

Validated Self-Evaluation



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1. The aims, nature and scope of the Validated Self-Evaluation

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. Evaluations are based upon a published framework of quality indicators (*Quality Management in Education 2*)¹ which embody the Government's policy on Best Value. The *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000* provides a framework for improvement planning that requires education authorities to set out and report on improvement objectives related to the National Performance Framework (NPF), national priorities and associated measures of performance.

HMIE's mission is to work with others to secure improvements in the education and wellbeing of the people of Scotland. It promotes public accountability for the delivery of high quality education for all learners, and services for children. HMIE no longer operates a cycle of inspection of the education functions of local authorities (INEA) but is developing a more proportionate approach to evaluating and reporting on these functions in line with the drive to reduce external scrutiny at service level. Working in partnership with other agencies and organisations and building on the findings of inspection and review, HMIE also aims to promote improvements for the benefit of all learners and service users. Validated Self-Evaluation (VSE) contributes to this aim through supporting capacity building for self-evaluation and improvement.

What is Validated Self-Evaluation?

VSE is a voluntary process which aims to support and challenge the work of education authorities to deliver and improve the quality of provision and outcomes they offer for all learners. It involves a partnership between the education authority and HMIE in which HMIE apply their knowledge of educational delivery and expertise in evaluation in order to extend, challenge and support the education authority's own self-evaluation processes, and so affirm (or otherwise) and strengthen the outcomes. VSE acknowledges that the responsibility for improving services and outcomes lies with the education authority. It recognises that self-evaluation is increasingly well embedded across the Scottish educational landscape and that high quality self-evaluation can lead to continuous improvement for learners and the achievement of excellence in practice and provision. In summary, VSE seeks to:

- build the capacity of education authorities to evaluate their own performance and improve the quality of services and outcomes for learners;
- promote and develop good practice and best value in education authorities;

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

- provide independent evaluation and validation and so provide information to Scottish Ministers and the public on the quality of education provision in Councils; and
- provide high quality and robust information which can contribute to the shared risk assessment process.

The VSE process is designed to accord with the principles recommended by the Crerar 'Reducing the Burden' Action Group, in that it is:

- focused on outcomes;
- proportionate to need;
- owned by those carrying out the self-evaluation;
- flexible, with the scope to recognise differences in service levels and types;
- built on existing good practice and relevant existing standards;
- rigorous and transparent; and
- designed to secure continuous improvement.

2. Validated Self-Evaluation in The Highland Council

The Highland Council worked in partnership with HMIE to evaluate aspects of the Education, Culture and Sports (ECS) Service in the Highland area. This was undertaken as a result of an expression of interest from the Highland Council in participating in this developing process. ECS brought a wide range of partners to work together throughout the self-evaluation process. The approach has been collaborative and rigorous, following the aims, nature and processes as detailed in this document. This joint summary provides information about VSE as a process generally, and details how it worked in Highland. It also offers a summary of the key outcomes for learners and details the agreed future actions.

3. Scope of the Validated Self-Evaluation in The Highland Council

The self-evaluation process set out to enable ECS staff to answer the following questions:

- What are our key strengths?
- What key outcomes have we achieved?
- How well do we meet the needs of stakeholders?

- How good is our leadership?
- What are our key priorities for improvement?
- What is our capacity to improve?

Previous self-evaluation by ECS indicated that a central challenge for Highland lies in improving outcomes for those young people who are vulnerable and who underachieve. In consultation with HMIE, The Highland Council identified four key themes which they wanted to evaluate more closely to determine the impact for children and young people.

The four themed areas were:

- Health and wellbeing
- Getting It Right for Every Child
- More Choices More Chances
- Literacy and numeracy

4. Process of Validated Self-Evaluation in The Highland Council

Senior managers in ECS worked with HMIE to brief a wide range of staff, elected members and key stakeholders on the principles of VSE. ECS service managers set up four groups to look at each of the themed areas and one group to focus on how performance is improving and the impact for learners. Each group was led by a chair and vice chair from ECS and had broad membership including representatives from partner agencies. Preparatory meetings were held during the briefing phase of the process. Senior managers met with the chair and vice chairs of each group to prepare the fieldwork. This was followed by a familiarisation session for group members. During the main week when the VSE activity took place, group members, including HMIE, undertook fieldwork including interviews and observations. They gathered, analysed and evaluated evidence, including statistical data. Groups were supported by HMIE to focus on the nature, purpose and scope of the allocated tasks. HMIE shared examples of good practice with team members, for example in relation to recognising and tracking achievement.

HMIE team members operated in a challenge and support role to ensure the process was sufficiently rigorous and robust. There were regular meetings of representatives of thematic groups, including HMIE and senior managers to discuss initial findings and to share practice. HMIE reviewed the Council's written plans, including the Single Outcome Agreement and the Business Management and Improvement Plan. HMIE were able to draw on what they already knew about the work of the Council. This included information gathered by the District Inspector, such as attainment and achievement data, and evidence from inspections of pre-school centres, schools and learning communities. HMIE also

used the findings of their inspection of services to protect children and young people in The Highland Council, published in May 2010, and the inspection of the Educational Psychology Services of March 2010.

Following the first main week of activity, authority staff collated evidence and worked together to provide an interim report. ECS senior managers and HMIE met to discuss the progress of the thematic groups and the overall strength of the self-evaluation. During this discussion they identified the need for HMIE to provide further support and challenge to senior managers in validating evidence and in building capacity among staff. In the second phase of the VSE, quality improvement officers worked with HMIE to review the robustness of their quality assurance processes and explore how their role in challenging and supporting schools and pre-five centres could be used more effectively to inform evaluation at authority level. A group of staff from Community Learning and Leisure (CLL) worked with HMIE to improve their self-evaluation processes. HMIE also worked alongside senior managers to test and confirm the initial findings of the self-evaluation and so enable senior managers to produce a full evaluation which forms the appendix of this joint report.

5. What did we find as a result of the Validated Self-Evaluation?

HMIE concurred with the range of strengths identified by ECS and from these, jointly selected a number of key strengths.

These were:

- school attainment at key stages in secondary schools;
- the wide range of partnerships which enhance outcomes for children, young people and their families;
- the effective steps taken to promote health and wellbeing of children and young people; and
- the commitment of elected members, the Chief Executive, the Director of ECS and senior staff across the service to improving outcomes for learners.

6. What did HMIE learn about the quality of self-evaluation in The Highland Council from this process?

This section describes the features which enabled HMIE to confirm the findings of the process and so validate the self-evaluation.

As the VSE process progressed, there was an increasingly positive culture of self-evaluation within The Highland Council. Senior managers recognised that approaches to self-evaluation were not yet consistently rigorous across the Service. Staff were strongly committed to improvement through self-evaluation and this was characterised by an openness and a willingness to question their existing practice and look at ways in which to improve the robustness of evidence

gathering. Preparatory work by authority staff was thorough and assisted in promoting a good understanding of the principles of VSE among those involved.

Group members worked effectively together to gather evidence. They interviewed key staff, visited establishments and analysed documentation. As the week progressed group members increasingly took on lead roles. They quickly grasped the importance of corroborating evidence and realised that in order to make informed judgements, they needed to consider direct observation, as well as data and collating views from stakeholders. Group members reported learning from each other as the week progressed.

Following interviews and focus group discussions, groups worked alongside HMIE to identify key issues and produce evaluative statements. HMIE supported and challenged this discussion and, as a result, groups realised that at times the focus was too narrow and did not include all aspects of the service. As a result, they were able to broaden their thinking and include this wider perspective. Through the VSE process, staff became increasingly aware of the range of data that was available and of the need to use this more effectively to corroborate evidence. They sharpened their focus on the use of statistical and comparator data. HMIE worked with groups to look for trends and patterns in data and explore how the information could be used more effectively to identify strengths and weaknesses and so inform future planning and improvement. Within this context, HMIE also assisted senior staff to examine the degree to which the authority uses data from attainment in secondary schools to challenge each school to improve its performance. As the process developed, staff improved their questioning to focus more on outcomes rather than processes. This assisted them in identifying improvements in learning for children and young people.

During the VSE process, groups became more aware of the need to link more effectively with each other to share findings. In some instances, team members from different groups conducted interviews together in order to synthesise information. They also gained valuable knowledge of good practice across The Highland Council.

During the second phase, HMIE worked alongside senior managers to provide a sharper focus to the report by strengthening evaluative judgements and hence statements. Through working with senior managers to validate evidence, HMIE found strong indications of a robust, fair and open approach to this process. Senior managers quickly identified aspects which required further corroboration and recognised that there was not sufficient analysis of data on adult learning. HMIE worked with a group of staff from CLL to build capacity for self-evaluation and to identify data which could be used within the internal report.

Overall, HMIE supported and challenged The Highland Council staff through discussion and modelling of evaluative activities. As a result, Highland staff were able to improve the quality of their evidence in order to identify more clearly strengths and areas for improvement. They were able to use evidence more effectively to evaluate the quality of their processes and outcomes for learners,

and so incorporate sharper, more evaluative statements within their self-evaluation report.

HMIE were satisfied that council staff took a strongly self-critical approach, actively probing aspects which were less effective, and that they welcomed and took full advantage of the independent benchmarking of quality which HMIE contributed. HMIE confirm that the self-evaluation process was robust and that staff demonstrated a capacity for self-evaluation and improvement to continue.

7. How has the Validated Self-Evaluation contributed to the Highland Council's capacity to improve?

Capacity for improvement depends upon a range of factors, including:

- the overall impact and outcomes achieved by the education authority;
- its focus on improvement;
- its track record in bringing about improvement;
- the quality and accuracy of its self-evaluation;
- how leadership and management of the Council results in improved outcomes for learners.

Within Highland there are many examples of good practice which provide positive learning experiences for children and young people and examples for others to follow. The authority faces a number of challenges. These include dealing with the difficulties of strategic management of extensive geographical areas with large numbers of establishments and ensuring a consistently high quality of leadership in these establishments. Through working alongside the HMIE team, senior managers and staff have gained valuable insights in relation to gathering and evaluating evidence about the impact and effectiveness of authority priorities.

The Chief Executive is strongly committed to continuous improvement through self-evaluation. The Director of the Education, Culture and Sport Service leads the service well and has strongly developed the service's capacity for improvement. He has a clear awareness of the ECS service's strengths and the challenges it faces in bringing about further improvements. The VSE process will continue to shape future approaches to improvement through self-evaluation. In particular, senior officers will build upon the process as a basis for improvement planning and public reporting on standards and quality.

HMIE are confident that The Highland Council has identified appropriate areas for improvement and how these improvements will be achieved. The Highland Council has a sound capacity for improvement.

What does the Council plan to do next?

As a result of the work undertaken within the VSE process, The Highland Council and HMIE have agreed broad priorities for action. These are to continue to:

- extend approaches to improvement through self-evaluation across the ECS Service to ensure consistently high quality learning experiences across schools and services;
- improve the relevance, range and use of data to ensure all learners achieve their full potential;
- develop further early intervention strategies to improve attainment in literacy and numeracy;
- develop a shared understanding across the service and its partners of the definition of learners' wider achievement and how this will be reflected in practice; and
- evaluate and improve the operation of Associated School Groups (ASGs) and Integrated Learning Communities (ILCs) in order to achieve the most effective mechanism for promoting wider achievement across communities.

Further details of areas identified for improvement are given in the attached report prepared by The Highland Council as part of the VSE process.

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Directorate 5
HM Inspectorate of Education

Mr Alistair Dodds
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29 June 2010

How can you contact us?

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of validated self-evaluation you should write to Gill Robinson, HMCI, at HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. Alternatively, if your query related to this report, you may also write to Mr Alistair Dodds, Chief Executive, The Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX.

Appendix: The Highland Council Self-Evaluation

This report was produced by The Highland Council staff and partners, supported by HMIE as part of the VSE process. It describes how Highland Education, Culture and Sport (ECS) Service conducted the VSE process and reflects on the strengths and improvement needs for each considered theme. It also indicates the main actions being addressed which arise from these self-evaluation activities. The contents of this report will be used to inform the Standards and Quality Report for 2010 and set the key improvement priorities for The Highland Council's next Education, Culture and Sport Service Improvement Plan.

As a result of the VSE process, the ECS Service's self-evaluation processes will be reviewed and improved to incorporate good practice developed during this engagement with HMIE.

The Highland Context

The Highland Council area comprises 33% of the Scottish landmass and includes 14 inhabited islands. The population has grown over the past ten years by 4.3% and currently is estimated at 219,400 which accounts for 4.2% of the population of Scotland. More people living, working and studying in the Highland Council area are essential for sustainable economic growth. Population growth is not evenly spread. There is relatively high growth in the Inner Moray Firth, the Isle of Skye and East Sutherland. There are areas of population decline, notably in small towns in the north of the area. The population is dispersed with only 25% living in settlements of over 10,000 people. The wide geographical area and the population growth distribution both place significant demands upon infrastructure and service delivery.

In keeping with the demographic profile of Scotland, the population is aging. Projections indicate that those aged over 75 years will account for 16% of the total population in 2031. However, there are increases in the number of births in Highland over the past five years and in the growth among younger migrants to the area. A greater proportion of the working age population is economically active and unemployment lower than Scottish averages. The proportion of people claiming housing and other benefits is lower than the national average, but this is rising. Home ownership and private renting are more common in Highland and house prices are higher than the Scottish average. Life expectancy is higher than in Scotland generally but hospital admissions for alcohol misuse in Highland are considerably higher than the Scottish average.

The Highland Council has a strong commitment to promoting the Gaelic language and culture. It is the first public body in Scotland to have its Gaelic Language Plan formally approved by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The Plan, which runs until 2011, intends to boost the status and use of the language across The Highland Council area.

ECS is the biggest of the Council's services, with 6,900 full and part time staff, including 2,932 teaching staff. There are 161 nursery units, 81 partner centres of which 20 are private providers, 183 Primary Schools, 29 Secondary Schools,

and three Special Schools in Highland. Three of the primary schools provide wraparound care including the Gaelic school in Inverness. There are 16,821 primary children, 14,767 secondary young people and 127 young people attending special schools.

The service also has responsibility for 18 leisure centres; 49 libraries (including 9 mobile libraries); 33 community education centres; a genealogy service; four dedicated art galleries; two regional museums; three hostels for young people; 133 public access personal computers in community libraries; two day education centres; three outdoor and residential centres; 100 partner centres providing pre school education, 180 sports pitches and four archive centres.

The Highland Council, through its capital programme and two phases of public-private partnerships, has opened 15 new schools and a state-of-the-art archive centre. The school estate is currently under review with a particular emphasis on assessing the impact of demographic change and the condition and suitability of the buildings. The Highland Council has 112 Primary Schools that are classified as Category C (Poor) in the Scottish Government's School Estate classification index. This represents over 25% of the Category C schools in Scotland.

The Highland Council has 80 elected members, representing 22 multi-member wards. The financial outlook for The Highland Council is particularly challenging. ECS budget savings have been delivered in the past four financial years, resulting in a reduced management and support structure. The outlook for the next two financial years would indicate that significant budget savings will require to be delivered which may have a direct impact on front-line service delivery.

Education, Culture and Sport Service profile

The ECS Service was created in 2002, combining the former Education Department and Culture and Leisure Services to allow more integrated working across its range of activities. Supported by central services, the functions of the ECS Service are currently delivered through three operational areas.

Within The Highland Council structure, ECS deliver services in a range of ways through pre-school facilities, schools, community centres, libraries, youth provision, leisure facilities, museums and Adult Literacies provision. Provision is also commissioned through service level agreements, contracts and partnership agreements with other providers, agencies and services.

The Council's programme *Strengthening the Highlands* sets out the Service's main actions which are reflected in the ECS Improvement Plan. This sits within a suite of plans that have clear links to the Single Outcome Agreement, the Corporate Plan, other individual Service Improvement plans and school and team plans.

The ECS Director leads, manages and directs the service within the framework of statutory responsibilities and regulations. As a member of The Highland Council's

Executive Officer Team, the Director contributes to the corporate management of the Council.

Four Heads of Service for Community Learning and Leisure, Education Services, Children's Services and Support Services, each have key roles in the leadership and management of the Service. The management of the service is organised into three service delivery areas each led by an Area ECS Manager who provides the strategic and operational leadership in their area.

What are the strengths of The Highland Council Education, Culture and Sport Service?

The Highland Council's evaluation of performance included a number of strengths. These include the following:

- secondary school attainment as measured by SQA in Highland is higher than the Scottish average in almost all indicators. It is better in almost all indicators for comparator authorities;
- most HMIE inspections of schools and pre-school centres within the last two years have been positive. The historically weakest indicator, that of improvement through self-evaluation, has shown recent overall improvement;
- strong and effective local partnerships between ECS, NHS Highland, Northern Constabulary and other service providers have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable young people and their families. HMIE published a very positive Child Protection report in May 2010. This highlighted the wide range of support services provided to children and families at an early stage and the effective action taken to protect children when identified as at risk of immediate harm;
- the effective literacy support for hard to reach young people, including the children of travelling families through Adult Basic Education and Youth Work provision;
- the impact of low cost leisure access scheme *High Life* which enables an increasing number of participants to access a growing range of facilities;
- the high levels of satisfaction expressed by users of community facilities including libraries, leisure centres, and schools;
- research undertaken by Edinburgh University on behalf of the Scottish Government confirms the Council's Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) planning process effectively supports professionals, young people and their families through its early identification and assessment processes;
- a robust Skills for Work programme provides a more relevant curriculum for significant numbers of young people. This programme includes the

involvement of a wide range of businesses, leading to more positive destinations;

- through More Choices More Chances, children and young people with additional needs are well supported to prepare for life after school; and
- an HMIE inspection published in March 2010 identified the positive impact of Psychological Services on young people, parents, staff and the wider community.

The Highland Council's vision

The Highland Council is committed to continuous improvement in services in its communities. This is reflected in its programme *Strengthening the Highlands*. The Education, Culture and Sport Service vision and aims were devised in February 2008. As a result, the vision of working together to inspire learning and achievement in Highland communities was developed. As stated, this is designed to enable the people of the Highlands to achieve their full potential as;

- Effective contributors.
- Confident, healthy and safe individuals and communities.
- Active and successful learners.
- Respected and responsible citizens.

This vision is achieved through the agreed values of:

- Promoting sustainable communities through building the capacity of individuals and the community.
- Meeting the needs of children, adults, families and communities through inclusive service provision, based on effective consultation.
- Recognising our staff as our most valuable asset and ensure they are enabled to develop their skills, expertise and potential.
- Promoting teamwork, collegiality and leadership at all levels within the Service.
- Fostering the social and cultural values of the Highlands and its communities.
- Improving our understanding of the world and our place in it.
- Promoting achievement, health and wellbeing through education, arts, culture, sport and heritage.

- Delivering continuously improving services through self-evaluation, quality assurance, planning and management.

How are we doing?

The Core group

Supported by HMIE, members of the Core VSE group engaged with a wide range of lead officers, staff and partners and performance data to evaluate the following aspects of the service. As a result of this work, collegiate awareness of the importance of the Single Outcome Agreement and subsequent improvement planning processes was enhanced. The usefulness of some data was questioned by group members during the VSE process. It was not always presented in a helpful format for evaluation.

Improvements in performance

Through the Council's programme for administration *Strengthening the Highlands* the service is committed to continue to raise levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy for children and young people in pre-school, primary, secondary and adult provision and maintain high levels of achievement in the Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Overall, levels of achievement within this framework were maintained between 2007/8 and 2008/9.

HMIE reports published since August 2008 show a positive picture of the achievements of pre-school centres.

In schools, inspection evidence since August 2008 shows a positive picture. *Improvements in performance* were satisfactory or better in almost all schools. In almost 30% of schools *Improvements in performance* were evaluated as very good.

In primary schools, most children are attaining or exceeding national levels in reading, writing and mathematics. These levels of attainment have been consistently maintained at approximately 81% for reading, 75% for writing and 84% for maths. There is now a need to build on this consistency to ensure future improvement. The service needs to review how it will measure the progress and attainment of its learners, individually and collectively to ensure and demonstrate future improvement in the context of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

At S1 and S2, the majority of young people are attaining appropriate national levels in reading, writing and mathematics. There has been a slight improvement in reading and writing over the last five years.

In relation to National Performance measures (SCQF), attainment in Highland secondary schools compares well overall in relation to the national average and

comparator authorities.² Performance at Levels 4, 5 and 6 is above the national average. At all stages Level 3 awards are in line with the national average.

At S4, performance has been broadly maintained over the past five years. Highland performs above the national average and comparator authorities in all but one of the key measures. The percentage of young people achieving five or more awards at Levels 3, 4 and 5 is better than national and comparator authorities. Performance at Level 3 in mathematics should be stronger.

By the end of S5, performance at Higher levels is strong. Over the past five years performance at 3+ Highers has been above national levels and comparator authorities. Over the same period the percentage of young people achieving five or more Highers has similarly been above national levels and comparator authorities. In 2009, the percentage of young people achieving five Highers was the highest in five years.

By the end of S6, the percentage of young people achieving 1+, 3+ or 5+ Highers is higher than nationally and in comparator authorities. Performance at Advanced Higher level has been variable over the past five years. Highland performance is in line with the national average but below that of comparator authorities.

In Highland, 94% of learners achieve Level 3 in English and mathematics by the time they leave school in S6. For the 6% of learners who do not achieve this standard there is a need to review the intervention strategy to ensure these young people are supported as early as possible in their school career.

Secondary schools perform well overall compared to the national average. There is variation in how individual schools perform against comparator schools. More emphasis needs to be placed on the effective use of comparator school and subject data when schools and authority staff conduct self-evaluation.

A review of HMIE inspection reports for learning communities associated with secondary schools and Community Learning and Development indicates that most programmes are having a positive impact on the health, wellbeing and skills development of young people and adults in our learning communities. CLL staff systematically collect a wide range of information which is used to comply with national requirements or to inform local reporting mechanisms. This data and information needs to be better used to track learners, support strategic decision-making and to set targets for continuous improvement. The ECS Service recognises there are important weaknesses in measuring performance.

² Levels of attainment

level	equivalent qualification
3	Standard Grade Foundation or Access 3
4	Standard Grade General or Intermediate 1
5	Standard grade Credit or Intermediate 2
6	Higher
7	Advanced Higher

An increasing number of adult learners participate and benefit from a range of community based learning programmes, including literacy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). More adult learners gained SQA Communications and Numeracy awards in 2008/09 than in the previous year. Partnership working effectively supports these learners by providing a wider range of learning opportunities and progression pathways.

Increasingly schools place more emphasis on the wider achievement of young people. The number of young people engaged in recognised leadership and achievement awards has increased from 767 in 2007 to 1128 in 2009. This exceeds the target set by the authority for 2010/11. The authority now needs to agree a definition of 'achievement' which ensures that all learners are offered suitable learning pathways which recognise, value and track their achievements.

A wide range of sustained initiatives has improved citizenship, enterprise and community capacity. Every school in Highland has achieved Health Promoting School status. All schools are registered for Eco-School Awards. A significant number of schools have met the Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flag award criteria.

In line with the Scottish average, a high proportion of school leavers continue to enter positive destinations. Over a three year period to 2008/09, the number of young people entering higher or further education has risen by 7% to 54%. The number of young people entering employment after school remains significantly above the national average. A range of partnerships with local schools, employers and other agencies such as Calman Trust have contributed productively to supporting young people into positive destinations. The service's participation in the national pilot for Activity Agreements will offer further support to young people.

Flexible, community based adult learning enables learners to develop or refresh a range of skills. Overall, adults report that they are more confident and motivated to succeed. For some, their achievements have impacted positively on their lives and their families. A number have built on this learning and progressed to formal education through Further Education colleges or have successfully applied for different jobs or promotion at work. Others are better able to support their children's learning. Some learners have used their achievements to undertake more responsible roles in the community.

The authority will:

- improve how the service measures the progress, attainment and achievement of all learners;
- improve early intervention strategies to ensure that more young people achieve Level 3 in English and mathematics by the time they leave school;
- improve the use of comparator school data to support and challenge expectations and raise attainment; and

- ensure that all learners are offered suitable learning pathways which recognise, value and track their achievements.

Impact on learners

The overall impact of services on learners of all ages and service users is very positive. In all pre-school centres inspected by HMIE since August 2008, evaluations indicated that children's experiences and arrangements to meet their needs are satisfactory or better. In all primary school inspections in the same period learners' experiences have been satisfactory or better. In just over a third of primary schools learners' experiences were very good. In the same period, the arrangements to meet learners' needs were satisfactory or better in most schools. In all secondary schools inspected over the same period, learners' experiences and arrangements to meet learners' needs were satisfactory or better.

CLL staff work well with a wide range of partners to provide effective learning opportunities for young people and adults. Young people improve their health and wellbeing through participation in Active Schools activities, accredited award schemes and youth groups. Skills are developed through a range of programmes including those for traditional music, community sports leadership, sports groups and through engagement with the *Highland Youth Voice* initiative and the local Youth Forum. The Feis movement effectively promotes the Gaelic language and culture and supports young people well to develop their oral and music skills. Overall, those participating in these activities are more confident and self-assured. Accreditation needs to be further developed to recognise and record young people's achievement.

Participation in adult learning results in positive impacts and achievements across a wide spectrum of groups and individuals. Some community members keep fit through physical exercise classes. Others become computer literate by undertaking the European Computer Driving Licence which supports them in their everyday lives. Some hard to reach groups, including members of the travellers community and prison offenders are participating in learning. Overall, better links between providers would assist learners to progress through different learning opportunities.

The Highland Library and Information Service effectively supports achievement in local communities. It maintains an interactive online directory of clubs, organisations and societies in The Highland Council area. This enables community organisations to promote events and community members to find up-to-date information. A range of children's services includes well-attended story time and rhyme time sessions and national summer reading events. Each library has a *Family Shelf* collection of books and resources giving practical support on all aspects of family life. Specific collections of world language novels, resources for learning English and the NHS sponsored *Well Read* health materials, support community members to achieve. Working in partnership with NHS Highland's Sexual Health Team, the *Talk2* collection provides libraries with a range of children's and young peoples' books about sexual development and wellbeing.

In primary schools inspected by HMIE, almost all young people and parents think schools are helping children become more confident. Most children and parents are positive about the school experience. In secondary schools almost all young people think they are getting on well with their school work. Most parents believe children enjoy learning, are progressing well, are treated fairly and feel safe. Most young people and parents are positive about the learning experience at school. Most secondary young people feel encouraged and enjoy learning at school. They feel they get help when needed.

All schools have pupil councils and the majority of young people think pupil councils are good at getting improvements made. There is a need to build on this good practice to ensure that greater account is taken of children and young peoples' views on the quality of learning and teaching.

The Highland Council has a wide range of effective activities to promote health and wellbeing. These include the *High Life* promotion which assists young people in taking up a healthy lifestyle. HMIE reports on health and nutrition in schools are positive. Active Schools coordinators work productively with school and ECS staff to develop children's and young people's physical fitness. Children at P7 benefit from health and fitness checks delivered bi-annually by Highland Council's Active Schools coordinator team, supported by class teachers, school nurses and physical education teachers in schools. Following the checks Active Schools coordinators suggest more active walking, cycling, play and sport opportunities to ensure that youngsters are more involved and take part in activities in schools and communities. Fitness trends indicate a pattern of improvement. Overall, cardiovascular fitness levels are being maintained and marginally improved for girls.

In More Choices More Chances, outcomes for the 16+ cohort are improving with good partnerships contributing to this success. For young people with additional support needs there is a very good focus on life skills. The service's piloting of Activity Agreements is targeted to support vulnerable young people prepare for the world of work or further learning.

Across the service, there is an increasing understanding and adoption of the Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach to meeting needs. A clear planning process supports professionals in the early identification and assessment of needs of young people and their families. There is increasing use of community based resources to support vulnerable children and young people. Service staff use data well to support vulnerable children and families. There is now scope to build on this effective practice to improve the use of data across the service.

The service's clear focus on improving learning and teaching has been supported by a range of initiatives including a revised Learning, Teaching and Assessment policy and toolkit. The *Highland Literacy Project* provides a helpful context for active, independent learning and embedding of Assessment is for Learning approaches. These support the inclusion of vulnerable learners. Improvements

in learning and teaching are not yet consistent and the expected impact on attainment has not yet materialised.

Very good child protection arrangements are in place. There is strong, effective leadership at political, voluntary and private sector levels. Staff use of the GIRFEC approach promotes good partnership working. As a result, there is a wide range of early intervention services with an increasing number of families benefiting. Very effective programmes and services allow children to keep themselves safe, particularly in schools and nurseries. The ECS Service in partnership with NHS Highland and Northern Constabulary has recently developed an E-safety Strategy for all school communities in Highland and advice to young people on sexual health and relationships.

Prompt and appropriate action is taken to address child protection concerns and alternative placements are sought quickly with families and friends, fostering or residential care should this be necessary. Information gathering and consistency of response to less immediate concerns should be improved. Overall, there is a culture of staff seeking and recording views of children and families who are encouraged to attend and be involved in meetings and decision-making. Joint arrangements for Child Protection have very well developed approaches to self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

Staff effectively support young people with a wide range of additional support needs. These include those who are interrupted learners, require assistive technologies, or who are hearing or vision impaired. Highland Council works with NHS Highland and a national communication charity to run a training and accreditation scheme for nurseries aimed at improving children's speech and language skills.

The service has provided a range of exemplification, guidance and training in implementing *Curriculum for Excellence*. An increasing number of children and young people have better learning experiences. Highland Council's policy for Outdoor Learning promotes the development of *Curriculum for Excellence* by fully utilising the environment to enhance learning experiences. More children and young people benefit from use of outdoor centres such as the Council's Badaguish Centre. As part of the service's monitoring processes, rates of participation are analysed to value and acknowledge individual achievements.

The authority's *Curriculum for Excellence* Showcase in October 2009 enabled practitioners to demonstrate and share effective practice. At this, over a hundred practitioners led and presented examples of good practice which was well received by over 2,000 teachers and support staff. The service recognises that this effective practice is not yet consistent across all schools.

As part of the service's work on improving the attainment and achievement of young people 3-18 the service needs to develop effective transitions. In recognition of this, the service has delivered cooperative learning training over the past three years for staff in schools and nurseries, and to educational psychologists, additional support needs teams, child protection trainers and senior

management teams. Almost all staff attending have been positive about the quality of the training and the impact it has had on their own practice.

The ECS service makes innovative use of websites and e-learning to enhance learning. The service's E-Learning site offers a range of courses which support learners with video lessons, learning materials and links to other relevant online activities.

Staff in secondary schools cooperate with a range of agencies including Inverness College and the Open University to enable learners to participate in a wide range of courses at Higher level and above. Both the Psychological Services and Support for Learners websites provide helpful information for young people and parents on a range of learning issues and gives links to other external agencies.

The service is improving the support it offers to children and young people who are Looked After and children and young people who are Looked After and Accommodated. A small, multi-agency team gives important short term support to this group of children and young people, particularly during periods of transition. Partnership working with other statutory, private and voluntary organisations contributes to the achievement of each young person. The service closely monitors and evaluates the impact of this intervention and there are indications of positive impact. The majority of those young people gained Level 3 or better in English and mathematics. These children and young people also achieved in a wide number of ways. This included ASDAN Bronze Awards and success in a wide range of sporting, music and performance activities.

The service will improve:

- the consistency of high quality learning experiences across schools and services;
- outcomes for learners through taking more effective account of their views;
- accreditation opportunities to recognise and record achievement;
- links between community learning providers; and
- transition arrangements so that all learners can build effectively upon their prior learning.

How good is our leadership?

Effective strategic planning is in place through the Single Outcome Agreement, the Council's Programme *Strengthening the Highlands*, the Corporate and Service Plan and functional plans such as *For Highland's Children 3*, and *Your Choice Health Plans*. The linkages between the layers of planning are understood by elected members and senior managers. The *Best Value 2 Pathfinder Audit* noted that the Council's strong political and managerial leadership, combined with improved political and management arrangements, provide a strategic focus and effective community leadership. Effective steps have been taken to refocus the

ECS Service Plan on priorities and align underlying plans accordingly. The strategic vision now provides more effective direction of the delivery of service. There is scope to further simplify planning processes in order to ensure effective impact on delivery and outcomes for learners.

Elected members work well with senior officers and area based staff. They receive regular reports on a wide range of service provision which is presented to the ECS Committee. Area Education, Culture and Sport Managers and headteachers of secondary schools present reports to Ward Business Meetings on aspects of school performance, including budgeting. These processes have assisted elected members to be clear about a range of agreed initiatives which have improved outcomes. Improvements to the quality of key data available to elected members and officers would support and inform decision-making and evaluation processes.

The Best Value 2 review published in April 2010 notes that the Council's Ward structures promote effective partnership working and community leadership at a local level. They provide the Council and its partners with a good opportunity for community engagement. Elected members believe that communication and engagement with stakeholders has improved recently. They now have a better understanding of the range of stakeholders involved in ECS services.

The Chief Executive demonstrates a strong commitment to continuous improvement in the quality of service provided. He has strengthened corporate working and strategic planning through his leadership of the Senior Management Team (SMT). He has provided very clear leadership in Child Protection.

The current ECS Service vision and aims 'Working together to inspire learning and achievement in Highland communities/ A' toirt piseach còmhla air ionnsachadh is coileanadh ann an Coimhearsnachdan na Gàidhealtachd' were drawn up in February 2008 as part of a strategic move to refocus the work of the service and its partners. This vision is increasingly familiar to a range of stakeholders through its use on key documentation and correspondence. The aims convey a distinctive picture of the aspirations for Highland's children, adults, families and communities through inclusive service provision. The ECS Service recognises that the communication of vision, values and service priorities continues to represent a major challenge.

The Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service leads the service well and has strongly developed the service's capacity for improvement. He has a clear awareness of the ECS service's strengths and the challenges it faces in bringing about further improvements.

The ECS Senior Management Team (SMT) support the Director well. They have a clear view that the service's vision statement must apply to all aspects of provision. They promote a wide range of developments to reflect this vision and influence practice at the point of delivery.

Area ECS Managers and their teams develop and maintain effective two-way communication with schools and other establishments. They use area team

meetings to maintain a shared overview of operational issues allowing intervention and support where required. There is scope for Area ECS Managers to ensure a more consistent focus on the Council's strategic priorities in their engagement with headteachers and services.

Senior officers have positive working relationships with school staff. The ECS Senior Management Team recognises the challenge faced in developing leadership capacity at all levels in such a large geographic area with a wide range of schools and service provision. In 2006, the service initiated a project of *Support for Leadership in Highland* which has improved the leadership skills of practitioners at differing levels across the service. A *Next Generation* leadership programme is now building effectively on this earlier work and includes those aiming for headship through the nationally developing *Flexible Routes to Headship* initiative. There is scope to develop this model to include ECS staff.

Across the service a number of steps have been taken to build educational leadership capacity. In all primary schools and in the majority of secondary schools, literacy coordinators have been identified and supported with additional training. In order to meet the continuing professional development (CPD) needs of staff across a wide geographical area, the service has developed useful approaches to training key staff to delivery strategic learning priorities such as cooperative learning.

The service has recently strengthened its strategic workforce planning and staffing management through the appointment of a manager to develop this aspect. The involvement of lead officers on national groups ensures that their work is reflective of national developments and contributes to understanding of best practice across the country. The service runs an effective pilot programme of induction and support for new head teachers. As a result new head teachers feel well supported on taking up post. The service now needs to build on this developing programme to identify future needs, particularly related to succession planning.

The service has recognised the importance of involving learners and managers at all levels in contributing to, and leading change. Senior managers and heads of establishments are responsible for ensuring support and challenge across the service. The service's improvement priorities provide an appropriate focus for change and improvement. The service has improved and simplified its expectations for self-evaluation and improvement planning in schools, giving a sharper focus on outcomes for learners and a clearer context for self-evaluation.

Each Area ECS Manager has responsibility for the day-to-day work of Quality Improvement Officers (QIO). The strategic responsibility for the team lies with the acting Head of Education Services. Senior staff in each area share information regularly and target areas of underperformance. There is scope to use the skills of this cross-sector team more proactively to provide better levels of challenge and coordinated support. The service recognises the need to clarify roles and responsibilities within the Quality Improvement Team (QIT) to ensure its work has maximum impact on learners.

The QIT has provided training and school support which contributes to improved self-evaluation processes. As a result, evaluations are now more closely aligned to those provided by external inspection. The service has identified the need for further, consistent improvement in self-evaluation. As a result self-evaluation support and training for schools is currently underway.

CLL managers have, over a period of sustained change and restructuring, effectively supported staff to maintain or improve services. Lead officers have contributed to a number of developments which have impacted positively on learners and customers. As a result, use of leisure centres and libraries has increased.

Community leadership capacity is strengthened through a range of voluntary and commercial partnerships. CLL officers work well with board members of independent leisure centres and museums to build local capacity and help ensure viability of these facilities. Through the Youth Participation structure, young people are supported to take leadership roles in their community and influence decision-making on service delivery.

The Highland Psychological Service very effectively supports the professional development of ECS staff and their partners through training, consultation and the promotion of innovative practice. Educational Psychologists (EP) are aligned to Associated School Groups (ASGs) and provide effective support to schools and Area ECS Managers, helping achieve very good outcomes for learners through GIRFEC, the development of emotional literacy and solution-focused approaches. HMIE published a very positive report on this service in March 2010.

Headteachers play key roles in change management within the service contributing to the strategic leadership of major developments. These include involvement in strategic groups. Headteachers also chair groups in important areas such as CPD, learning and teaching, assessment and reporting.

In order to ensure that young people take on leadership roles and contribute to aspects of decision-making, the service has a range of effective means of engaging young people including consultation events and *Youth Voice*. The Youth Convener is a voting member of both the ECS Committee and Joint Committee for Children and Young People and contributes to the strategic decision-making.

Staff from ASGs and other ECS staff are effective in promoting pupil care and welfare transitions. They are not yet fully effective in promoting curricular transitions. Planning and monitoring activities are not well developed. The service recognises the need to clarify the role of ILCs and their relationship to existing ASGs to ensure a wider, shared agenda for improvement.

The authority will:

- gather and share intelligence across a range of stakeholders in order to more effectively evaluate and support strategic improvement;
- improve the range and accessibility of data for use in decision making and evaluation processes;
- continue to simplify the planning processes;
- roll out and further develop the leadership programme to identify future needs and enhance succession planning; and
- clarify the role of the ILCs and their relationship to existing ASGs.

Themed evaluations

As part of the VSE exercise HMIE supported and challenged ECS staff to evaluate the quality of four agreed themed areas. Previous self-evaluation indicated that a central challenge for Highland lay in improving outcomes for those young people who are vulnerable and/or who underachieve. Group members were drawn from practitioners, young people, elected members and some partner agencies including health. These groups evaluated the impact being made through:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Getting It Right for Every Child
- More Choices More Chances
- Literacy and numeracy

Members of each group engaged in self-evaluation activities, reflected on key strengths and future improvements and reported on their engagement with practitioners, stakeholders, learners and data sources under five key questions. These were:

- What are our key strengths?
- What key outcomes have we achieved?
- How well do we meet the needs of our stakeholders?
- What are our key priorities for improvement?
- What is our capacity (including leadership) to improve?

This process was highly valued by group members as a high quality professional development opportunity which enhanced and developed understanding of best practice in self-evaluation. It effectively built the service's capacity to know itself better. For those engaging with theme group members, it was a forum for strong professional dialogue between and across a range of staff and partners.

The findings of these theme groups will be used to inform the next Service Improvement Plan.

The following themed reports are the result of this process.

Theme 1: Health and Wellbeing

Members of this group effectively engaged with a wide range of staff and partners who support health and wellbeing for learners of all ages. They also visited provision and discussed the difference being made with learners and their families. Through the VSE process, questioning skills improved to support triangulation of evidence and the writing of useful evaluative statements.

There are strong and effective local partnerships between ECS, NHS Highland, Northern Constabulary and other service providers. In those evaluated as part of VSE, almost all are having a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of our vulnerable young people and their families. The participation of young people in group discussions, extracurricular activities, projects and clubs has increased self-awareness, self-esteem and self-worth. Vulnerable young people continue to benefit from participation in physical activities provided by Active Schools coordinators and peripatetic staff.

Partnership working is strengthening leadership at a local operational level and has the potential to support further development in capacity building at a strategic level. Good examples of these include Community Arts Projects, Young Carers support and Youth Groups.

A multi-agency approach to the promotion of pro-social behaviour has led to reductions in the levels of youth crime across the Highland Council area. Despite a slight rise in the number of referrals to the children's hearing system for some age groups on offending grounds (2006 - 2008), youth crime levels in the Highland Council area continue to be among the lowest in Scotland. The Service's health initiative *High Life* allowing reduced rates for swimming and leisure facilities has had a positive impact on families' health and wellbeing.

As a result of its partnership with Disability Sports Scotland the service provides a wide range of sports and activities for young people with disabilities. A significant number of young people have achieved well.

All schools have Health Promoting School status. Features of good practice include a very positive ethos of inclusion and achievement where children are involved in setting clear, realistic and meaningful targets for learning and where they are encouraged to make a commitment to a healthy lifestyle and can act as

positive role models for others. The service actively promotes healthy eating and adopted the Scottish standards for nutrition one year in advance of national requirements.

The Council's Additional Support Needs Strategic Management Team works closely with the Highland Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) team to consult on, and support the CAMHS framework. EPs work with schools to promote awareness raising and prevention of mental ill-health. Training in emotional literacy, attachment, resilience building, crisis intervention and bereavement and loss has helped build capacity and confidence of school staff to better meet needs through these approaches. Close partnership working with NHS Highland colleagues has helped establish the CAMHS framework and enabled more targeted support for identified children and young people.

Areas for improvement:

- The service recognises that current provision is inconsistent in the degree that schools provide a minimum of two hours high quality physical education per week. The authority requires to address this issue.
- As part of the re-accreditation process for Health Promoting School status, there is a need to ensure consistency in applying the criteria by schools and their partners, through sampling and direct observation.

Theme 2: Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

GIRFEC is a key priority for the Council and was included by ECS within the Single Outcome Agreement. The GIRFEC theme group set out to evaluate two key areas of work. These were:

- *How well do we work with parents, community and partner agencies to provide/build a supportive network around every child, and*
- *How well do we get assessment and planning right at the earliest stage, building on information already known, to ensure effective early intervention?*

Group members met with a very wide range of staff and services engaged in the GIRFEC process. Building on the feedback gathered, members reviewed existing evaluations to further evaluate these two areas of work.

Overall, integrated working is well embedded in strategic planning within the Council and Community Planning Partnership. There is a common vision for the implementation of GIRFEC.

Highland Council is a pathfinder authority for this major development which aims to improve outcomes for all children and young people. Elected members across the council have demonstrated considerable commitment to improving the life chances of children and young people. As a result, the Council has appointed

three elected members as Children's Champions who promote an understanding and recognition of the needs of children and young people within the Council's various strategic and governance forums.

The HMIE Child Protection inspection report published in May 2010 highlights a number of key strengths. These include, the wide range of support services available at an early stage, and well developed approaches to self-evaluation and continuous improvement. These strengths help ensure success in the rollout of the GIRFEC model across Highland. In addition, the Edinburgh University evaluation indicates that children and families welcome and benefit from effective communication with staff. As a consequence, they feel better engaged and particularly like the single team approach. Families have opportunities to say who they prefer to work with and disagreements with decisions are recorded.

The HMIE report published in March 2010 on Psychological Services commends the good practice in promoting emotional literacy which is integrated into partnership working. In general, a wide range of stakeholders highly value the support provided by EPs as part of the wider support network at service, school, staff and children/family levels.

Collaborative working between Integrated Services Officers (ISOs), headteachers and Children's Service Workers (CSWs) very effectively support children with a range of needs, especially those with emotional, social and behavioural needs. All ISOs have access to funding which allows them to recognise and flexibly respond to local needs as part of the emphasis on early intervention. Equitable and ready access to key resources is seen by many stakeholders as key to ensuring impact and this process should be more transparent.

Children's Plans are clear in identifying the responsibilities and action of key partners. Achievements of targets set in these plans provide evidence of positive impact on the child. As a result of more effective working with parents, community and partner agencies, there are reduced and more appropriate referrals to social work and the Children's Reporter. Fewer children and young people are being taken into emergency care.

Planning and assessment have improved. Helpful policy and guidance documents supporting the planning process have been created in collaboration with young people and families. Assessments of children are more holistic. A higher level of professional trust and information sharing across agencies has improved planning and assessment processes. As a result, there is a more appropriate and proportionate response to meeting the needs of those children who do not require to be referred to the Children's Reporter. Overall, there are improved outcomes for children in a majority of cases.

Areas for improvement

- Information sharing between partners has improved although processes and protocols are not yet consistently applied. Further work is required to minimise barriers to a shared and clear understanding of the needs of children and young people.
- To demonstrate equality and fairness, the sharing of the rationale for resource allocation within an ASG should be more transparent.

Theme 3: More Choices More Chances

Through the VSE process, this group effectively reflected the views of a range of partners, school staff, CLL staff and young people and reviewed a range of data and information.

A key priority for The Highland Council is the implementation of 16+ Learning Choices. The Highland MCMC Strategy Group effectively leads, coordinates, plans and manages the delivery of provision for unemployed young people. It also aims to prevent young people becoming unemployed. Group members work effectively with a range of partners including Skills Development Scotland (SDS), the Employers' Coalition and North Highland College.

Within Highland Council, there is a focus on improving outcomes for vulnerable young people. This is being taken forward through the service's piloting of Activity Agreements.

A Skills for Work programme with a robust quality assurance process, which involves a wide range of businesses, provides a broader curriculum for an increasing number of young people. These school-delivered courses and the strong school-college link programme are improving outcomes for a greater number of young people. Youth Development Officers, the Looked After Children Team and Active Schools coordinators provide a wide range of opportunities for non-formal learning and achievement which is recognised and celebrated.

Psychological Services provide effective advice and consultation to Post 16 service providers including adult social work services, voluntary organisations, colleges, young offenders' institutions and training providers. The service has provided effective guidance and a clear framework for this cohort of learners and reduces barriers for them and their families as they move from Children to Adult Services.

It is necessary to ensure that all schools have a good understanding of MCMC and are implementing 16+ Learning Choices effectively by December 2010. To support this, a programme of engagements with key staff is in place. Schools need to be more proactive in promoting 16+ Learning Choices to parents and local employers. The early identification and tracking of young people's progress, making use of attainment, literacy and numeracy data and other relevant information has begun with support from the appointment of a 16+ Learning

Choices Coordinator. Colleges and the ECS Service need to strengthen partnerships to promote more appropriate provision which provides a sustainable future for school leavers. To support this, these partnerships should track individual leavers and monitor destinations beyond school.

Areas for Improvement

- Ensure consistent implementation of 16+ Learning Choices.
- Develop further a shared understanding across the service and partners of the scope and wide range of achievements.
- Promote and track sustained destinations.

Theme 4: Literacy and numeracy

This group evaluated the impact of a number of strategic initiatives and undertook a range of visits for direct observation and the sampling of people's views. As a result of the VSE process, questioning skills improved and a sharp focus on impact was well maintained.

The Service has an overarching focus on improving learning and teaching through a broad range of inter-connected initiatives such as its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy, Toolkit and Framework. This has helped practitioners to develop aspects of both literacy and numeracy.

The Highland Literacy Project (HLP) has had a positive impact on learning. HLP, which embeds Assessment is for Learning and promotes active and independent learning approaches, has promoted self-esteem and enjoyment of reading. It has enabled more vulnerable learners to be better included in group work and contribute more to their own learning. HLP has engaged parents in the learning process through workshops and activities. Parents with children in Gaelic Medium benefit from innovative support using mp3 players and internet websites for literacy and numeracy. An HLP pilot programme, designed to support non-readers at the start of P2 has had a positive impact on a small number of readers and their families, helping them become more fluent and independent. Literacy across learning in secondary schools has been a more recent strategic development for HLP. Literacy coordinators are being supported to work with colleagues across subjects. Impact is variable at this early stage and this work needs to be further developed and evaluated.

The service has recently moved to a specific focus on numeracy as part of its implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*. Although it is at an early stage, there are promising signs of impact. Monitoring and observation demonstrate that children are enjoying learning through more frequent use of real life contexts and problem-solving approaches. The Service needs to develop the initiative further, identifying clear aims for practitioners and learners.

A range of effective methods are employed across the Service to identify children who are underachieving in literacy and numeracy. Across Highland, a range of intervention strategies is used to support those under-achieving. This includes examples of reading intervention in S1. Such interventions need to be evaluated to enable the service to agree which should be used consistently. At significant transition stages there is a need for practitioners to work together to moderate assessment and ensure that learners consistently build on their prior learning.

The involvement of the wider learning community in some areas provides effective support for vulnerable learners to develop their literacy and numeracy skills from 3-18 and beyond. At the Early Years stage, nursery coordinators have been successful in making links across a number of centres and in identifying children with literacy and numeracy needs. As a result, literacy and numeracy targets feature in all Early Years Children's Plans. Vulnerable primary and secondary young people in some areas are well supported by extra curricular activity opportunities, many organised by Active School coordinators. These opportunities, including homework and out of school clubs, should be more widely available across all Associated Schools Groups.

Adult Literacy Services provision supports adults in Highland to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. This has enabled these adults to make changes in their life and work. A number have successfully completed the driving Theory Test and employment entry tests which require an appropriate level of literacy and numeracy skills. This support has enabled others to join local committees and to research family histories. It also contributes to support for vulnerable children and young people. In Porterfield Prison a multi-disciplinary approach to meeting the needs of individual young offenders is well supported by the Prison Literacy Liaison Officer in collaboration with college staff. A Link Centre facility provides literacy and numeracy support through various accredited courses up to SCQF Level 6 and including Money Management. Lifelong learning is promoted within the prison environment to engage both offenders and families in the liberation process through, for example, Bookstart events. Links with post-school provision, especially Adult Literacy Services, need to be further developed.

Highland Libraries have an outreach presence in the local community where literacy and numeracy are actively promoted. Library staff promote access to the service at conferences, community events, The Highland Games, the Travellers' Site in Inverness and at health fairs.

Schools are increasingly providing a stable and safe nurturing environment to promote literacy and numeracy skills. In the best examples there is a clear vision of what should be achieved, strong teamwork between appropriate personnel and agencies, good two-way communication with parents and effective support for transition. This is integrated with high quality learning, teaching and assessment provision and by young people taking more responsibility for their own learning. Overall, these approaches have led to higher pupil and parental expectations, better school attendance, and learning with more meaning for the children and young people. This effective practice is not yet consistent across the service.

Areas for Improvements

- The Service shares a range of data relating to attainment in literacy and numeracy with practitioners. Current attainment data for Highland primary schools does not yet demonstrate the expected improvements. There is a need to use this data at a strategic level to inform resource provision more effectively, and at an establishment or team level to inform practice and have a wider impact on children's learning.
- At significant transition stages there is a need for practitioners to work together to moderate assessment and ensure appropriately high expectations and that children's prior learning is built upon effectively.

What does the Council plan to do next?

As a result of the work undertaken within the VSE process, The Highland Council and HMIE have agreed broad priorities for action. These are to:

Extend approaches to improvement through self-evaluation across the whole ECS Service to ensure consistently high quality learning experiences across schools and services.

To do this the service will develop a sustainable cycle of self-evaluation which will:

- revise existing self-evaluation guidance and pro-forma to reflect the features of the VSE process which provide a more robust and sustainable model;
- regularly revisit vision, values and aims and reinforce these in events and activities to strengthen a sense of common purpose;
- clearly link priorities to strategic planning and resource allocation through further improving communication of key strategic actions and measurable outcomes;
- widen the range of stakeholders regularly involved in self-evaluation to take more account of their views and develop more effective use of direct observation to provide robust triangulation of evidence;
- ensure clear linkage to service improvement priorities during engagement with schools and facilities, enabling Quality Improvement Officers and lead CLL officers to better evaluate and report on outcomes for learners;
- revise quality assurance processes for improvement planning and standards and quality reporting;

- provide support and challenge to improve school, CLL staff and partners' capacity to self-evaluate impact against agreed outcomes and identify future improvements;
- provide more planned opportunities to network to promote dissemination and adoption of identified good practice;
- effectively inform reporting processes to a range of stakeholders including the service's Annual Standards and Quality Report; and
- further develop and extend the leadership programme across the service.

Improve the relevance, range and use of data to ensure all learners achieve their full potential

To do this the service will implement a performance data and measures strategy by:

- reviewing the purpose and range of data and information collected across the service and how this is shared and used to inform improvement and maximise impact;
- developing a robust data collection system to support the attainment and wider achievement of children, young people, adults and communities;
- improving decision-making and evaluation processes through provision of clear, accessible data and information;
- improving the use of comparator school data to support and challenge expectations and raise attainment; and
- improving the use of comparator data for other facilities and services to support and challenge expectations and raise attainment and achievement.

Develop further early intervention strategies to improve attainment in literacy and numeracy.

To do this the service will:

- improve early identification of young people who need transition support;
- improve intervention strategies 3 - 18 to ensure that more young people achieve level 3 English and Mathematics by the time they leave school; and
- develop an agreed approach to measuring and tracking the progress and attainment of its learners, individually and collectively, to ensure and demonstrate future improvement.

Develop a shared understanding across the service and its partners of the definition of learners' wider achievement and how this will be reflected in practice

Working with partners, the service will:

- work with a range of stakeholders to come to a shared view of achievement and how it is tracked for all learners;
- increase opportunities for wider achievement for individuals by supporting innovation in curriculum design; and
- develop systems which better recognise achievement.

Evaluate the operation of ASGs and ILCs in order to achieve the most effective mechanism for promoting wider achievement across communities and improved outcomes for all learners.

To do this the service will:

- clarify its expectations of the role and functions of both ASGs and ILCs;
- clarify the role and function of those supporting achievement in each learning community;
- improve links between community learning providers;
- improve transition arrangements so that all learners can build effectively upon their prior learning; and
- work with a range of stakeholders and partners to ensure that all learners are offered suitable routes which recognise and value their achievements and build community capacity.

In addition, the service will address the main findings of the theme groups.

Health and Well Being

- Provide further guidance on the definition and provision of two hours of high quality physical education; and
- Quality assure the Health Promoting School re-accreditation process.

Getting It Right for Every Child

- Improve consistency of practice in GIRFEC processes and protocols to minimise barriers to a clear and shared understanding of the needs of children and young people; and

- Improve the transparency of resource allocation.

More Choices More Chances:

- Ensure consistent implementation of 16+ Learning Choices;
- Develop a shared understanding of the scope and range of achievements; and
- Track sustained destinations of school leavers.

Literacy and numeracy

- Use data and performance measures at a strategic level to better inform resource allocation and support improvement;
- Use data and performance within establishments and teams to inform practice and impact on learning experiences; and
- Support practitioners to share consistently high standards and moderate assessment at significant transition stages to ensure that prior learning is built upon effectively.