

**Falkirk Council**

**17 July 2007**

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## Introduction

The education functions of each local authority in Scotland were inspected between 2000 and 2005. A second cycle of inspections began in 2006 taking a proportionate approach using the findings of the original inspection and other information subsequently available. Section 9 of the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* charges HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), on behalf of the Scottish Ministers, to provide an external evaluation of the effectiveness of the local authority in its quality assurance of educational provision within the Council and of its support to schools in improving quality. Inspections are conducted within a published framework of quality indicators (*Quality Management in Education 2*)<sup>1</sup> which embody the Government's policy on Best Value.

Each inspection is planned and implemented in partnership with Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission for Scotland. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the *Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000*. It provides services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland. Together they ensure that the Scottish Executive and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

The inspection team also includes Associate Assessors who are senior members of staff currently serving in another Scottish local authority.

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<sup>1</sup> *Quality Management in Education 2* (HM Inspectorate of Education 2006) is a framework of self-evaluation for Local Authority Education Services.

## 1. The aims, nature and scope of the inspection

HMIE inspects the education functions of all 32 Councils within Scotland as part of its commitment to inspect and report on the quality of education and to help secure improvement. HMIE reported on the first inspection of Falkirk Council in April 2004. In the period since the publication of this report HM Inspectors have worked with senior officers of the Council to monitor progress on the main points for action arising from the 2004 report. An interim follow-up report was published in October 2005 which evaluated the progress made to date on the main points for action in the 2004 report. This report provides further information on the progress the Council had made on the main points for action contained in the original inspection report.

During the inspection HM Inspectors visited the neighbourhoods of Grangemouth and Larbert to sample the impact of the work of the authority. The inspection included the evaluation of the quality of educational psychology provision in the council area.

## 2. What are the challenges for the Council?

### Context

*Falkirk is characterised by a growth in population and employment opportunities. Falkirk has more young people than the national average and school rolls show an increasing trend. This growth, and associated demographic changes and house building developments, presented special challenges to Education Services in involving local communities, in building new schools in new locations and in modernising the school estate. Additionally, Education Services faced a number of particular challenges including improving the performance of secondary-age pupils in Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) examinations, closing the attainment gap between high and low achieving pupils and ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable pupils were consistently met. These challenges were being addressed against a background of having to meet efficiency savings. Elected members, senior managers and staff within Education Services showed a clear focus on these issues and a strong commitment to working to address them.*

Falkirk is the eleventh largest council in Scotland with a population of almost 150,000. It is one of the fastest growing council areas. While Scotland's population has remained broadly static since 1991 Falkirk's has grown by 5%. In the period 1997 to 2004, jobs in Falkirk increased by 15% compared to the national average of 12%. Unemployment, while in line with the figure for Scotland as a whole, had shown significant reduction in recent years. However, youth unemployment is second highest in Scotland outside Glasgow. There is a higher percentage of jobs in production and construction and a lower percentage in financial services and management than the national average. There remain pockets of severe deprivation, with over 6% of the Falkirk Council population living in some of the most deprived areas in Scotland. Evidence provided by research into health inequalities indicates significant differences in people's health between the least affluent areas and the rest of the Council.

Notably, Falkirk has more young people than the national average with school rolls increasing. Given that many of Falkirk schools are already nearing capacity, addressing the increasing school roll and ensuring appropriate facilities for the provision of education and care is a recognised challenge for the Council. The Council had invested significantly in the modernisation of its school estate to meet new demands and provide high quality accommodation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It had undertaken this modernisation through a combination of Private Public Partnership (PPP) and Not for Profit Distributing Organisation (NPDO) funding arrangements. The implementation and progress of these projects is very important to the continued development of Falkirk schools and the quality of school learning environments.

### **Political and organisational structure**

*At the time of the inspection across the Council there were 32 elected members. No party had an overall majority. An alliance between the Scottish National Party (SNP) and independent members formed the administration<sup>2</sup>. The Director of Education had been appointed in February 2005 and management structures within the Education Department reviewed.*

Falkirk Council comprised 32 councillors: 12 Labour; 11 SNP; two Conservative with five independent and two non-aligned. Around half of the elected members had intimated that they would not stand for re-election at the May 2007 local government elections. A Councillor from the SNP served as the Convenor of the Education and Leisure Committee (ELC), which comprised a total of 12 members. Teacher representatives, parents and pupils regularly attended and participated in meetings of the ELC.

Responsibility for managing pre-school centres, primary, secondary and special schools and the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) lies within Education Services. It is led by a Director and three heads of service; Head of School Improvement, Head of Educational Support and Head of Educational Resources. The Director of Education had been appointed in February 2005 and, following an earlier review by the Chief Executive, management structures had been simplified and the roles and responsibilities of a range of officers altered to give greater focus to delivering improvement. Several officers were new in post. Teaching staff were regularly seconded from schools as development officers. The Director of Community Services leads the Community Education Service which is within the overall remit of the Head of Culture and Lifelong Learning.

### **3. How good are attainment and achievement of children and young people and how well are they supported?**

*The quality of outcomes achieved by learners in Falkirk and improvements in their performance varied across and within sectors and was adequate overall. Performance on some key indicators, notably for secondary pupils in SQA examinations, attendance, and among some groups of more vulnerable pupils was weak. The impact of authority work on the experiences of learners was improving and was good overall.*

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<sup>2</sup> Between the period of the inspection and the publication of the report, and following the Scottish Parliamentary Election the Council changed. The Council now comprised 14 Labour, 13 Scottish National Party, two Conservative, two Independents and one Independent not aligned to any group.

## Pre-school

*The education authority's impact on pre-school provision and the outcomes achieved were good overall. The outcomes for children were good or very good in most pre-school centres inspected over the last three years. Performance in 2005/2006 was less strong, but was still good overall. The reorganisation of nursery teachers to provide more distributed support across the sector had resulted in a number of challenges. These included the need to provide additional support for headteachers of primary schools with nursery classes. Continued monitoring of leadership for learning in primary schools with nursery classes was required. Partner providers received good levels of support, including opportunities to participate in continuing professional development (CPD). The Council was sponsoring a number of initiatives in pre-school and early education including one based on the work of the eminent psychologist Vygotsky to promote thinking skills.*

Parents and carers were able to access a range of useful information about services for young children, including pre-school education, through the *Falkirk Childcare Information Service*. The authority ensured that pre-school establishments were involved in a number of authority-led initiatives such as the literacy strategy and the *Bairns into Books* project, and the authority's work on *Curriculum for Excellence*<sup>3</sup>. It also supported staff in pre-school establishments, including those in partnership centres, to develop their skills and expertise through a well-focused programme of courses and support from Quality Improvement Officers (QIOs), Curriculum Support Teams (CSTs), visiting teachers and other staff. All heads of pre-school establishments who responded to the survey thought that centrally-deployed staff gave good advice to take forward improvement. All reported that they had been involved in training with other departments and most thought the authority assisted staff in accessing relevant staff development.

Children with additional support needs were identified early and well supported by specialist staff. There were examples of positive links with social work, health professionals and educational psychologists. Family support workers attached to the Integrated Learning Communities (ILCs) made a valuable contribution to supporting vulnerable pupils and their families. Inspections of pre-school centres in the previous three years indicated that provision for pupils with additional support needs was very good or good in almost all centres.

Pre-school establishments mostly performed well across the quality indicators used in inspections. Children were found to be making very good or good progress in all key areas of development and learning in almost all centres inspected. The quality of children's progress in emotional, personal and social development was a particular strength. Leadership was evaluated as very good or good in most centres. However, the pattern of provision was weaker in 2005/2006 than in the preceding two years with, for example, leadership and the quality of the learning environment being evaluated as weak in around a quarter of centres.

The authority had reorganised its team of nursery teachers to allow them to provide support more widely across the Council area and in different types of pre-school provision. This had left some primary schools with nursery classes without an experienced nursery teacher

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<sup>3</sup> The *Curriculum for Excellence* programme outlines the purposes and principles of the curriculum 3-18 to provide a framework within which improvement to Scottish education can and should be made.

available to support the headteacher in managing the nursery class and providing leadership for learning. While all early years officers continued to discharge their responsibilities ably and professionally, the authority had recognised the need to provide additional support for headteachers through written guidance, additional training and inputs from an external consultant. It had also reviewed its approaches to ensuring high quality provision across its partner centres. While the overall performance of the pre-school sector remained strong it is important that the Council continues to monitor closely the impact of the changes it has introduced.

### **Features of good practice: Vygotsky Project**

The project enhanced the development of thinking skills in the young learner and in particular developed strategies that supported the promotion of self-regulation, the use of external mediation and signs and symbols as learning tools. Since August 2005, the project had involved initial training and staff development delivered to all early years staff with further focused staff development for the staff in seven pilot establishments with a view to implementing the approach in nursery, P1 and enhanced provision settings. Staff had identified improvement in their understanding of strategies to develop effective learning and thinking and have observed increased levels of engagement of children in thinking opportunities. Further development will involve continued joint-working in early years between Curriculum Support and Educational Psychological Service with a view to extending the approach across all early years provision through the development of guidance and staff development.

More detailed information is available at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

### **Primary schools**

*The authority's provision for primary schools was good overall and its work was having a positive impact on pupils. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Evidence from school inspections showed that most schools were achieving good standards of attainment in English language and mathematics. In almost all schools inspected, staff had high expectations of their pupils and had established productive partnerships with parents. Importantly, the quality of leadership had been evaluated as good or very good in all inspections of primary schools over the past two years. The authority remained committed to promoting pupils' wider achievements through important initiatives in areas such as healthy living, the development of sustainability, and environmental awareness.*

Outcomes of HMIE inspections of primary schools in the period since the first inspection of Falkirk Council had been positive overall. Areas of strength included equality and fairness, partnerships with parents and the quality of accommodation. In most cases, the overall quality of attainment in both English language and mathematics was evaluated as good. In a few cases it was evaluated as very good. Expectations and promoting achievement was evaluated as either good or very good in almost all inspections in this period. The quality of schools' self-evaluation was less consistent. In a minority of inspections, this was evaluated as having major strengths. However, in a number of schools, this was judged to have important weaknesses. The quality of leadership was increasingly consistent. In the past two years, evaluations in this area had all been either good or very good.

Overall performance in attainment in Falkirk Council primary schools was good. Authority staff and headteachers had prioritised the need to continue to raise attainment. This had resulted in improvements across the authority. Staff continued to benefit from helpful analyses of attainment patterns and trends, both for their own school and authority wide. The grouping of schools with similar socio-economic characteristics to form Good Practice Networks and the creation of the Early Years and Primary Improvement Partnership (EYPIP) provided useful additional forums for consideration of ways to raise standards. At key stages in primary education, most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Over the last three years, pupils' attainment in each of these areas had improved steadily. By P7, the performance of the lowest attaining pupils in mathematics had improved over the period 2003 to 2006. Similar progress had not yet been achieved in reading and writing. During the same period, schools had made limited progress in closing the gap in attainment outcomes between girls and boys. Attendance levels in Falkirk primary schools were above both national and comparator authority averages<sup>4</sup>. Exclusion levels in Falkirk primary schools were significantly below the national average and below that of comparator figures.

In their response to HMIE pre-inspection questionnaires, almost all parents of pupils at Falkirk Council primary schools reported that their children enjoyed school, that their children's school had a good reputation in the local community and that teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. Almost all pupils reported that they enjoyed school, that they had a say in deciding how to make the school better and that they felt safe and well looked after in school. Impressively, 98% of pupils who responded felt that the school helped them to keep themselves safe and healthy, by, for example, teaching them about healthy eating and the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Just less than one-third felt that the behaviour of some pupils in the school was not always good.

The number of high quality initiatives to improve pupils' achievements in a range of important areas, identified in the 2004 inspection report, had been maintained and developed further. Educational psychologists had assisted in improving the play skills and wellbeing of children through the development of the Council's *Managing Schools Project*. The authority remained committed to promoting pupils' understanding of, and interest in, the development of sustainability and environmental awareness. Falkirk primary schools had responded through positive engagement in a range of environmental experiences, including positive participation and achievement in the Eco Schools' initiative. Through the work of individual schools and ILCs, a wide range of health promoting activities had been developed and sustained in almost all primary schools. The Council had sought to promote its new *Hungry for Success*<sup>5</sup> menus through competitive pricing and the re-introduction of more on-site cooking kitchens within schools. Pupils reported positively on their involvement in healthy-living developments and on their understanding of important related issues. Continued implementation of personal learning planning had encouraged pupils to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning and development. Staff encouraged pupils to agree learning targets with them and to help monitor how they progressed against these targets. Across the authority, pupils had responded well to good opportunities to express their views and to become involved in decision-making through pupil councils. Pupils in Falkirk primary schools continued to take on responsibilities in a range of areas, including

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'comparator authorities' refers to the group of education authorities which are comparative to each other in terms of socio-economic and demographic factors.

<sup>5</sup> *Hungry for Success* – A Whole School Approach to School Meals in Scotland, Scottish Executive, November 2002.

acting as buddies to younger pupils and, in some schools, monitoring aspects of energy efficiency.

## **Secondary schools**

*Strengths just outweighed weaknesses in the authority's impact on learners in secondary schools. Secondary schools appreciated the considerable support they received from the authority. The promotion of broader achievement, strong school-college links and pupil involvement in decision-making were notable strengths. While performance in a number of SQA measures had shown some improvement between 2002 and 2006, performance across most measures was consistently below the average for comparator authorities and the national average. Overall, outcomes for learners in national examinations were weak. A very effective partnership with Forth Valley College helped provide a more flexible curriculum and additional ways of recognising and accrediting broader pupil achievement. Entry rates to further and higher education showed signs of improvement and the number of pupils whose leaver destinations were not in education, employment or training (NEET) had reduced steadily between 2004 and 2006. There had been only a minor reduction in pupil absences which still significantly exceeded the average for comparator authorities and the national average. The Council had very recently invested significantly in an electronic notification system designed to alert parents to non-attendance. The overall number of exclusions had reduced considerably in 2006. There was a continuing need to ensure that the authority's approaches to securing school improvement were underpinned by clearly focused action plans.*

Senior managers and headteachers demonstrated a strong commitment to raise attainment and attendance levels. Headteachers welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the development and review of authority-wide improvement strategies through their involvement in the highly regarded Secondary Schools Improvement Partnership (SSIP). This forum provided a very clear focus on a range of initiatives to improve learning and teaching, for example, the 'leading teacher' project and the recently devised *English Framework for Learning*. Major challenges still remained. There was now a need to ensure that initiatives designed to raise standards were appropriately prioritised and supported by clearly focused action plans.

In the period 2001 to 2004, the last year when national figures were available for national levels of attainment, pupils' performance in S2 in reading, writing and mathematics was strong and generally above the average for comparator authorities and the national average. Performance in all three areas improved further in 2005.

In the five year period from 2002 to 2006, performance in National Qualifications across a wide range of indicators was variable but consistently below the national average and the average for comparator authorities. Performance in the following measures had declined:

- mathematics at Level 3<sup>6</sup> by the end of S4;
- five or more awards at Level 3 by the end of S4; and
- English and mathematics at Level 3 by the end of S6.

Measures on which there had been improvement were the number of pupils gaining:

- an award in English at Level 3 by the end of S4;
- five or more awards at Level 4 by the end of S4;
- five or more awards at Level 5 by the end of S4;
- three or more and five or more awards at Level 6 by the end of S5; and
- one award or better at Level 7 by the end of S6.

While there had been some improvement throughout this period of the lowest attaining 20% of S4 pupils, the 2006 average tariff score was the lowest.

The education authority had actively promoted and supported a commitment to reduce the number of pupil exclusions through a range of initiatives including the appointment in each school of well-trained behaviour coordinators. While their number and deployment varied considerably across schools, there were signs that their work had contributed to reducing behaviour likely to lead to exclusion from school. In 2006 the number of pupils excluded reduced from the previous year's figure of 115 to 84 per 1,000. The authority had established informal attendance panels to combat high levels of pupil absence. It was too early to assess the impact of the revised arrangements on levels of pupil absence which, despite slight improvements in 2006 and 2007, significantly exceeded both the average figure for comparator authorities and the national average over the past three years. The Council had very recently invested in an electronic notification system designed to alert parents to their child's non-attendance.

In the period from September 2003 to March 2007, HMIE inspected four secondary schools, half the total number of secondary schools in the Council area. Aspects identified as good or very good in all four schools were the quality of the curriculum and pastoral care. The overall quality of pupils' learning was adequate in two, good in one and weak in another. Attainment, collectively, varied across the stages from weak to very good. Leadership across the school was very good in one school, good in two and weak in one.

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<sup>6</sup> Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Levels:

7: Advanced Higher at A-C/CSYS at A-C

6: Higher at A-C

5: Intermediate 2 at A-C; Standard Grade at 1-2

4: Intermediate 1 at A-C; Standard Grade at 3-4

3: Access 3 cluster; Standard Grade at 5-6.

Well-considered consortia timetabling arrangements and the development of a very effective partnership with Forth Valley College were supporting schools to provide a more flexible curriculum and to promote ways of recognising and accrediting broader pupil achievement. These approaches had resulted in greater choice in the senior school curriculum, an increased uptake of National Qualifications in S3, the introduction of Standard Grade in S2 in three schools, and a growing number of pupils achieving Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Youth Achievement and Scottish Progression Awards. The Council's Employment Training Unit was centrally involved in partnership arrangements designed to support vocational education opportunities. These arrangements included a successful S4 'positive transitions' project in four clusters targeted at school leavers at risk of not being in education, employment, or training. In the period 2003 to 2006 the number of young people going straight into work or training had increased. In line with the community planning partnership's NEET strategy, the authority and schools were working closely with partner agencies to increase the number of leavers entering full-time further and higher education. The overall numbers of young people not in education, employment or training, although still above comparator and national averages, had decreased steadily over the period.

Headteachers and staff in schools appreciated the support they received from senior managers and quality improvement and curriculum support officers. All headteachers agreed that senior managers showed a high level of commitment to improving education and that the authority made a positive difference to improving the quality of learning and teaching. Staff considered that officers made effective use of an increasingly sophisticated range of performance information to assist and challenge schools to improve. They valued the comprehensive training programmes provided by the authority in response to curriculum developments, school improvement priorities and a variety of major national initiatives. They also welcomed the opportunity to network and to share good practice through participation in key groups including cross-sectoral groups set up to review the performance of individual schools. A recent review of new management structures had led to the allocation of additional funds which most headteachers were using to enhance arrangements for the management of pastoral care. The authority had seconded an education information and communications technology (ICT) manager partly in response to anxieties which headteachers had expressed about the quality of the infrastructure and related support.

Arrangements to involve pupils in decision-making were an important strength. As well as pupil councils in each school, the authority had established the Falkirk Council Schools Council which was attended by representatives from each school. Members of the forum were consulted by the Director of Education on a range of issues including pupils' rights and responsibilities. Members participated in key working groups and contributed ably to meetings of the Education and Leisure Committee. An increasingly common feature of the work of pupil councils in schools was the involvement of pupils in staff selection procedures.

There were extensive opportunities for pupils to take part in cultural, sports, enterprise, international and environmental education activities, including award-bearing activities. Participation levels were high, and schools responded enthusiastically to authority-wide events such as Young Enterprise competitions and the Falkirk International Education Award. The authority provided strong support for enterprise initiatives and sound arrangements were in place to recognise and record the valuable contributions made by an impressive range of activities to the school curriculum.

## Features of good practice across sectors: Enterprise in Education

The authority had done a great deal to successfully promote and develop enterprise education across all sectors in line with *Determined to Succeed*<sup>7</sup>. A highly impressive database, which was attracting national attention, enabled the authority to record and maintain an overview of the very large number of enterprise initiatives being undertaken in its establishments. One such initiative, which had very recently won an award from Forth Valley Partnership Awards organised by Careers Scotland, involved a secondary school and a major national housing developer based in Falkirk. The database has been distributed to all schools to facilitate the sharing of good practice.

More detailed information is available at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

## Community learning and development

*The overall impact of community learning and development (CLD) services on adult learners and young people was very good. Staff delivering CLD services worked well with both internal and external partners to deliver a range of effective learning programmes. Youth work services offered a wide programme of activities which delivered both a universal service and one targeted at more vulnerable learners. Targets set to increase the number of learners in adult literacy programmes were being exceeded. An audit of the wide range of community-based adult learning opportunities was being undertaken to assess the appropriateness of topics and levels and their impact in terms of progression.*

The last CLD inspection report published in October 2005 had focused on the Falkirk area within the Council. Key strengths included the quality of learning opportunities, particularly in adult learning, projects in youth learning, and work to encourage community involvement.

The CLD service had identified key youth work priorities and programmes to roll out across the authority area and promoted these through publication of a learning plan for young people for 2006 to 2008. Programmes included street soccer, smoking cessation and parenting education. A broad range of generic youth work activities was available across the authority area through youth clubs and issue-based activities. Youth work input to schools was delivered through an integrated pupil support programme targeted at vulnerable young people with poor patterns of attendance or behaviour in S2/S3. Young people who attended the programme recorded their learning and progress in work diaries and this was accredited through Youth Achievement Awards. Youth work staff engaged in this delivery were not systematically engaged with schools to promote pupils' progress. A programme which offered outdoor education activities was delivered in Muiravonside Country Park by Community Services staff and engaged with difficult and challenging pupils to develop their communication and teamwork skills. Working in partnership with youth justice, police and other agencies, the CLD service had developed and delivered an effective range of diversionary activities and opportunities. These initiatives increased the capacity of the service to enable young people to become responsible citizens and confident individuals. The service recognised and monitored the wider achievement of young people through use of award programmes including The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, the Youth Achievement Award and the John Muir Award. These were undertaken in a wide range of youth work,

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<sup>7</sup> *Determined to Succeed* – Scottish Executive, 2002.

outdoor education and school settings. The levels of young people engaged in these awards had increased steadily over the past three years.

Targets for the delivery of adult literacies were met and showed improvement over time. Adult literacies programmes were targeted on regeneration areas and supported learners on an almost one to one ratio with support of volunteer tutors. The community-based adult learning programme delivered through Forth Valley College reached over 2,000 learners each year and was well integrated with other provision. The programme was being reviewed to ensure it offered suitable activities tailored to encouraging participants to engage in lifelong learning. The Grangemouth *Equal People Group*, an initiative supported by CLD, promoted opportunities for people with learning difficulties to participate in and influence decision making. Participants had developed a sense of group autonomy, ambition and self-determination.

Most CLD service performance information was still collated on a quantitative basis. Impact data was limited and staff training in relation to use of national quality indicators was being rolled out within the staff training programme. *My Future's in Falkirk* (MFiF) progress reports, published twice-yearly, showed clear improvements over time in relation to both the numbers of young people engaged in programmes and activities and their impact on young people and local businesses.

### **Children and young people with additional support needs**

*The authority had established a strong ethos of inclusion and was committed to the promotion of inclusive practices across its provisions. The impact and outcomes for pupils with additional support needs was good overall. Pupils with a wide range of additional support needs benefited from access to a flexible curriculum and resources. Partnership and multi-agency working was well developed across Falkirk. Joint working with health partners was particularly effective and had improved outcomes for a wide range of pupils including those who were looked after<sup>8</sup> by the authority, and those with an autistic spectrum disorder. Education Services had prepared well for the implementation of The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act, 2004 (ASL) and schools were well supported by the new Additional Support for Learning team. Further work was required to ensure that the performance of all pupils was closely monitored across the authority and that all pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties had access to a broad curriculum and were appropriately supported.*

There was a wide range of educational provision to support the needs of pupils with additional support needs. This included off-site provision for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and special schools for pupils with a range of complex learning and sensory needs. The authority had also developed an extensive range of enhanced provision support within mainstream schools for primary- and secondary-aged pupils with a wide range of additional support needs including learning needs and autistic spectrum disorders. Children and young people were supported to attend their local schools through the 'Staged Intervention' process and by ILCs. Individual schools monitored pupils' progress through individualised educational programmes (IEPs) which were reviewed and monitored in partnership with parents and appropriate support agencies, in line with authority guidance. There was growing evidence of pupils' views being creatively incorporated into

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'looked after' in this report includes all children looked after or looked after and accommodated by the Council.

the review process. Pupils with additional support needs in most schools had very good opportunities to be involved in whole school activities such as school shows and sporting events. In one school they also accessed high quality community activities at the end of the school day.

The education authority provided good advice on policy, planning and resource allocation in a helpful draft handbook for additional support for learning which had been distributed across the authority. The document outlined a staged intervention process which had been developed to ensure a consistent approach to addressing the additional support needs of pupils across the authority. A wide range of support staff were effectively deployed to support individuals and pupil groups. Centrally-based staff, including a team of specialists who provided support to pupils with English as an additional language and pupils from the Gypsy/Traveller community, gave good advice and strong support to staff in schools. Provision for pupils with sensory difficulties was well supported by specialist staff. Effective partnership arrangements with social work staff provided good levels of support to looked after children and young people. An identified officer supported effective communication between agencies and schools regarding the ongoing needs of pupils who were looked after. This ensured positive involvement in all decision-making processes within reviews and case conferences. Well-judged authority training opportunities for mainstream and specialist teachers, and support staff, had improved skills and confidence in relation to meeting additional learning needs. However, as identified in school inspections over the last three years, the overall impact was not yet evident in meeting all pupils' learning needs. Further progress was required in raising achievement levels for all children and young people with additional support needs, including those who were looked after.

The Council had developed an effective approach to planning and training in relation to the implementation of the duties outlined in the ASL Act. The authority had produced a range of leaflets to inform stakeholders, including parents of the support available for pupils with additional support needs. A well-established training programme for staff at all levels had been put in place to develop an understanding and awareness of the requirements of the legislation. The authority had been particularly successful in achieving good attendance at parent meetings and training regarding the implications of the ASL Act. There had been strong involvement from partner agencies in discussions and developments regarding the implementation of this Act.

The authority had developed a wide range of creative and supportive packages to meet the needs of a number of pupils including in-school support systems and flexible curricular approaches. Other examples included the development of 'nurture groups', creative curricular links with Forth Valley College, young people and their families. However, overall services for children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties required to be further developed. Service delivery was inconsistent across the authority and did not systematically meet the needs of children and young people. All pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs did not yet have access to local high quality full-time educational placements. Further integration of the support services for learning and behaviour was required to deliver better and more integrated outcomes for children and young people. The establishment of a new senior post which aims to provide support for behaviour management in secondary schools and to improve provision for young people outwith mainstream education, was a significant step towards addressing these issues.

The Educational Psychology Service delivered a broad and balanced range of services including advice and consultation, assessment and intervention, research and strategic development. They led a range of innovative projects, including the *Managing Schools Project* and *Psychology for Life*.

Overall, pupils and parents were well supported at important points of transition through strong multi-agency working. This was a particular strength in the transition stage between secondary and post-school provision. Parents spoke positively about the impact of the Child Support Plan developed by the pre-five educational support service. However, a few raised concerns about the transitional arrangements for pupils moving from the pre-five educational support service into formal education as the support service was no longer directly available when a child reached the age of four. In addition, transition arrangements for pupils in the enhanced provision moving to secondary school need to be monitored to ensure that they were in line with the authority policy for pupils in mainstream schools.

#### **Features of good practice: Falkirk's *Managing School Projects***

Falkirk's *Managing School Projects* was a highly successful initiative developed by the Falkirk Educational Psychology Service to train school staff to design and lead their own projects in schools. Since 2002 over half the Primary Schools in Falkirk and three Secondary Schools had taken part. Themes have covered play, communication and resilience and wellbeing. Each school evaluated and monitored the outcomes of the project's direct impact upon pupils. Examples from Primary Play projects included fewer playground incidents, children playing more playground games and rating their experiences more highly. From Secondary, resilience and wellbeing outcomes included substantial increase in lunchtime clubs, and more physically active pupils.

More detailed information is available at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

#### **4. What impact has the authority had in meeting the needs of parents, carers and families, staff and the wider community?**

##### **Impact on parents, carers and families**

*Overall, the impact of the authority on meeting the needs of parents, carers and families was good. Parents were very positive about the quality of education their children received. Evidence gathered over the previous three years from school inspections showed that parents were generally satisfied with their children's schools. The authority had undertaken some successful projects to involve families in learning and strong support was offered to parents and carers through the pupil support service, CLD services and the Community Development Training Unit.*

Evidence from questionnaires returned during school inspections over the past three years indicated that most parents and carers were satisfied with the provision in the schools their children attended. In almost all primary school inspections partnerships with parents, the School Board and the community were found to be good or better. In recent secondary school inspections partnership had been good.

The *Parents Focus Group* was an effective group which ensured that issues of parental concern were taken into account in the planning and development of Education Services. The Annual Parents Conference won an award at the Council's Celebrating Success Awards in November 2006. A wide range of approaches were being undertaken in relation to the *Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006* to ensure that staff and parents were aware of the diverse ways that they could be involved in their children's learning. Parents, carers and families were engaged in celebration of success events for their own and their children's learning through schools, college, CLD and wider partnerships in the Council's high-profile MFiF initiative.

Family Support Workers created home-school links and strengthened communications and relationships with parents who were not effectively engaged with schools. Attendance data showed a positive increase for most pupils who regularly engaged with family support staff. There were positive anecdotal examples from teaching staff on the change in young people's lives and behaviour. However, methods to measure the impact of family support work in relation to family and individual development required to be further developed. Developments in working with fathers to encourage them to become more effectively involved in their children's development and learning had resulted in positive behavioural changes made within the home and school setting and had contributed to academic improvement and achievements.

#### **Features of good practice: Denny Parents Group**

Denny Parents Group was a very positive support group for mothers of children with additional support needs. The development of the group had been supported by community learning and development staff and the group were now very effectively supported by the Community Development Training Unit (CDTU), a Falkirk-wide voluntary organisation. Participants had completed training programmes on surviving teenagers and how to deal with drugs as well as offering each other day-to-day support, sharing experiences and advice. All were able to clearly express the positive changes their involvement had brought in terms of their confidence levels and their ability to articulate concerns and communicate more effectively with schools and other services. With the support of CDTU they had produced a video letter for presentation to schools staff about the issues they faced as parents. This had already been presented in two schools and had been received very positively.

More detailed information is available at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

A range of family learning opportunities were delivered through the adult learning team and were targeted at vulnerable learners. Partnership with family support workers was limited and the development of family learning activities had not been effectively integrated into ILCs. Some parents of children and young people with additional support needs were concerned about the lack of engagement their children were able to have in out-of-schools activities due to additional costs and transport issues.

The Educational Psychology Service had developed effective working relationships with children, young people, and families. Individual educational psychologists took care to ensure that young people and their families were involved in the development of plans to

support them. The service now needed to further extend these working practices to include all stakeholder groups

### **Impact on staff**

*The authority's impact on meeting the needs of staff was good. Commendably, the authority had successfully prioritised the need to engage staff more directly in shaping policy and practice. Morale amongst teaching staff, centrally-deployed staff and senior managers was very positive. The morale of support and ancillary staff in schools was low. The use of professional review, support and development systems varied across the services. Almost all staff reported positively on the quality and impact of opportunities for CPD. Support for probationer teachers was of high quality and very well received. The work of the Quality Improvement Team had resulted in improved practices and the quality of pupils' experiences.*

The authority had successfully prioritised the need to communicate and engage with staff in schools, at a variety of different levels. Headteachers in all sectors had responded very positively to approaches which ensured that they were involved in the authority's strategic decision-making processes. Headteachers were actively and positively involved in a number of important groups, including the EYPIP, and the SSIP. These groups had a clear focus on raising achievement. Good Practice Networks continued to provide a useful platform to ensure that effective practice was shared amongst headteachers and staff. However, the positive impact of these developments on headteachers and teaching staff was not as evident among support and ancillary staff. Morale amongst many in this group was low and this was widely attributed to poor management by the Council of the move to implement the Single Status Agreement. Support staff interviewed were unanimous in their disappointment at the way in which communication on this sensitive issue had been handled. To their credit, and that of heads of establishments, there was no evidence of these concerns having impacted negatively on the quality of the support they provided.

Limited progress had been made, overall, on the implementation and use of the Professional Review and Development programme in schools. In the HMIE interim follow-up report of October 2005, HMIE commented on the need for better consideration of arrangements for the professional review and development of headteachers. No clear improvement was yet evident and while new arrangements had been agreed there remained significant numbers of headteachers who had not benefited from a professional review in recent years. Additionally, there was as yet no formal, council-wide, arrangement for the review of support staff though some headteachers had introduced their own procedures. School staff, and in particular headteachers and teachers, reported positively on the quality of opportunities for CPD. Almost all who responded to the inspection survey reported that the authority assisted staff in accessing staff development and training to support improvement in their work.

Senior managers, including headteachers, had benefited from a clear and effective prioritisation of leadership and management development programmes. These had included some well-received courses provided by the Central Scotland Partnership. Class teachers were positive about a range of provision, including the benefits of increasingly open and effective contact with relevant QIOs. Headteachers too, were positive about the way in which the role of the Quality Improvement Team was developing and almost all strongly

agreed or agreed that QIOs maintained effective contact with their establishment. Support from centrally-deployed staff in key areas, including learning and teaching, had resulted in reported benefits to learners. School staff commented positively on the way in which the authority had helped to improve their work in important areas including approaches to early intervention, health promotion, citizenship and developments in sustainability. Problems with ICT had limited the capacity of some staff to use ICT in their teaching. However, the authority had taken important steps to ensure that problems related to the speed of internet connection and the need to refresh the stock of computers in schools were being addressed. It had established very good support arrangements for probationer teachers, many of whom felt highly valued at an important stage of their professional development.

The Educational Psychology Service made a valuable contribution to the ongoing professional development of a wide range of stakeholders including support assistants, parents, educational authority staff and health colleagues.

Staff and volunteers trained as literacies tutors delivering CLD provision within Community Services were very well supported by line managers and central services. Volunteers who had attended literacies tutors training were very positive about the impact of the training they had received and were clear that the services they delivered had improved significantly as a result. Council staff and those from a range of partner agencies within the Community Learning and Development Partnership were very positive about their engagement in peer reviews of adult learning, youth learning and skills development action plans.

### **Impact on the local community**

***The authority's impact on the local community was very good. Local community planning was very effective in engaging the community to influence local decision making. Most schools had developed positive relationships with their communities. Community organisations were well supported by CLD staff and voluntary organisations were well supported and represented at all levels of community planning through the Council for Voluntary Service Falkirk and District (CVS Falkirk) and its networks.***

The development by Community Services of local community planning structures had been very effective in engaging local people. Staff provided them with a number of opportunities to influence service delivery. As a result, local issues were reflected in the themes of the overall Strategic Community Plan and formed the basis of local community plans.

Local people were actively involved through effective consultation processes in developing draft plans for key developments. The regeneration of Grangemouth town centre, for example, was being strongly influenced by local community members, local agencies and businesses. Partnership work between local community planning and local organisations such as the community council worked well, with each group and forum being clear about their role and contribution. Local groups and networks were in the process of setting up new formal and informal mechanisms and structures for planning, reporting and monitoring of the services provided by the local authority and other community planning partners. Community Services required to undertake further work on transferring support for local community planning networks from local community planning staff to the community capacity team. Links between local community planning and ILCs required to be reviewed in order to ensure that schools were effectively integrated into the community planning process.

Links between local businesses, Forth Valley College and a number of schools were very strong. Grangemouth High School, for example, worked closely on a series of initiatives with British Petroleum, Asda and GE Plastics. Forth Valley College had strong links with a wide range of employers. The college, in partnership with Education Services and the employment training unit, had engaged very productively with employers in developing skills for work programmes for young people. An aspect of MFiF, involved staff from 'Space Unlimited' working with young people to engage them in problem-solving activities linked to local community planning. Participants reported that as a consequence their self-confidence had grown and they had developed decision-making skills and greater creativity.

A directory of voluntary organisation activity in the Falkirk authority area had been developed by *CVS Falkirk* but was not yet widely accessed by other services. Staff and funding support for voluntary organisations was provided by *CVS Falkirk*. The development of networks linked to community planning themes had resulted in the effective engagement of the voluntary sector at all levels of community planning. Community Services staff provided effective support for small community organisations and worked closely with local activists. This support had, for example, resulted in an increase in the numbers engaged in local community planning and community action.

Other features of the authority's increasingly effective partnership with Forth Valley College included the provision of a growing number of places in college for S3/S4 pupils, transition arrangements from special schools to college and effective partnership working in community planning. As part of the promotion of MFiF, large groups of P7 pupils, over 200 each time, attended careers events at the college. The authority also liaised well with college staff and the Employment Training Unit to improve opportunities for young people not in education, employment or training.

#### **Features of good practice: 'Falkirk Football Club in the Community'**

The 'Falkirk Football Club in the Community' programme based at the Community Stadium developed the enthusiasm for football among children and young people in the Council area. It harnessed this enthusiasm to encourage active involvement and to providing routes for Falkirk's 'bairns' to progress from pre-school into adulthood whether as players, coaches, volunteers or supporters. While there was provision for those identified as perhaps being able to become professional footballers, the programme was much wider in its scope. Youngsters across the Council area were involved through 'mini bairns' for three to five year olds, the John Hughes Football Centres for those between five and 14 years of age to Twilight Leagues for teenagers. Special attention was paid to girls through the Girls Football in the Community initiative. Thanks to the productive partnership between Falkirk FC and Community Services and the active encouragement of schools, thousands of young people were able to enjoy football while developing confidence, self-esteem and other important life skills. Falkirk FC won the SFA Community Club of the Year for 2007.

More detailed information is available at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

## Impact on the wider community

*Impact on the wider community was good overall. Education in Falkirk was increasingly attracting national recognition. A number of the authority's initiatives had been the subject of interest from others who wanted to learn about specific aspects of its work. Such interest included the very effective partnership established with the Employment and Training Unit. The authority's Determined to Succeed database was proving very useful in managing the considerable information which existed about the authority's work on enterprise education, and had attracted interest from Learning and Teaching Scotland. The detailed approach by the authority to the collection and analysis of tariff scores had also attracted attention at a national level and had been adapted for use across Scotland. Senior staff from within Community Services had been seconded to support national developments. High quality publications developed by the Council for parents and young people was helping to raise the profile of the authority and its work in education.*

The Directors of Education and Community Services and a number of their senior managers were variously involved in national initiatives. The Director of Education, for example, chaired the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland *Children's Services Committee* while the Director of Community Services chaired the *National Swimming Academy*. Other senior officers had successfully contributed to national developments through secondments or had worked with HMIE as Associate Assessors. Such involvements made a positive contribution to Scottish education and helped raise the profile of Falkirk's provision for education.

The authority had forged links with a number of other councils as a *Central Scotland Partnership* to take forward new initiatives. This included a range of CPD opportunities for staff at all levels, from newly qualified teachers to those developing leadership and management skills. This partnership had the potential to be a very useful forum for a range of joint development activities. The authority had been proactive in ensuring leading figures had been invited to Falkirk Council events to motivate and inspire staff.

Staff in Falkirk Council had been successful in accessing funding to promote innovative activities. The authority was gaining a very positive national reputation for its work on CLD staff training and development, particularly at access levels and in youth work. The *Leading Teacher* and *Building Resilience* initiatives were at early stages of development but were already drawing attention and acclaim. The *Spinach for Popeye* programme focused on building entrepreneurial skills with young people and was recognised across Europe. EPS staff had published research findings in national journals, and effectively contributed to national projects and conferences.

Staff from a range of Councils visited Falkirk to learn more about its experience at the forefront of replacing and building new schools. For example, the innovative design, with its focus on sustainability, of Deanburn Primary School continued to draw national and international attention and visitors. Two other primary schools, at Maddiston and North Larbert, were being designed with ecologically friendly 'green' building techniques. The Council had responded sensitively to the views of stakeholders with regard to new schools, and continued to be flexible and creative in the newest phase of developments.

Schools were encouraged to look beyond the boundaries of the Council area, to forge links and to participate in national and international development, projects and competitions.

Recent examples included Inchyra Nursery School's participation in the European Union's Comenius programme. Children attending the nursery were enjoying an early experience of speaking German, and were developing an awareness of other people and places.

### **Features of good practice: Inchyra Nursery School's Comenius Project**

At Inchyra Nursery School, international education is an integral part of the curriculum. They are proud to be the only nursery school in Great Britain to have received a Comenius language student. Participation in this project has motivated and inspired even the youngest three year olds to learn more. Parents have been very positive about the introduction of German to their children and the initiative has helped further partnership working with them. Involvement in this project has resulted in more confident, knowledgeable children whose understanding of people from different countries has been widened at a very early age through a range of international experiences.

More detailed information is available at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk)

## **5. How well is the authority led?**

### **Vision, values and aims**

*The impact of the authority's vision, values and aims was good overall. Links from the Education and Community Services plans to corporate vision and aims were clear. This was particularly evident in the extent to which the key initiative, MFiF was understood and shared by staff in all sectors and throughout the community. Almost all staff, including those in partner organisations, were positive about the initiative and their role in contributing to the successful delivery of its outcomes. Awareness in schools of Education Services over-arching policy Learning to Achieve was less evident and it had not achieved the same level of impact. Community organisations and local activists were also very positive about the vision and felt that there was a clear drive by the authority and its partners to make the area a better place to live and work. The strong focus on the need to raise attainment in secondary schools was shared by all key personnel, from elected members to individual teachers.*

Staff in educational establishments were aware of the authority's wider vision, values and aims. They were committed to raising attainment and achievement and valued the partnerships with parents and other stakeholders. Across the Council, the morale of teachers was high and high aspirations for the young people of Falkirk permeated the work of all staff. This had a positive impact on the confidence and self-esteem of young people, and their aspirations for achievement. As yet, however, these gains had not impacted on attainment in examinations by pupils in secondary schools. The Children's Commission was at an early stage in ensuring effective partnership working across all agencies and more required to be done to clarify to all staff, their role in integrated working, and the potential benefits for learners and their families.

A notable feature of the impact of the authority's vision was the success of the MFiF initiative which had succeeded in bringing together the Council's vision for the development of the area across services. It had caught the imagination of stakeholders and helped enthuse

staff in education and community services. Staff interviewed at all levels within the Council were aware of the importance of the initiative and the successes already achieved. It provided not only a very useful, high profile focus for developing and improving services but a helpful means of encouraging greater partnership working across departments and with other bodies and agencies. In schools, there was less awareness of or recognition of the significance of the *Learning to Achieve* policy and few staff cited it as an important influence on their work.

The authority was committed to the promotion of positive attitudes to cultural diversity, equality and social justice. There was a strong focus on inclusion, which had resulted in a review of provision for pupils with additional support needs. Some further work was required to ensure that the achievements of these pupils were tracked appropriately. Authority staff, including Community Services had worked well with groups of parents and children to encourage greater participation in physical activity and cultural activities.

### **Leadership and direction**

*Elected members provided strong support to the Chief Executive and the Directors of Education and Community Services. The experienced Chief Executive had a detailed and comprehensive knowledge of the authority and the challenges facing education. The corporate team was relatively new, enthusiastic and highly committed to work together to meet the challenges facing Falkirk at this time of expansion and growth. The much improved sense of purpose and direction since the appointment of the Director of Education meant that staff in establishments and services now had considerable confidence in the leadership of the education service. Headteachers were increasingly being expected to assume greater devolved responsibility. This was a trend they welcomed. A number, especially in secondary schools, expressed concerns over ICT provision. Links between Education Services and other corporate services were good and improving. Workforce planning and planning for the development of the school estate were notable strengths. Overall, the quality of leadership and direction in the context of the education functions of the authority was good.*

The Chief Executive had a detailed and comprehensive knowledge of the authority and was highly committed to the area and to its future. For a period of months pending the appointment of the current Director of Education she had assumed direct responsibility for the department. This experience gave her a very clear first-hand understanding of the key issues. Together with elected members and the corporate management team she had increased the pace of change and development at various levels, including restructuring within Education Services itself and the induction of new headteachers. Elected members took a strong interest in education and the improvement of services. This was recognised by most heads of establishments. They had, for example, given keen attention to the progress being made against the main points for action contained in the inspection report of April 2004 and the efforts being made to raise standards of attainment in secondary schools. School inspection data and other performance data was scrutinised regularly by the Council's Education and Leisure Scrutiny Committee.

A more streamlined *local priorities* approach to service planning had been introduced and well received by schools who found the new approach helpful in informing school priorities and plans for improvement. While this approach linked service priorities clearly with corporate and national priorities, links between service priorities and budget priorities needed

to be more explicitly shown. The Council should take appropriate action to align more closely service and budget planning. The use and impact of the Children's Services Plan was not clear. Few staff referred to it, and it was recognised that there had been slippage in monitoring, reviewing and reporting on its progress. Planning for the maintenance and development of the school estate was well managed. All schools had completed asset management plans covering the period 2006 to 2011. The strategic management of school capacities was well planned and management information systems had been enhanced to provide more effective statistical modelling to assist the Council in this aspect of its work. Workforce planning and the management of teacher recruitment was a notable strength and Falkirk had succeeded in attracting and retaining teachers in a competitive market. This had resulted in a higher proportion of younger teachers compared to national norms.

There was a strong and supportive working relationship between Corporate Finance and the Resources Division of Education Services. A new corporate financial management system had been installed in all schools and this provided better financial information and allowed schools direct access to the financial ledger and to online purchasing. Budgetary control had improved over the last two years. However, there was a need to address capacity and training issues within the Education Services' Resources Division. Practical and well-considered financial guidance had been developed to support devolved expenditure in schools as part of the extension of devolved school management (DSM) arrangements following a highly regarded review led by an external consultant. The new scheme should support the devolution to schools of up to 95% of the eligible budget.

The authority had already delivered four new secondary schools through a PPP model and recognised the need for further investment in secondary schools to provide all pupils and teachers in the sector with a modern learning environment. This investment was being delivered through a NPDO partnership project, which, at the time of the inspection, was nearing financial close. The project was effectively managed and the highly diligent and enthusiastic project team had drawn on important lessons from the Council's initial phase of new builds.

Headteachers, particularly in secondary schools, expressed serious concerns about the capacity of the corporate ICT team to deliver a reliable infrastructure to schools that was well-matched to the needs of pupils and staff. School inspection reports highlighted the need for improvements. Similar concerns were recognised within Education Services and the Council had recently taken some important steps to address issues and to prepare for the future development of ICT in education. Sound arrangements had been made to invest significantly in ICT procurement and a comprehensive refreshment programme. The appointment of an education ICT manager was another positive step that was beginning to improve communication and joint-working with colleagues from corporate ICT. Senior managers were aware of the limitations of the service's main management information system, and arrangements were in hand to explore the option of purchasing an alternative system widely used by other Scottish education authorities.

The Council had introduced improved arrangements to manage strategic risk. Risk registers were in place and all services were represented on the Council's risk management group. This enabled dissemination of ideas across services and allowed issues to be raised and considered within the group. Education Services were reviewing their risk register. The corporate programme for Best Value service reviews was to be reviewed after the local

government elections in May 2007. It was intended to introduce a rolling programme for Best Value Reviews and Education Services would operate within that programme. Best Value Reviews had been conducted in a number of significant areas such as management structures within Education Services which had resulted in a clearer focus on improvement.

### **Leadership of people and partnerships**

*Overall, this aspect of leadership was good. The Director of Education had established highly effective working relationships with a number of key partners. An area of strength was the increasing impact of the Quality Improvement Team. Headteachers and senior officers were extremely positive about the extent to which they worked with the Directors as professional partners. Primary headteachers were particularly enthusiastic about the developing professional relationship. The benefits of partnership working were becoming increasingly evident in the workings of the very important Secondary and Early Years and Primary Improvement Partnerships. There were clear examples of inter-agency cooperation leading to tangible benefits. Overall, however, there remained a need for improved strategic direction as to how the key partnership between education and community services was developed to benefit children and young people.*

The Director of Education had successfully prioritised the need to build capacity for leadership at all levels in Education Services. She and her senior managers had succeeded in developing highly effective working relationships with a range of professionals and partners. Working closely with council staff, the Director had put in place measures aimed at addressing limitations in internet capacity to ensure that school staff had access to effective ICT provision. With the support of senior colleagues, she had developed further the work of the Quality Improvement Team. This included an increasingly rigorous focus on efforts to improve attainment and to provide appropriate support and challenge for headteachers. Headteachers valued their effective partnership with the Director and Heads of Service and were increasingly clear about their extended role in the broader senior management team. They had responded positively to this increasing responsibility and to the Director's clear approach to partnership working as exemplified in the work of the SSIP. The relatively new EYPIP had developed an appropriate three-year plan, structured around seven key priority areas. Headteachers reported enthusiastically on the start that had been made in important areas such as developing literacy and improving attendance.

The Director of Community Services provided very effective leadership to staff and in promoting productive partnership working with other departments and agencies. She played a prominent part in taking forward MFiF and in local community planning. Partnerships with the voluntary sector, business sector and other key agencies were well developed. Partners were clear about their role in developing and delivering priorities in relation to community development and education delivery. Senior staff within Community Services were very positive about the levels of responsibility they had been given and flexibility to drive forward agendas. There was a strong emphasis on staff developing new knowledge and skills, taking the lead on cross cutting activities. Restructuring of the CLD service had been underway for some time and care was being taken to ensure they made best use of the strengths and skills of staff, particularly the senior managers.

The newly appointed principal educational psychologist, well supported by the three deputy principal psychologists had established effective, well-integrated, teamwork across the service. The service was well supported by senior managers.

The HMIE follow-up inspection report, published in October 2005, noted that a start had been made to address the considerable challenges faced by ILCs to ensure benefits for young people and their families. There continued to be a number of positive developments in this area. Pupils and their families had benefited in a number of ways. For example, a recent HMIE inspection report of a primary school in the Grangemouth area noted the work of the school's nurture group and boys' group in providing effective assistance for identified pupils. Partnership working with health professionals had been developed through the ILC structure including a well-regarded 'Mellow Parenting' programme which focused on supporting the needs of families with pre-school children and cross-generational work with local school pupils, the community and community health grouping in the Grangemouth area. These positive outcomes were not, however, consistent across the various ILCs. Overall, there was a need for still greater strategic direction and coherence in the operation of the various partnerships in their efforts to address the identified needs of children and young people.

### **Leadership of change and improvement**

*The quality of the leadership of change had a number of strengths which outweighed weaknesses. The Directors of Education and Community Services provided a strong lead in encouraging innovation and sought to identify and promote excellence. A notable feature was the start made in giving greater responsibility to schools and headteachers. This development was widely welcomed by headteachers who looked forward to the opportunities to increase their role in taking forward the authority's vision, values and aims. The authority had focused closely on improving school attainment and provided very helpful data analyses for schools and its own QIOs. Regular visits to schools by QIOs were complemented by a programme of performance reviews and scrutiny visits. These provided schools and departments with opportunities to engage with senior managers and other centrally-deployed staff in discussing performance. While headteachers found these contacts increasingly purposeful there remained a need for improvement priorities to be supported by appropriately focused action plans and for progress to be rigorously monitored and evaluated.*

The authority had strengthened the capacity of central teams to support and challenge schools. There was a strong sense of purpose and commitment among QIOs and Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs). Schools increasingly recognised the developing system of performance reviews and scrutiny visits to departments as significant events which helped them focus on improving their work. A positive feature was the inclusion of headteachers from other schools on such reviews. Performance reviews, scrutiny visits and other contacts between centrally-deployed staff and schools were informed by high quality analyses of data, notably in relation to secondary examination results. The authority's own analyses were supplemented by the services of a highly experienced external consultant who, along with officers from the authority, met staff in all eight secondary schools and discussed results and their implications. More attention now needed to be given to ensuring that where room for improvement was identified appropriate steps were taken, action points agreed and progress rigorously and systematically monitored and evaluated by both centrally-deployed and school staff.

The Directors of Education and Community Services each gave a very positive lead in setting an agenda for improvement, encouraging innovation, as in the Vygotsky initiative, and shared leadership. Staff from Community Services were very positive about the lead given and about the opportunities for them to develop their own leadership skills. They were confident about taking on new projects and pursuing additional opportunities. Headteachers were similarly positive about the moves now evident to accord them a greater role in leading the improvement agenda in school education though they thought there was room to extend this further. The establishment of the SSIP and, more recently, the EYPIP were viewed positively as clear indications of the authority's commitment to developing shared leadership as was the emerging DSM scheme. The Director of Community Services met regularly with headteachers to help ensure they were up to date with the way in which staff from both services contributed to key council priorities. However, in order to meet the needs of children and young people more effectively, there remained a continuing need to give greater strategic direction to the operation of ILCs, in particular, by the closer integration of staff and services. ILCs and local community planning teams required to work more closely to ensure that their activities were complementary and made best use of available resources. Representatives of chairs of ILCs had recently begun attending the Children's Commission and this was proving beneficial to the wider partnership.

Educational psychologists had assisted in improving the quality of provision within the authority for families with children in their early years, and for children and young people at times of transition. Closer links now needed to be established with authority priorities so the service can more comprehensively contribute to impact and outcomes for Falkirk's children and young people.

The authority gave strong support to promoting wider achievements by children and young people in areas such as healthy living, literacy, the arts and sports. Initiatives such as the *Falkirk RED Children's Book Awards* promoted interest in books and reading while encouraging pupils at secondary school to *Read, Enjoy and Debate*. Other examples included the successes achieved by children and young people in environmental work through the John Muir Awards, in fund-raising to support charities and awareness of global citizenship and work with local companies such as British Petroleum on science and technology projects.

## **6. What is the Council's capacity for improvement?**

*Falkirk Council was improving its provision for education. Since the appointment of the current Director of Education Services there had been a much increased dynamism and belief that all those working with children and young people could work together effectively to improve outcomes. There was a strong sense of corporate working and the Council's impressive MFiF initiative provided a clear and very widely shared vision for the future. Morale among staff in schools had improved greatly, though there were issues to be resolved affecting support staff. While much had been done to strengthen the focus on raising standards and meeting the needs of all, and well-founded plans existed for further useful developments, there remained significant aspects of provision where performance had stubbornly resisted improvement. This was most notable in secondary school examination performance. Nonetheless, Falkirk Council's Education and*

***Community services, working together, now demonstrated a good capacity for improvement and the ability to achieve the desired improvements in performance.***

The Council had continued to build on the improvements noted in the report of the interim follow-up inspection published in October 2005. The appointment of the new Director of Education and the management restructuring which preceded it had now had time to take effect. Further appointments had been made to strengthen the team within the Education Department and these were complemented by strong moves to give greater responsibility for improvement to headteachers through, for example, the formation of the SSIP and EYPIP and the new system for the devolved management of budgets. While attainment in secondary school examination results remained too low, the authority was clearly focused on addressing the situation and performance in other sectors and in the broader achievements of pupils was good.

Critically, the Council had maintained the improvements noted in relation to morale among staff, especially among headteachers and teachers. Morale among other staff working in pre-school establishments and schools had been negatively affected by weaknesses in the Council's management of the move to single status. Nonetheless, the strong impression from schools and those working in CLD was of optimism, and a belief that they were moving in the right direction to secure improvements. A major factor in this confidence was the clear, purposeful lead given by the Directors of Education and Community Services. While there continued to be room for further improvements in the development of the strategic partnership between their departments, the role of the Children's Committee and the ILCs there was evidence of continuing improvements and the formation of a secure basis for the future.

## Key strengths

- The Council's commitment to improving the school estate and to meet the needs of communities as the population expanded.
- The leadership provided by the Directors of Education and Community Services and their increasingly effective partnership.
- The much improved morale among teachers and headteachers and their willingness to address the improvement agenda.
- The very positive impact of *My Future's in Falkirk* in setting out a vision for the future.
- The work undertaken to promote enterprise education across the Council's establishments.
- The engagement with local communities in local community planning processes and regeneration projects.
- Steps taken to consult with and involve pupils and young people.

## Main points for action

- Improve attainment in secondary schools.
- Ensure that all staff benefit from regular professional reviews which focus on their personal achievements and development needs and assist in career progression.
- Develop a more systematic approach to local Education Services planning to ensure shared priorities and targets are met.
- Develop clearer and more effective approaches to meeting the needs of more vulnerable pupils at primary and secondary stages, including those who are looked after or with social, emotional and behavioural needs.
- Ensure that the Resources Division within Education Services has the capacity to meet the demands placed upon it.

The authority has been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how it will address the main findings of the report. HMIE will maintain contact with the authority and will ask the authority for a report on pupil achievement and attainment in September 2009.

**Annette Bruton**  
**HM Chief Inspector**  
**Directorate 5**  
July 2007

## Appendix 1

### Quality indicators

<b>Quality Indicator</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Improvements in performance	Good
Impact on learners	Good
Impact on parents/carers and families	Good
Impact on staff	Good
Impact on the local community	Very good
Impact on the wider community	Good
Vision, values and aims	Good
Leadership and direction	Good
Developing people and partnerships	Good
Leadership of change and improvement	Good

### Note

The quality scale used in inspections is indicated below. Further details are provided on the inside cover of this report.

<b>Old level</b>	<b>New level</b>	<b>Description</b>
Very good	Excellent	Outstanding, sector leading
	Very good	Major strengths
Good	Good	Important strengths with some areas for improvement
	Adequate	Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Fair	Weak	Important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Major weaknesses

## Appendix 2

### Performance information

#### Attendance

Table A.1: Percentage Attendance

<b>Primary:</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Falkirk	95.5	95.2	94.9
CA Average	95.4	95.2	95.2
National	95.3	95.0	95.0
<b>Secondary:</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Falkirk	89.0	88.2	88.2
CA Average	90.4	90.5	90.8
National	90.2	90.1	90.5

#### Staying on Rate

Table A.2: Percentage of pupils staying on to S5 (Post Christmas)

	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Falkirk	69.2	69.1	67.4
CA Average	63.3	63.4	62.5
National	64.2	64.1	63.8

#### Pupil Destinations

Table A.3: Percentage of pupils entering each destination

<b>Higher Education:</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Falkirk	29	26	24
CA Average	30	31	30
National	29	31	30
<b>Further Education:</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Falkirk	13	17	18
CA Average	24	25	27
National	21	21	23
<b>Training:</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Falkirk	5	8	7
CA Average	5	5	5
National	5	5	5

<b>Employment:</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Falkirk	27	29	32
CA Average	23	24	24
National	25	27	26
<b>Unemployed and seeking employment or training:</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Falkirk	18	16	15
CA Average	14	9	12
National	13	10	11
<b>Unemployed and not seeking employment or training:</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Falkirk	4	2	3
CA Average	2	3	2
National	3	3	2
<b>Destination unknown:</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Falkirk	3	3	1
CA Average	3	2	2
National	4	3	2

## Exclusions

Table A.4: Total number of exclusions and exclusions per 1,000 population

<b>Primary:</b>	<b>2004</b>		<b>2005</b>		<b>2006</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Per 1,000</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Per 1,000</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Per 1,000</b>
Falkirk	75	6	75	6	90	8
CA Average		9		12		12
National	4,478	11	5,319	13	5,779	15
<b>Secondary:</b>	<b>2004</b>		<b>2005</b>		<b>2006</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Per 1,000</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Per 1,000</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Per 1,000</b>
Falkirk	883	99	1049	115	785	86
CA Average		111		112		102
National	33,465	105	35,513	112	36,136	115

## SQA Attainment

Table A.5: Results in Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications

<b>Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Levels:</b>
<b>Level 7:</b> Advanced Higher at A-C/CSYS at A-C
<b>Level 6:</b> Higher at A-C
<b>Level 5:</b> Intermediate 2 at A-C; Standard Grade at 1-2
<b>Level 4:</b> Intermediate 1 at A-C; Standard Grade at 3-4
<b>Level 3:</b> Access 3 Cluster; Standard Grade at 5-6

### Percentage of relevant S4 roll achieving by the end of S4

English at Level 3 or better		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Falkirk</b>		91.7	93.8	91.9	93.4
<b>CA Average</b>		93.2	93.5	93.5	93.3	93.9
<b>National</b>		93.4	93.7	93.7	93.6	94.0

Mathematics at Level 3 or better		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Falkirk</b>		90.9	91.5	89.6	90.1
<b>CA Average</b>		92.4	92.6	93.2	92.8	93.4
<b>National</b>		92.6	92.6	92.5	92.1	92.9

5 + at Level 3 or better		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Falkirk</b>		88.4	90.3	88.2	88.8
<b>CA Average</b>		90.5	90.1	91.0	90.3	90.4
<b>National</b>		90.8	90.7	90.8	90.2	90.7

5 + at Level 4 or better		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Falkirk</b>		70.2	73.1	70.3	71.7
<b>CA Average</b>		77.1	76.1	77.2	76.5	76.4
<b>National</b>		76.7	76.4	76.6	76.1	76.8

5 + at Level 5 or better		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<b>Falkirk</b>		26.3	30.4	28.1	28.5
<b>CA Average</b>		32.7	33.6	33.7	33.4	33.6
<b>National</b>		33.9	34.0	34.6	34.2	34.8

### Percentage of relevant S4 roll achieving by the end of S5

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>3 + at Level 6 or better</b>					
Falkirk	16.7	15.9	19.0	16.2	18.2
CA Average	23.2	21.5	22.4	22.1	20.9
National	22.8	22.6	22.7	22.7	21.7

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>5 + at Level 6 or better</b>					
Falkirk	6.8	6.6	7.8	6.2	7.8
CA Average	8.8	8.8	8.7	8.8	9.0
National	9.3	9.6	9.4	9.9	9.7

### Percentage of relevant S4 roll achieving by the end of S6

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>English and Mathematics at Level 3 or better</b>					
Falkirk	91.9	92.8	89.6	90.8	89.5
CA Average	91.8	92.2	91.4	91.6	92.2
National	92.3	92.3	91.6	91.8	91.7

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>5 + at Level 3 or better</b>					
Falkirk	89.4	90.7	88.9	90.6	88.8
CA Average	90.4	90.6	90.9	90.5	91.6
National	90.9	91.1	91.3	91.2	91.4

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>5 + at Level 4 or better</b>					
Falkirk	74.7	77.0	72.7	76.0	72.5
CA Average	78.2	78.6	78.9	78.0	79.3
National	77.9	78.6	78.6	78.4	78.5

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>5 + at Level 5 or better</b>					
Falkirk	40.9	42.8	39.5	43.8	41.4
CA Average	46.0	47.7	47.2	46.8	47.6
National	45.7	46.9	47.2	47.1	47.6

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>1 + at Level 6 or better</b>					
Falkirk	38.2	39.5	37.2	41.0	37.0
CA Average	44.1	44.7	43.4	43.2	42.9
National	43.7	43.6	43.5	43.1	43.0

<b>3 + at Level 6 or better</b>		<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
	<b>Falkirk</b>	25.7	25.0	24.3	26.6	23.4
	<b>CA Average</b>	31.1	31.7	29.7	30.0	29.5
	<b>National</b>	31.0	30.7	30.6	30.1	30.0

<b>5 + at Level 6 or better</b>		<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
	<b>Falkirk</b>	15.5	15.1	14.3	15.8	14.0
	<b>CA Average</b>	19.6	20.1	19.0	18.8	18.9
	<b>National</b>	19.7	19.6	19.6	19.4	19.7

<b>1 + at Level 7 or better</b>		<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
	<b>Falkirk</b>	10.1	9.6	9.6	9.2	10.6
	<b>CA Average</b>	10.8	12.6	11.8	11.6	12.1
	<b>National</b>	11.6	11.9	12.3	12.1	12.5

## Notes

- (1) CA average denotes comparator authority average
- (2) Comparator authorities for Falkirk include:

<b>Comparators</b>	<b>Rating</b>	
South Lanarkshire	****	'Very Close'
Fife	****	'Very Close'
Clackmannanshire	****	'Very Close'
Moray	****	'Very Close'
Angus	****	'Very Close'

- (3) Caution should be exercised when making comparisons with comparator authority averages if there are a number of authorities that are not extremely or very close.

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