



Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Roinn an Fhoghlaim is Seirbheisean Chloinne

Department of Education and Children's Services

Aithisg Fèin-mheasadh Dearbhte

(Validated Self-Evaluation Report)

15 April 2014





COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

Education and Children's Services Department

Fèin-mheasadh Dearbhte (Validated Self Evaluation) 2013-14

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1.0 CONTEXT

- 1.1 Between June 2013 and February 2014, in collaboration with Education Scotland, the Department for Education and Children’s Services carried out a validated self-evaluation.
- 1.2 We evaluated two areas of our work;
- a) The effectiveness of **leadership** at all levels in contributing to the improvement of our secondary schools.
 - b) The quality of **learning** at the early and primary stages of education across the Outer Hebrides.
- 1.3 We set up two task groups to consider these areas. A primary Headteacher led one task group and another group was led by a Depute Headteacher from one of the four presenting centres. The task groups included a range of staff from Education and Children’s Services including quality improvement officers (QIO’s), educational psychologists, social workers, teachers and other staff. Other group members included staff from other council services, HMI or Associate Assessors from Education Scotland.

2.0 THE VALIDATED SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS

- 2.1 The process began with the agreement of the two areas of focus for the self-evaluation. Following the establishment of two task groups, several meetings were held by the two task groups to gather evidence and make evaluations. In June 2013, the evidence and evaluations were shared with various stakeholder groups across the islands. Their views were incorporated into the evidence.
- 2.2 In December 2013, several days were allocated for the two task groups, supported by HMI colleagues, to visit different schools and Comhairle department settings to further validate the evidence gathered. The groups were based in Lewis and in Uist and attended a range of Comhairle activities.
- 2.3 The Leadership Group met with a group of Headteachers in Uist and spent a morning or afternoon in three of the four secondary schools. They attended a meeting with Community Learning and Development officers and a meeting which was held to consider the support offered to a Looked After child in the authority. The Leadership Group met with the Leader of the Council and with the Chair of Education and Children’s Committee. The group met with Third Sector partners and representatives from various department teams including Education and Skills and ‘More Choices More Chances’. Importantly, the group met with young people in different settings, including schools, but also in Young People’s Focus Groups. In addition, the Leadership Group met parents of pupils attending specific provision developed by the authority and met with local business partners in the context of employability and work experience.
- 2.4 The Learning Group spent a morning or afternoon in four primary schools, two in Lewis and two in the Uists. In addition, meetings were held with Community and Learning Development officers to review learning initiatives for primary aged pupils. The group undertook a case file review with social work colleagues and met with Support for Learning staff to consider planning for the learning needs of identified pupils. An audit of case files was also undertaken in relation to Child Protection arrangements.
- 2.5 Following the visits, the task group leaders gathered the evidence and reviewed the self-evaluation judgements and information. Summary findings were shared between the two groups with strengths and areas for development noted.
- 2.6 In February 2014, the two task groups met with HMI colleagues to agree action plans and summary findings. The information is incorporated into this report, which should be read alongside the published report from Education Scotland officers who participated in the validated self-evaluation. <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/othersectors/validatedselfevaluation/EileanSiarWesternIslesCouncil.asp>

3.0 LEADERSHIP

- 3.1 The task group focused on four aspects of leadership, following the quality indicators from evaluation frameworks. These relate to;
- vision, values and aims;
 - leadership and direction;
 - leadership of people, and;
 - leadership of change and improvement.
- 3.2 Overall, the task group judged leadership to be good across all of the four areas.
- 3.3 Strong political and educational leadership have driven a comprehensive review of educational provision and curriculum development across the Western Isles. Transformational change in terms of school rationalisation has been undertaken and the budget mechanism is planned effectively to help ensure that pupils in the Western Isles access modern and well-resourced school environments.
- 3.4 The Leadership Group found that the Comhairle’s policy and strategic documents provide a clear direction to support ongoing improvement. A comprehensive range of strategic plans support service delivery. Business plans have a clear focus on outcomes and are resourced through a robust business model strategy. The plans are designed and delivered with various partners and managed through learning communities.
- 3.5 Learning communities provide a multi-agency approach to service delivery and are effective in providing support to pupils, particularly to vulnerable children and their families.
- 3.6 The *Curriculum for Excellence* is being implemented effectively in most schools and, in the four secondary schools, curriculum redesign is undertaken with close reference to the Comhairle’s budget choices and national guidance. The pace of change is variable across the four schools and innovation, particularly in terms of e-learning, is a key aspect requiring further development to meet the ambitions of the department for wider subject choice with available resources.
- 3.7 The curriculum in secondary schools is enhanced by a number of innovative developments, particularly in relation to accredited-vocational areas of learning. The courses are offered in close liaison with business partners and have due regard for local employment and economic priorities. The courses complement local programmes of support for vulnerable young people, including those at risk of exclusion. Access to such provision is widening but needs to be extended further across schools and all phases of the four schools.
- 3.8 Links with business partners across the islands are positive and growing. The four schools are increasing their links with local employers beyond the usual work experience provision to develop certificated courses and help begin to address economic priorities. The high positive and sustained destinations for young school leavers across the islands is a consequence of effective guidance and varied pathways available to the young people at the end of their secondary education. Skills for work courses are in place and provide pupils of differing ages with relevant and certificated curriculum choices.
- 3.9 There is a strong culture of support and challenge at authority, partnership and school level. Quality improvement policies and procedures provide a strong basis for self-evaluation and action planning. The assisted self-evaluation model requires review to ensure a more proportionate and focused approach to support and challenge.
- 3.10 The Leadership Group found that awareness and understanding of Comhairle and department priorities were not consistently evident across diverse forward planning arrangements in schools and services. In order to provide a clearer strategic direction, the department should ensure that key priorities arising from the validated self-evaluation exercise are shared with all services and built into all relevant local development and improvement plans.

4.0 KEY FINDINGS: LEADERSHIP

Strengths

- There is evidence of good political and educational leadership. This has led to a clear strategy for improvement, notably in school rationalisation and curriculum development;
- School, officer and political leaders demonstrate a strong capacity and evident commitment to continuous improvement;
- There are effective strategic business plans in place, which identify key actions and provide regular opportunities for school leaders, officers and members to monitor progress against major targets and intended outcomes;
- A good range of opportunities is provided which allow young people to develop leadership skills both in class and beyond the school;
- Senior staff demonstrate a clear focus on positive destinations for young people and guidance arrangements in schools and through authority-led initiatives which are effective in supporting individual pupils;
- The focus on curriculum relevance and vocational routes has highlighted the importance of exit destinations and has enabled the authority to develop a number of effective place-based learning projects, such as 'Include-Us' and 'First Steps'. These projects have been effective in supporting positive destinations for a number of young people;
- There is evidence of individualised, informed and effective guidance for young people in all presenting centres. This helps ensure positive pathways and diverse, meaningful routes for pupils.

Areas for development

- Subject networks and secondary Headteachers meetings have been well received and are considered to be an effective means by which change can be managed and curriculum development can be progressed uniformly;
- The skills required and promoted in work, place-based activities need to be further enhanced/developed fully for all pupils in other key subject areas;
- Information derived from destination data is used well to determine the strategic vision regarding positive pathways. Further use should be made of this data to determine the sustainability of these positive destinations. This would also support the local authority in developing its employment strategy for the Western Isles and assist in regenerating the island population;
- There is scope for greater precision and accuracy in target setting for secondary-aged pupils, using a more individualised and diagnostic model such as evidenced in pathway/guidance support;
- Awareness and understanding of Comhairle and department priorities is not consistently evident across diverse forward planning arrangements in schools and services;
- Senior Officers across the authority should develop systems to more effectively share good practice in order to allow practitioners to contribute more fully in the delivery of the authority's strategic vision;
- Across all four presenting centres there is scope for improved opportunities for pupils to be more actively involved in the development of wider learning initiatives across the school;
- There is a need to develop more consistent and effective transition arrangements into S1 with the use of e-portfolios by all schools as a global means of capturing individual pupils' wide achievements;
- Although project-based approaches have been successful in supporting enterprise and positive destinations, there remains some lack of equality of opportunity across the islands and between establishments, in terms of access to such opportunities;
- Business partnerships require further development to ensure a more collaborative approach to planning learning, course content and skills focus;
- The current ICT infrastructure needs to be reviewed to ensure that it provides best value in determining educational opportunities to meet the needs of all.

5.0 LEARNING

- 5.1 The task group focused on the quality of children and pupils' learning, particularly at the early, first and second levels. The group referred to a number of quality indicators from evaluation frameworks. These relate to;
- Improvements in performance;
 - Improving the well-being of children and young people;
 - Impact on learners, and;
 - Impact on families.
- 5.2 Overall, the task group judged the quality of pupils learning to be at least good in all four areas.
- 5.3 The Learning Group found good arrangements for pupils' transition from early years settings into primary. Most settings used transition documents to pass information to colleagues and an increasing number of centres planned collaboratively with teachers in P1 classes. Nursery profiles were effective summary documents and were most useful when parents and children themselves had been involved in gathering information and identifying next steps in learning. There is some variation in quality of the profiles across different schools and centres. The information gathered by professionals as part of the Early Years Collaborative assessment process is used well to identify and support children not yet meeting key developmental milestones.
- 5.4 The Learning Group visited four primary schools and reviewed HMI and Education Scotland inspection information and authority evidence regarding the quality of pupils' learning across all schools. Strengths include pupils' high levels of engagement, their enthusiasm, good behaviour and increasing responsibility for their learning. In most schools staff provided a good range of leadership opportunities for pupils, particularly in the mid- and upper-primary years. Professional development opportunities have shown a positive impact on pupils' learning. Although learning experiences are good the validated self-evaluation process indicated a need for school and authority staff to work more effectively together to ensure greater challenge across all areas of learning, particularly for higher achieving pupils.
- 5.5 Promotion, support and uptake for GME are key actions for the department and for all schools. Enrolment figures across the authority have increased, though some areas have shown a more rapid rate of increased uptake than others. In Learning Community Area One, for example, the rate is considerably less than other areas, particularly those in the south. The effectiveness of support, advice and guidance provided to parents should be reviewed to identify more effective strategies for engaging with parents at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.6 There are strong and effective partnerships with various Gaelic partner organisations, which provide support to non-Gaelic speaking parents of children in GME. There is an increasing participation of children in a range of Gaelic arts and cultural activities.
- 5.7 A small but significant number of young people in the authority are Looked After or Looked After and Accommodated. A few are also subject to child protection review procedures. The Learning Group found that staff working with the children concerned are informed and knowledgeable about their needs. There are good arrangements in place to support the children through the active case review mechanism. An audit of case files found some examples of good practice in terms of chronology and self-evaluation.
- 5.8 Transition arrangements for pupils with additional support needs are good. Information is shared at an early stage and plans put in place to facilitate smooth transition from nursery to primary school and from primary to secondary.
- 5.9 The authority has a three-year schedule of assisted school evaluation visits, which aim to provide schools with challenge and support. The visits have been effective in driving forward change but are not considered to be sufficiently proportionate by a significant number of senior school staff. There is scope to further develop the approach to build on internal and external self-evaluation information held by schools and the education authority. Overall, the reports from the visits accurately identify strengths and areas requiring development and have led to notable improvements in schools.

6.0 KEY FINDINGS: LEARNING

Strengths

- Overall, the quality of learning experiences in early years and primary classes is good. Strengths include pupils' high levels of engagement, their enthusiasm, good behaviour and increasing responsibility for their learning;
- There is evidence of very good pastoral support available for children moving from pre-school to primary;
- Schools demonstrate effective approaches to the implementation of Gaelic Education;
- There are good examples of support systems for parents with children in Gaelic Medium Education;
- All schools have made improvements as a result of internal and external evaluations;
- Valuable contributions are being made by support staff in helping improve pupils' learning experiences;
- Effective enhanced transition arrangements for children with additional support needs;
- Staff development initiatives show positive impact on pupils' learning, particularly, for example 'Tapestry' in primary school;
- A good range of leadership opportunities is available to pupils in mid- and upper-primary;
- Teachers are increasingly engaged in collaborative planning and this has led to improved curriculum opportunities for pupils and more coherent development of skills across levels;
- Across all schools, partners enhance pupils' learning experiences.

Areas for development

- Ensure consistency of approach in the delivery of experiences and outcomes at the Early Level;
- Further development of Nursery Profiles is required both in terms of content breadth and usage;
- Review the effectiveness of support, advice and guidance provided to parents regarding Gaelic Medium Education (GME). In particular, there is a need to identify strategies for engaging with parents at the earliest opportunity to inform them of the benefits of GME;
- Ensure consistency across schools in the administration and application of standardised assessments and use of data to plan for and secure improvements in learning and teaching;
- Support all schools to provide increased pace and challenge for all learners, including in particular higher-achieving pupils;
- Review the Assisted Self-Evaluation (ASE) process to ensure that the model is sufficiently flexible and proportionate;
- Continue moderation activities to ensure staged intervention process is applied consistently across the Authority;
- Schools should involve partners more fully and consistently in curriculum planning.

7.0 NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 Education Scotland and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar agreed common areas for development and created action plans to address the aspects requiring improvement. The action plans are incorporated into the department business plan and will be reviewed regularly as part of the self-evaluation and performance management reporting procedures. The plans are attached for information. The Department for Education and Children's Services intend to use the findings from the self-evaluation exercise to continue to improve our work.

- 7.2 Officers from the Comhairle supported by Education Scotland, agreed three broad department priorities, which encompass the more detailed actions and development points arising from the validated self-evaluation. These are;

Department Key Priority 1.

Deliver high quality learning and teaching in all educational settings.

Department Key Priority 2.

Ensure effective, accountable leadership for all.

Department Key Priority 3.

Improve the use of data to secure excellent outcomes for all learners in the Outer Hebrides.

- 7.3 These priorities will provide a guide and direction to all department, school and service improvement plans in the 2014/15 academic session.
- 7.4 In 2014/15, the Department will begin the next phase of validated self-evaluation by evaluating progress against aspects of the department key priorities.

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Peter Carpenter
Director of Education and Children's Services
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