

## **S18. OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF SQA ATTAINMENT WITHIN FALKIRK SECONDARY SCHOOLS 2012-14**

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services providing an overview and analysis of Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) attainment in Falkirk schools over a three year period, 2012 – 2014. The report was submitted in response to a request made by the committee on 14 May 2015 (ref S8). The report also provided information on how Falkirk Council's secondary schools perform in relation to similar schools in other authorities. Robert Naylor provided an overview of the report. He advised caution when making comparisons between schools year to year as attainment varied dependent on the nature of the cohort of young people in that year group. Further, the committee was advised that attainment measures were on the cusp of changing at that the new Insight tool would be used going forward. Insight replaces Standard Tables and Charts and is aligned with Curriculum for Excellence by measuring best achievement at point of school exit. It recognises wider achievement by including a range of SCQF credit-rated awards and learning programmes such as City & Guilds or Duke of Edinburgh.

The committee stated that it was good to hear that a young person's wider achievements and talent in other areas would be formally recognised. Members discussed the possibility that this might further skew figures regarding the attainment gap as children from more affluent families may be more likely to be involved in extra-curricular accredited programmes. Members stated that the presentation on Insight should be made available to all elected members through a briefing rather than being presented only to the Education Executive.

Robert Naylor stated that Insight would give the service the ability to analyse against the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and positive destinations, analysis was possible by many factors including whether a young person was a looked after child. He advised that vocational qualifications undertaken in the senior phase of secondary school would be included in Insight as would credit from part time college attendance in fourth and fifth year. Further, Insight would be the tool Education Scotland used in future when carrying out school inspections. In response to the discussion on access to extra credit based on affluence, Robert Naylor stated that if the schemes were delivered by the Council then they would be across all schools and open to all young people. He advised that Insight measured a young person's total points when leaving school. He stated that all national qualifications carried points and that average totals would be determined for every school. Work would then be undertaken by the Scottish Government to create a virtual comparator school. He advised that pupils who do not perform as strongly in academic exams will get credit for their many achievements which currently go formally unrecognised. This would assist such individuals in the employment market.

The committee discussed exam results for the current year and that attainment had not increased across the district but stayed static or gone down in some schools. Robert Naylor advised that the 2014/2015 results had just been released and a number of the results would be queried through the appeals process. The results figures would not be finalised until February 2016 after the appeals process had been completed.

Members asked how much importance was placed by the service on best practice sharing across schools to increase attainment. Robert Naylor stated that Larbert High School had historically had strong leadership and that there were many other examples nationally of effective leadership being key to school improvements. He advised that schools had a focus on attendance as it was known that there is a direct link between

attendance and attainment. The leader in a school is vitally important and sets the tone and expectations, and raises the aspirations of teachers and parents. The Council's Head Teachers and Depute Head Teachers met to share best practice.

The committee asked how Community Planning Partners were contributing to raising attainment in education. Robert Naylor stated that the report was focussed on secondary school but that the Scottish Government's Scottish Attainment Challenge had seen seven Councils receive over £11 million funding from the Attainment Scotland Fund. A further 65 schools would be allocated a share of funding and one of those was in Falkirk. This money would be used for an Attainment Advisor who would work from November to close the attainment gap in one or more local primary schools. He advised the committee of a national debate on the attainment gap at the primary stage and how to best measure it. Falkirk used a standardised test for literacy and numeracy. Fiona Campbell stated that the Community Planning Partnership was carrying out a review of its strategic plan with a range of evidence being compiled. The Council was working with all partner organisations to understand their challenges. A workshop was to be held on 31 August to consider the partnership's priorities for the next five years. She advised that all partners feed in to the planning process and that young people will feature in relation to positive destinations. She stated that a report would be submitted to Council in early 2016 and that engagement with elected members would be a part of the planning process.

Members expressed some concern at the wording relating to Bo'ness Academy in appendix 3 to the report, stating that it was too condemnatory and asked why intervention had not been put in place earlier to assist the cohort. Robert Naylor stated that the language used was not appropriate. He advised that in fourth year the cohort had performed less well than other years and that performance carried through. He stated that in primary school it was likely known that the year group was performing below the previous year.

The committee discussed the impact of socio-economic factors on attainment. Robert Naylor stated that there was a long standing national debate on the issue and that some said that it does not need to effect attainment but evidence from the last fifty years shows that it does have an impact. Overall attainment in Scotland had increased but the gap remains. In the past where significant spend and resources had been targeted at deprived groups the gap had been reduced but that once projects ended the gap returned. Historically in times of budget pressures additional capacity at deprived schools was an area reduced.

Members asked about systems for tracking pupil progress. Robert Naylor stated that an electronic tool was used, tracking and monitoring was carried out on all years not just those going through SQA exams. The tool was bought for Falkirk's high schools to analyse tracking and monitoring information, which allows Head Teachers to drill down into more detail. In year challenge was generated through the information provided through the tracking and monitoring tool to intervene quickly where attainment appeared to be dropping off.

The committee discussed that attendance would be improved where education was provided in a form which engages young people and this would lead to a general improvement in attainment alongside the need for strong leadership in secondary schools. The committee requested feedback on the points raised, namely: school leadership, mentoring and best practice sharing, a presentation on Insight and past examples of learning impacting on attainment (including primary schools).

## Decision

The committee agreed:-

- (1) to note the report;
- (2) to request the Director of Children's Services to provide a further update on 2015 attainment to the Education Executive and the Scrutiny Committee when this information is available, and
- (3) to request that further reports should provide the basis for regular reporting on attainment and achievement, focusing on overall attainment, progress of lower attaining pupils, and attainment relative to socio-economic deprivation.