

Summary of Collaborative Improvement visit to Inverclyde Educational Services January 2022

1. What is collaborative improvement?

Collaborative Improvement is an approach to bringing about improvement through shared work involving staff from the local authority, Education Scotland and Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES). Together, the group establish the focus for the Collaborative Improvement visit and then undertake activities in the local authority that will result in an evaluative summary of where there are strengths and where there are areas that may require further focus.

The approach to collaborative improvement was outlined in the joint agreement and is based on the call for a “strengthened middle” in the 2015 OECD report on Scottish Education. The approach is also intended to address the recommendation in Audit Scotland’s report on education that Councils should work with schools, Regional Improvement Collaboratives, other policy teams and partners, for example in the third sector, to reduce variability in outcomes.

2. What was the focus for the collaborative improvement visit

The focus for the collaborative improvement process in Inverclyde was based around a key question:

“How effective is our overall senior phase offer in ensuring that all pupils leave our schools entering a positive and sustained destination with the right qualifications, experience and skills?”

Since 2019 the Education Service has had a Senior Phase Action plan acting as a deeper more detailed approach to our work within the annual Education Service Improvement plan. This was originally drawn up during the autumn of 2019 by key partners including schools, More Choices More Chances (MCMC), West College Scotland, Skills Development Scotland and the central education leadership team.

Our rationale for focussing the collaborative improvement process on the question above was linked to but not exhaustive of:

- Ongoing review of our senior phase
- High staying on rates in our secondary schools; the need to ensure we are getting it right for every child
- Low uptake of vocational qualifications such as foundation apprenticeships

Underpinning the overarching questions we identified key themes for the team to focus on:

Senior Phase offer – beyond the traditional offer:

- Alternative qualification offer and wider achievement (National Progression Awards, Foundation Apprenticeships, Awards)
- Alternative delivery of qualifications
- Links with college and the college offer
- Provision for children with complex needs

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) and employability offer:

- The role of the DYW Coordinator
- Links with employers and preparing young people for the world of work

- Engagement and offer with Skills Development Scotland
- Support from the MCMC team to track offers and positive destinations

3. Planning and process

A team including Inverclyde Education Service leaders, ADES and Education Scotland were brought together to discuss the scope, ethos, process and outcomes a number of weeks before the start of the engagement. The scoping meeting clarified the background and enabled Inverclyde to present some key information. ADES and Education Scotland leads set out the process, ethos and intended outcomes for the full team.

Key documentation was gathered and shared with the team members ahead of the process beginning, providing them with agendas for meetings and recording documents. The visit was coordinated by an ADES officer, Senior Regional Adviser and Senior HM Inspector from Education Scotland working with the Head of Education and Education Officer responsible for the Senior Phase. In addition, the team for the Collaborative Improvement visit included four members representing ADES who were all Directors or Executive Directors in Aberdeenshire, Dundee, Midlothian and North Lanarkshire; Head of Education and an Education Officer from Inverclyde and a team from Education Scotland.

The visit was carried out entirely remotely due to Covid restrictions. The visit was carried out over a number of half day visit over approximately 7 days. It began with a presentation by Inverclyde on progress to date. This set the scene and context and led into a discussion about the actions that had been taken and strengths and areas of challenge. A series of focus groups was then arranged and groups were joined by members of the team above as well as representatives from schools, MCMC, West Collage Scotland and SDS.

An agreed agenda / suggested overview for each theme was used for each stakeholder meeting as a provocation to begin the conversation. Each stakeholder group explored where the authority was doing well and what the challenges were; what would help moving forward and what next steps might be. At the end of each day a team discussion took place with sharing of information and an opportunity for clarification. Recording sheets from each focus group were collated and shared with the team ahead of the next half day to form the basis of further discussions as well as identifying any gaps in the information / evidence shared.

4. What is working well?

At the end of the collaborative improvement process a number of areas were identified as strengths.

4.1 Dynamic, Purposeful Leadership

- Transparency and openness to issues and opportunities
- Tangible ethos between the central teams, schools and the wider education teams with a focus on Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)
- Genuine Systems Leadership demonstrated by the central team with a focus on children, citizens and community
- The current education and curriculum offer is producing strong academic results for young people following more traditional, 'academic' pathways
- Willingness of school leaders, central team and college partners to reflect on current picture and work together to improve
- Evidence of high level digital investment in schools e.g. the virtual classroom has got off to good start
- Robust use of data to analyse performance, identify trends, highlight issues and develop profiles of young people

- Outstanding commitment to driving improved outcomes for all young people across all partners at strategic and operational levels in and with schools
- Strong collegiality and collaboration between and across schools and with the local authority central staff
- Confidence of the leaders in the partnership

4.2 Strong relationships with schools

- School partnership working and 'moving as one' in the curriculum planning and model. Individual solutions and creative approaches are in place in some schools (digital delivery model / remote classroom etc.) with the intent to further develop these across the estate.
- DYW Coordinators are a very welcome addition to school teams. There is sharing of good DYW practice across schools.
- There is a consistent approach across schools in terms of employability skills but there is scope to extend this.
- Very good collaboration / agreement across Head Teachers including common timetable and consortia arrangements
- Positive partnership working between schools and partners; strong partnership working across teams, the council and other partners
- A genuine desire to improve curriculum offer and outcomes for young people
- Strong enthusiasm for delivery of programmes by key school leaders
- Good examples of process supporting college access

4.3 Individuals / Teams

- The MCMC team know where every pupil is and take proactive steps re the pipeline to support them i.e. 12 years of 100% known destinations including follow-ups. Exploration on how to engage the wider community in sharing the support and offers available for young people (hubs identified to deliver this)
- The Service level agreement developed between education and MCMC in 2019/20 is working well
- Strong evidence of supply side programmes e.g. bespoke college offer for targeted pupils focused on employment skills, work placements, schools focusing on employability skills within the BGE
- Relationships and understanding of shared issues.
- There are good and open relationships with the college
- College using innovative, digital and creative approaches to offer employability programme, building basics in CVs, interview skills and employer engagement. Also offering to support staff in schools with the learning from these digital approaches.

5. Areas for further evaluation / development / analysis

At the end of the collaborative improvement process a number of areas were identified as areas for further evaluation, development and analysis:

5.1 Strategic Governance

- There is a need to further build up a system-wide approach to planning and communications to ensure all key partners are fully involved in, and contribute to, the employability and economic agenda. There might be scope to review how the LEP fits into the overall structure going forward and whether something like an 'Employability Board' or youth employability subgroup as part of recovery agenda for education, skills and young people would add value to the strategic governance.

- Review and identify the key personnel taking responsibility for leading on any planned improvements.
- Review the quality and depth of labour market intelligence (LMI) and how this is shared across the council, including all partners i.e. ensuring that schools and key partners such as the college are fully aware of employer needs to inform the development of their collective offer
- Inverclyde Council is a major employer in the region / LA – there is scope to widen opportunities to link with DYW
- There is a role for the Inverclyde multi agency Children’s Services Planning Partnership to play an increased role in respect of developing pathways for young people with complex needs

5.2 Strategic Review of Senior Phase and College links

- The service should continue to progress the Senior Phase review. Consideration should be given to the reach of the review to incorporate the 3-18 curriculum rationale to ensure a focus on skills, particularly around employability. Schools should use the opportunities that will be delivered through the various reviews and policy changes to reflect on their curriculum structures to ensure they remain flexible and meet the needs of all learners. Pupil and parental voice should be a central feature of the Senior Phase review.
- Review the management of the college / education service relationship and approach to communication ensuring a key role for the college in the strategic oversight and governance
- Education Services and the college to co-create a clearer annual process and timeline for the development of the college offer and schools’ individual and consortium offer
- Opportunities to develop staff knowledge, at all levels, of interpreting labour market information (LMI), the skills pipeline and the range of alternative qualifications and pathways should be explored with partners (SDS, SCQF and Insight).
- Schools, in partnership with the service, should carry out deeper analysis against virtual comparators and other Local Authorities with a focus on vocational pathways. This will help schools to design an appropriate and personalised learner journey that will support the skills pipeline locally and nationally.
- Education services should continue to work with other council departments, for example MCMC and Economy and Regeneration, to increase the opportunities in training.
- There now needs to be a strengthened and cross service vision for young people with ASN with greater emphasis on curricular pathways to qualifications for children with complex needs including consideration of target groups e.g. ASN/CEYP. Partnerships with CLD, CLD Co-ordinator Group, Practitioners forum and the Regional Improvement Collaborative should be reviewed and strengthened to explore the current provision and opportunities within the community for all young people
- School leaders are looking for more College delivery in-school but recognise the flip side of this i.e. pupils then having further limited experience in preparation for world outside by travelling to or attending the college.
- Clarification of processes to evaluate performance of programmes, including Validated Self – evaluation activity for learning and teaching and pedagogy in college led activity and in school programmes for the consortium.

5.3 Parental Engagement / Pupil Voice

- Consideration should be given as to how parental engagement can be strengthened e.g. through the guidance structure supported by DYW coordinators to involve parents in aligning learner visions, widening understanding of pathways on offer, including vocational and alternative qualifications. There is work to do in convincing parents of the benefits of FA provision. This needs greater coordination between agencies and should not just left to LA / schools to do i.e. a whole system approach is required
- Strengthen the role of young people in their self-evaluation and personal leadership of skills development pre, during and post placement
- As above further develop the role for SCQF ambassadors and SCQF champions at pupil level.
- Develop the role of Youth champions from employment / business to promote pathways / mentors for young people beginning pathways

5.4 Partnership Working

- Continue to develop opportunities to connect with DYW on a regional basis.
- Revisit DYW West's Key Performance Indicators around equalities; how are they supporting our most vulnerable young people/those with complex needs into employment?
- Strengthen partnership working with local colleagues and those with knowledge of local employability.
- Strengthen the use of tracking to inform planning / pipeline / journey.
- There is a fairly consistent offer from DYW across schools but this needs further development. There is a need to look at minimum requirements re employability skills / experience.
- Further develop ways of identifying strengths in individual school arrangements with partners and further sharing these across the secondary estate to support continuous development (Guidance Teachers/ links with in-situ primaries/ community groups etc.)
- DYW staff in schools – recruitment related challenges because of non-permanent nature of posts
- Consider a 'deep dive' and explore case studies into the factors impacting on the group who do not sustain employment e.g. young males 20 – 25.
- Review the wider role of training providers, third sector deliverers and partners to enhance curriculum pathways

5.7 Employability / Foundation Apprenticeships (FA) / Modern Apprenticeships (MA)

- Enhance the knowledge of the local context at teacher level to support relevance and context of teaching and learning experiences, including skills and progression within all subjects within the BGE. How do teachers currently consider and reinforce this across all departments?
- Further develop FA and MA articulation and increase the offers.
- There are limited offers of employability geared towards learners with Additional Support Needs. Partners should look for opportunities from S3 onwards to show employers the skills / qualities of learners. Parental engagement will be important in overcoming logistical challenges.
- Further develop employer engagement in existing programmes and their involvement of future programmes.
- Is there potential for the council to build in agreements re 'local' employees linked to outward looking analysis of re-emerging workforce opportunities e.g. MAs?
- Continue to develop conversations with the Council Management Team to grow the council as a provider of apprenticeships

6. What will happen next?

- This report will be shared with all key partners mentioned above
- Key partners will review the existing Senior Phase Action plan and incorporate key aspects of the collaborative improvement visit into further Service Improvement Planning.
- Progress will be reported through the Senior Phase Action plan through to the Education Service Standards and Quality reporting process