

Inspection of Local Authorities

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

December 2018

Introduction

In 2017 we introduced a new model of inspection of local authorities which we piloted in December 2017. Clackmannanshire Council was inspected during week commencing 21 May 2018. HM Inspectors and professional associates, working in partnership with Audit Scotland, evaluated the education service strategies to improve learning, raise attainment and narrow the poverty-related attainment gap. These are the aims of the [Scottish Attainment Challenge](#), a key Scottish Government programme introduced in 2015. Within this programme, Clackmannanshire Council is one of nine Challenge Authorities.

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

The Scottish Attainment Challenge has a total budget of £750 million over a five year period. As a Challenge Authority, Clackmannanshire Council is allocated a significant proportion of this funding. The money is being directed to support the excellence and equity agenda. The aim is to close the attainment gap which currently exists between those living in Scotland's least and most deprived areas. This report is our findings on the progress Clackmannanshire Council is making and the capacity of the council to continue to make appropriate progress with this work. Whilst we worked in partnership with others to gather the evidence that underpins this, the report and the judgements in it belong solely to Education Scotland.

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

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

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

Context

The education service in Clackmannanshire Council is responsible for the education of approximately 6,550 school age pupils in mainstream education establishments, and for 35 school age pupils who are based outside of mainstream education in external placements. The strategic lead for education across the council is the Chief Education Officer. Education is delivered through:

2 council-managed early learning and childcare centres (ELCCs);

4 partner providers of early learning and childcare;

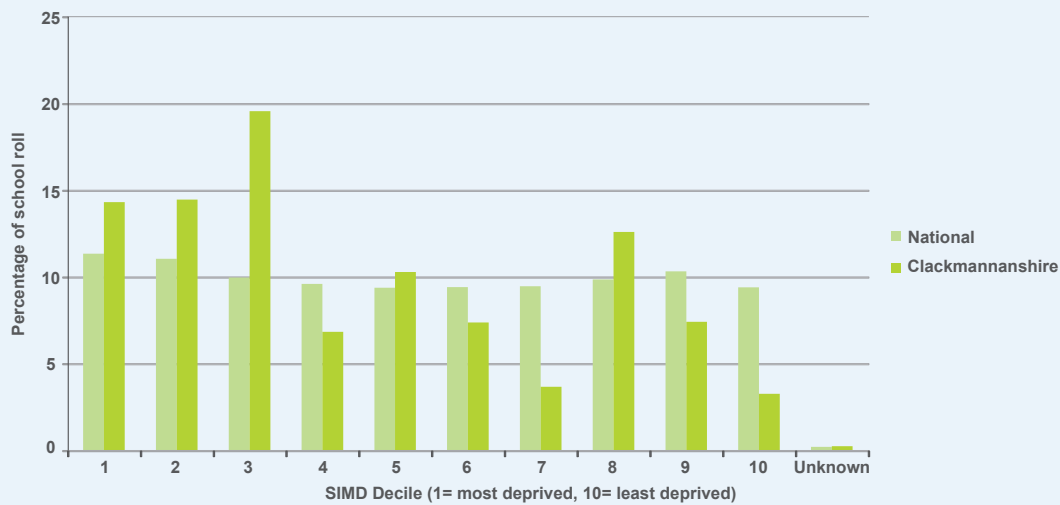
18 primary schools;

3 secondary schools;

1 school for children and young people with additional support needs.

There are 6,585 pupils across the authority's primary, secondary and additional support needs schools, and a further 1,293 children in early years settings.

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



“ Mediocrity will not be tolerated. ”

Chief Education Officer

It is clear that the leader of the council, the policy lead, the members of the new tripartite group and the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee demonstrate commitment to improving learning and building a culture of aspiration.

“ Education plays a huge part in turning around deprivation. ”

Leader of the Council

There is now a clearly articulated vision and well-defined set of priorities for raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap within Clackmannanshire. It is closely aligned with the values and priorities of the current council’s corporate plan, the Children’s Services Plan and in line with the National Improvement Framework (NIF) priorities. This is providing a strong shared vision for improvement amongst elected members, centrally deployed staff and heads of establishment. However, the vision, has not yet reached all staff, particularly at classroom and playroom levels. As a result, it has not yet had sufficient impact on classroom and playroom pedagogy and practice.

In developing its vision and strategic focus, as part of its self-evaluation framework, [Clackmannanshire Education Plan 2017-18: Towards Excellence](#), the authority has looked to strengthen its understanding of the Clackmannanshire context, supported by the [Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017-2027](#) (LOIP). It has also worked collaboratively with academic experts and other educational leads to support improvement and to develop outcomes methodologies which integrate policy research with practice.

It has established key principles and expectations to support the realisation of its vision through establishing:

- 6 Big Goals;
- 4 overarching priorities based on the NIF Priorities;
- A measurement plan and data collection approach based on a holistic set of 15 Key Performance Measures;
- Clear alignment with local, regional and national improvement planning.

The Attainment Scotland Fund in Clackmannanshire Council

Clackmannanshire Council has gone through a period of significant political and strategic change. This impacted negatively on the governance, focus, pace and direction of the education authority's work in relation to the implementation of Scottish Attainment Challenge at school and community level. The early Scottish Attainment Challenge joint plans for Clackmannanshire and Stirling Councils have now been revised by the new senior education team to better reflect the needs of Clackmannanshire Council and to support their new vision for education.

“ The big goals, which put children first, are shining through.”

secondary headteacher

Primary schools

Clackmannanshire Council is now in its third year as a challenge authority as Scottish Attainment Challenge Primary funding began in the 2015/16 financial year. Between 2015/16 and 2017/18, the authority has drawn down a total of **£2.53 million** from the Scottish Government to support Scottish Attainment Challenge primary initiatives. The authority projected it would spend **£2.7 million** in the period from 2015/16 to 2017/18. The full year grant was announced at the end of June 2015. However, initiatives did not get underway until late August 2015 due to the proximity of the announcement to the summer holiday period. These delays were compounded by challenges in recruiting for newly-created posts. Recruitment issues have continued to be challenging, as they have nationally.

Secondary schools

Scottish Attainment Challenge Secondary Funding began in 2016/17. Between 2016/17 and 2017/18, the authority has drawn down **£742,983**. The authority projected it would spend **£888,550** in the period from 2016/17 to 2017/18. Similar recruitment issues to those identified above have been the main reason for the differences between planned and actual expenditure.

Overall, the total amount drawn down by Clackmannanshire Council from 2015/16 to 2017/18 is **£3,470,762**.

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

Headteachers, school staff and centrally-based officers have a shared understanding of Clackmannanshire Council's poverty-related attainment gap. There is evidence that some of the approaches being taken through the Scottish Attainment Challenge, combined with higher aspirations, are beginning to lead to improved outcomes for groups of learners. Staff are positive that the initiatives are making a difference. The authority has recently developed a self-evaluation tool which is being used by centrally-based staff. Work done by centrally based officers with headteachers and schools on the effective use of self-evaluation has improved their practice in this area. Schools also work together in clusters, using data to evaluate their joint effectiveness in closing the poverty-related attainment gap and to identify common themes and next steps. For some initiatives there is not yet sufficient evidence of significant impact. The authority is taking positive steps to improve the analysis and evaluation of data to monitor and track the impact of interventions on children's and young people's progress.

The Chief Education Officer and senior staff across the council are fostering a culture of collaborative professional learning across the authority. There is an improving approach to career-long professional learning for all staff working with children and young people. The authority is committed to improving learning and teaching, with a focus on literacy and numeracy. Through a range of learning opportunities, there is a better understanding of the local context and a growing culture in the use of nurturing approaches. This is now leading towards well-informed, targeted interventions for learners. Work with universities is helping to build staff capacity in using research, alongside new approaches in leading learning in numeracy, literacy and health and wellbeing

Increasingly, staff have a better understanding of, and use various improvement methodologies. Collaborative enquiries are encouraged through participation in, and are integral to, a range of professional learning activities. They are also an important part of the newly qualified teachers' induction year, where they are required to undertake an action research project, aiming to improve outcomes for learners. This is impacting positively on groups of learners.

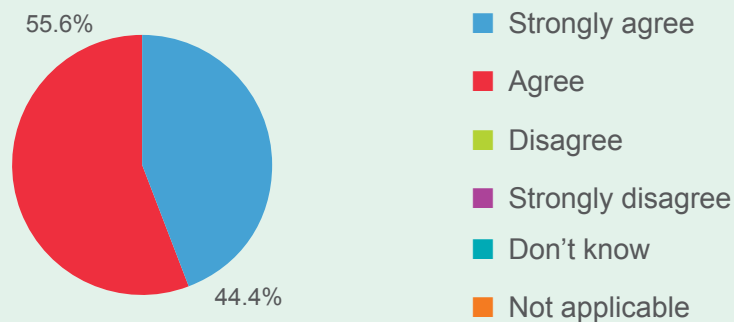
Headteachers understand the importance of self-evaluation well. They self-evaluate their work against [GTCS standards](#). A cycle of school reviews across the authority is near completion. Senior managers and peer headteachers have been validating schools' self-evaluations through examination of data, classroom visits, meetings and questionnaires, focusing on how well schools are improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. As a result, headteachers and managers have developed a clearer understanding of the attainment levels and poverty-related attainment gap across Clackmannanshire Council and in their own establishments.

“ I had a school review in my second week as headteacher. As a result, we will tear up our BGE curriculum and start again! ”

secondary headteacher

The role of partners in self-evaluation is developing. Partners engage in discussions with schools about individual pieces of work and initiatives, and amend them in light of experience. Overall, partners should be more involved in self-evaluation with individual schools and with the council. A positive step towards this was taken in the consultation of partners relating to the development of a community learning and development plan for 2018-2021.

The education authority Senior Management Team promote a culture of innovation and well-informed change.



Across the authority funding from The Attainment Scotland Fund is supporting and increasing opportunities for young people to take leadership roles, for example, the Pupil Led Enquiry programme. The Senior Leadership Team has identified the need to ensure that pupil voice is further developed in order for it to make an impact on the delivery of learning and teaching. The authority should continue with its plans to build on innovative programmes which are increasing pupil voice and aspiration and integrate the learning and approaches more fully into the curriculum.

“ There is a tone of courage here. ”

new secondary headteacher

The authority has initiated and developed university partnerships, including the University of Strathclyde and University of Stirling. This work is informed by identified areas of need across the council. As a result, university staff are working with several schools to implement research-based initiatives. Initial work on reading has involved helping school staff to understand reading as a social activity. This is beginning to lead to a culture shift in the schools involved. Children report that they are finding reading more enjoyable and have been learning techniques which help them in other curricular areas such as interdisciplinary learning.

“ Staff are buzzing about the range of learning opportunities in the authority. ”

headteacher

The authority is involved in a number of other partnerships, including with Health Promotion Scotland and Wellbeing Scotland. These initiatives, including Safe Talk, Suicide Prevention and the Social Influence programme, have already led to improved outcomes for individual children and young people. Young people report that they find these programmes helpful and that they are more confident and less anxious as a result. They are also attending school more regularly.

The authority has developed a parental engagement initiative and action plan. There is now a draft family learning strategy, **Family Learning In Clackmannanshire (FLIC)**. This was a successful aspect of the recent “CCafé” work, which provided a relaxed approach to children and parents learning together and some schools have developed their own bespoke family learning opportunities. Parents and children were attending and learning together in social situations such as cooking and mealtimes, simultaneously developing relationships and social skills. Parents reported that this approach had resulted in a significant positive impact on their relationship with their children. The authority is keen to encourage the “seldom heard voices” of parents from more challenging circumstances to be heard. There are early plans to help to improve the resilience and confidence in families and increase their ability to support children to learn, through joint work with Columba 1400, based on evidence and research.

Third sector organisations are working to engage parents through confidence building programmes, leading to them eventually taking up volunteering opportunities. The approach is designed to raise the expectations of parents who should then be more aspirational for their children. As yet, it is too early to identify the impact of the programme.

Schools are making variable use of partners to enhance the offer of support to families. Partnership working with speech and language therapists operating in targeted schools is showing early signs of success. Children’s listening skills are improving as is their enthusiasm for writing.

Early intervention staff are working with younger children, parents and teachers in a number of targeted schools across the authority. They provide in-class support and run bespoke wellbeing interventions for identified individuals and small groups through a nurture hub approach. They know the children and their needs well. They have good relationships with parents and organise support groups for them in the wider community, encouraging a self-help approach. They monitor the effectiveness of their work and can show how individual children are making progress through, for example, standardised assessment techniques, use of the Leuven Scale of active engagement in learning, feedback from parents and improved attendance of children.

While there are a few programmes which work to strengthen parental leadership through family learning, the authority recognises that these programmes need to be more fully integrated in order to promote high expectations and enable parents to play a fuller part in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The council is developing its arrangements to involve parent councils in the planning for the Scottish Attainment Challenge and, in partnership with schools, for Pupil Equity Funding.

“**Vision, ambition, aspiration and inspiration for teachers and schools has been until recently lacking or not readily visible.**”

parent

Partners would welcome greater opportunities to co-create and jointly lead initiatives in relation to Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding developments, particularly at school level. The authority recognises the need to strengthen partnership working, particularly at establishment level, and is working to provide establishments with a better understanding of the range of partners working in their context.

“ We intend to use the parental engagement strategy as a self-evaluation tool with our own parents. ”

headteacher

Team leads for SAC interventions are regularly evaluating the progress of interventions against their short, medium and long term outcomes. Pupils are demonstrating a greater degree of aspiration and their growing confidence in themselves as learners is evident. Parents who spoke to HM Inspectors told of the impact of the council drive to improve outcomes as having a positive impact on families at home and within the community. The early gains in this area should be built upon as planned, providing greater support to families and communities in Clackmannanshire Council.

It is noted that the current senior management team have only been in place since the end of 2016 following the dissolution of five years of Clackmannanshire/Stirling shared service. Current SAC implementation plans and the availability of trend data start from that point. The authority is not yet able to evidence change sufficiently well through quantitative data related to initiatives undertaken through Scottish Attainment Challenge funding or the use of Pupil Equity Funding. Most of the more recent initiatives are at too early a stage to have quantitative data over time which can be interrogated.

“ We have trained our teaching staff as Data Mentors. ”

secondary headteacher

The local authority has employed an improvement analyst to develop systems to organise and analyse information, and to create a baseline assessment by collecting data and then monitoring progress against the NIF Indicators. The analyst has also been creating data packs for use during school reviews and producing a summary profile for each school to be reviewed. This process has provided a useful baseline for performance across authority schools. The improvement analyst is increasing the capacity of school staff to interrogate their own data by providing bespoke training sessions for staff. In addition, the analyst is helping to build up staff confidence and expertise in data literacy through working with a range of staff in school “surgeries”. Headteachers and teachers value this relatively new support. Headteachers feel that data is more readily accessible for them and that they can use this to help support professional dialogue with a range of staff including teachers. Staff are beginning to analyse data to help them identify and focus on clear priorities which have been shown to have a positive effect on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The authority has arrangements in place to strengthen its use of this data in order to improve learning, raise attainment and close the poverty-related attainment gap.

Subsequent to the inspection visit, the authority informed Education Scotland that the latest Teacher Professional Judgement data indicates improvement across all four curricular areas in P1, P4 & P7, including significant improvement in numeracy across both primary and secondary stages.

A wide range of initiatives linked to Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding has recently been piloted or implemented across the authority. The authority is now using information related to the efficacy of interventions and is planning to use this to refine the menu of approaches which is used by schools.

“ I am new here but recognise a real sense of change. That is the reason that I wanted to come to Clackmannanshire Council. ”

new primary headteacher

The authority has successfully reduced school exclusions. Schools engage with centrally-based officers before excluding a child or young person, and a solution-focused script is used to check the strategies which the school has already tried and to explore alternative approaches with them.

Curriculum lead officers have been recently appointed, further increasing the capacity of the centrally-based officer team. The authority has also appointed ‘improving outcomes’ principal teachers. They focus on literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. Their work is informed by research findings and supported by university staff. They are involved in direct work with schools, helping them to have a better understanding of the curriculum in these areas. This is a ‘bottom up’ approach where the principal teachers are expert practitioners and model best practice in teaching their subject area. The authority has invested significant resources in this approach which has the potential to be an important aspect of helping schools to close the poverty-related attainment gap. The authority should continue to evaluate the impact of this work on improving outcomes for children and young people.

The educational psychology service has focused on developing a brain-based intervention programme, Readiness for Learning (R4L), to raise attainment at both universal and targeted levels. The Pupil Equity Funding allocation has allowed them to develop the approach and it is beginning to show a positive impact on health and wellbeing measures. Currently, 500 school staff, all 3 secondary schools, community learning and development team, social workers, and active sport workers have engaged in R4L training. Evaluations from practitioners are positive and there is evidence of practitioners using the strategies to improve children’s engagement and their inclusion in schools. For example, 90% of children who were involved in R4L achieved early level compared with 70% in schools which do not use this approach. Exclusion figures in R4L schools have decreased and children are spending less time out of class. Out of the 520 trained staff, 80% have reported a significant and positive impact on their teaching.

The authority and schools are aware of the need to to develop and improve the sustainability element and exit strategies for Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding initiatives and are beginning to plan for this.

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

The Chief Education Officer took up post in summer 2016. Since then, her strong and focused leadership, with the support of the senior leadership team she subsequently appointed, has reinvigorated education staff to begin to make a positive difference for children and young people as part of the Clackmannanshire 'family'.

Education Officers and headteachers report that, following her appointment, there is now a welcomed, relentless drive for improvement and raised expectation for their children and young people from the Chief Education Officer. Scottish Attainment Challenge planning has been refreshed in establishments and reviewed with the new Senior Leadership Team. Headteachers have a commitment to the council's drive to improve outcomes.

A planned programme of review and support for leadership of Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding takes place at the monthly headteacher meetings. Headteachers are beginning to work together more effectively in clusters to plan for improvements. These developments are now being taken forward with enthusiasm and at pace, and are showing early signs of impact.

The areas of priority within the current improvement plan are appropriate for leading to better outcomes for the children and young people. Community learning and development has included children and young people, families, schools, local communities and partner agencies within their improvement planning, demonstrating clear links to council priorities. The speech and language therapy service has engaged as a strong partner with educational psychology service initiatives to improve literacy. Whilst there has been some positive collaboration around the planning for improvement initiatives, the process to involve all stakeholders is at early stages of development and there remains further work to be done within this area to ensure sustainability.

Over the last two years, education services has created a number of posts and teams to drive forward the implementation of initiatives related to Scottish Attainment Challenge and to provide support directly to headteachers in receipt of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding and Pupil Equity Funding. Leadership capacity in schools has also been strengthened through a range of Pupil Equity Funding initiatives across the council, and leadership opportunities have been created at a range of levels.

The Chief Education Officer and her senior leadership team are aware of the need to consider the sustainability of current approaches to improvement. They are monitoring closely the implementation and early impact of a range of interventions, supported by implementation science.

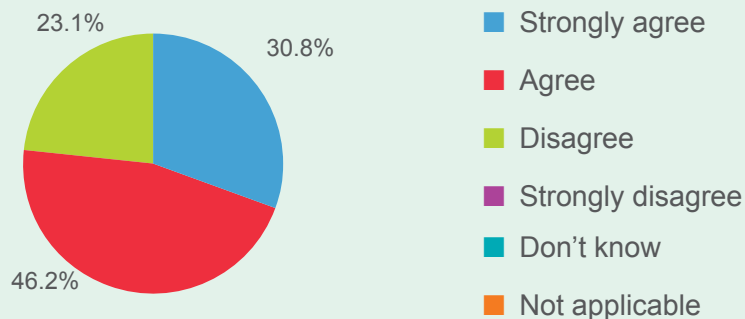
“ Having our own dedicated Chief Education Officer has changed the provision in Clackmannanshire. The new team now knows our schools and has the knowledge about how to improve them. ”

Leader of the Council

There is a clear governance framework within education services for managing and reporting on Scottish Attainment Challenge. Finance is well integrated into the governance and accountability framework within education services for Scottish Attainment Challenge. Governance and reporting arrangements related to Pupil Equity Funding are less well developed. Headteachers discuss Pupil Equity Funding arrangements with the Improving Outcomes team. Formal reporting and risk management routes are not as yet well developed. A comprehensive embedded approach to risk management should now be developed that includes monitoring and management of the risk at a school level, at education service level for both Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding, across education more widely, and importantly at council and elected member levels.

While reports to the scrutiny committee are clear and easy to understand, they do not yet provide elected members with sufficient information to enable them to effectively scrutinise and challenge Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding related progress. The submission of Scottish Attainment Challenge information to committee has been irregular due to changes in committee structure, and elected members have not yet received any reports about Pupil Equity Funding. To enhance scrutiny, there is a need to further improve the level of detailed information provided to elected members.

I receive regular reports on Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding initiatives, which include progress against planned outputs and outcomes.



There has been an increasing level of accountability from the centre for Scottish Attainment Challenge and for Pupil Equity Funding. The ongoing advice to headteachers about Pupil Equity Funding is welcomed, particularly in relation to HR and procurement. The authority should continue to build headteachers' knowledge of, and confidence in, procurement practices. The authority plans to review the first year of Pupil Equity Funding to identify lessons learned and to use this to improve processes and management going forward. The authority has produced detailed guidance to support headteachers in planning how to use their Pupil Equity Funding effectively. Effective arrangements are in place to track and monitor Pupil Equity Funding expenditure. Spend and projections are discussed with headteachers regularly, but there is a lack of reporting at the centre.

“ The leadership team have created a culture where it feels more personal and that it matters. ”

centrally based officer

There is a growing focus on leadership development across the authority and there is evidence of increasing levels of participation and engagement in a range of leadership programmes at all levels. Headteachers are developing their leadership skills through shared accountability and recognise themselves more appropriately as senior officers of the council. The authority has encouraged and enabled staff to take on additional responsibilities for improving outcomes for learners through, for example, the work of Improving Outcomes Principal Teachers. Opportunities for secondments have built the capacity of individual staff to take on leadership responsibilities. They have also begun to improve classroom practice.

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

Education Scotland is confident that the evidence and evaluation to date indicates that the educational psychology service makes a strong contribution. This is particularly evident in relation to brain based approaches to improving self-regulation and improving children's readiness to learn. Further development in the use of data to demonstrate long-term outcomes in closing the poverty-related attainment gap will strengthen the contribution of the educational psychology service.

The educational psychology service has developed a comprehensive system of self-evaluation for improvement. This includes a concise service improvement plan that integrates and builds on the Education Service's Plan. Self-evaluation for continuous improvement is part of the remit for all educational psychologists. The system provides a very effective framework to measure the value added from interventions and the service's specific contributions to the authority's work to close the poverty-related attainment gap. The educational psychology service is aware of the need to widen the range of school and authority data sources to make the process of analysis and evaluation process sustainable and meaningful to a wider range of stakeholders. Allocation of school improvement plan areas and tasks to educational psychologists is helping to take forward key areas for improvement, and these are having a positive impact on the quality of services delivered to stakeholders.

The educational psychology service has a very good capacity to continue to improve. Very close alignment between the educational psychology service and the educational priorities of the local authority has led to a clear role for educational psychology service in relation to Scottish Attainment Challenge developments. The service is well supported by the Chief Executive Officer and the Senior Educational Psychologist. They provide effective support and challenge to enable the team of EPs to lead and drive improvements.

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

Overall, Clackmannanshire Council is making satisfactory progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap, following a period of significant local political and strategic change. HM Inspectors are confident that the evidence and evaluation to date indicates that:

Strengths

- The strong leadership of the Chief Education Officer, supported by her senior leadership team, who share a clear vision of the action which needs to be taken.
- Education staff have been reinvigorated to make a positive difference for children and young people as part of the Clackmannanshire 'family'.
- Positive steps, including strong partnerships with universities, have been put in place to improve the use and analysis of data to measure the impact of Scottish Attainment Challenge initiatives.

Aspects for development

The authority needs to:

- Continue to develop and strengthen joint working with partner agencies which is leading to improvement.
- Ensure, as planned, implementation for the initiatives which are making the greatest difference to improving outcomes for learners.
- Continue to develop and improve the sustainability element and exit strategies for Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding initiatives and improve governance arrangements.

What happens next?

Education Scotland is confident that the evidence and evaluation to date indicates that Clackmannanshire Council is making satisfactory progress in putting in place arrangements to help it to improve learning, raise attainment and close the poverty-related attainment gap. The local authority's plans and self-evaluation processes are beginning to lead to improvements. As a result we will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this inspection. We will continue to monitor progress through the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme.

Education Scotland

Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Almondvale Way
Livingston EH54 6GA

T +44 (0)131 244 4330

E enquiries@education.scotland.gsi.gov.uk

www.education.gov.scot

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