectReport300614.pdf

Making Sense: Education for children and young people with dyslexia in Scotland (May 2014)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/inc37making-sense>

Meeting the needs of learners and employers through effective planning, application and admission processes in Scotland's colleges: An aspect report on provision in Scotland's colleges on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council (February 2014)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/MeetingtheNeeds280214.pdf>

Religious and Moral Education 3-18 curriculum impact report (February 2014)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/rme30CurriculumImpactReviewRME.pdf>

2013 Publications

Creativity across learning 3-18 curriculum impact review (September 2013)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Creativity/CRE1WhatAreCreativitySkills/Creativity3to18.pdf>

Social studies 3-18 curriculum impact review: 2013 update (September 2013)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/SocialStudies3to182013Update.pdf>

The Sciences 3-18 curriculum impact review: 2013 update (September 2013)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Sciences/SCI14SciencesCurriculumImpact/sciences-3-to-18-2013-update.pdf>

Health and wellbeing: The responsibility of all 3-18 curriculum impact review (September 2013)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/hwb14-impact-report.pdf>

Colleges and community planning: Maximising the contribution of Scotland's colleges to improving outcomes for learners through community planning, in a regional context - A thematic-based aspect report on provision in Scotland's Colleges on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council (May 2013)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/CollegesCommunityPlanning.pdf>

2012 Publications

Making the difference: The impact of staff qualifications on children's learning in early years (November 2012)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/elc39MakingTheDifference.pdf>

The involvement of external experts in school education (November 2012)

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/Involvementofexternalexpertsinschooleducation.pdf>

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