

**Inspection of the education
functions of local authorities**

**Summary of evaluation of the
educational psychology service**

North Ayrshire Council

14 April 2009

Definition of terms used in this report.

HM Inspectors use published criteria when making evaluations. They are published as quality indicators which relate evaluations to six levels. HMIE began using a six-point scale to make evaluations in August 2005. The table below shows how the six-point scale relates to the four-point scale that we used previously.

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

This report also uses the following words to describe numbers and proportions:

almost all	over 90%
most	75-90%
majority	50-74%
less than half	15-49%
few	up to 15%

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1. The aims, nature and scope of the inspection

The education functions of each local authority in Scotland were inspected between 2000 and 2005. A second cycle of inspections began in 2006 which incorporates an evaluation of educational psychology services (EPS). 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.

The inspection of North Ayrshire Council included the evaluation of the quality of educational psychology provision on behalf of stakeholders. The evaluation of EPS are conducted within a framework of quality indicators which embody the Government's policy on Best Value.

This web-based report should be read alongside the report on the inspection of the education functions of North Ayrshire Council which sets out the wider context in which EPS are delivered.

The Educational Psychology Service

The North Ayrshire EPS was based in two locations, Irvine and Saltcoats. At the time of the inspection, there were 14 full-time equivalent educational psychologists (EPs), which included one Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) and three senior EPs. There were no deputy EPs. The service also employed a full-time research assistant. In addition, there were two full-time clerical assistants and one part-time clerical assistant.

2. What key outcomes has the service achieved?

The EPS had shown a high level of success against both authority and service objectives. They had successfully implemented all of their improvement plan targets for 2007-2008 and had demonstrated improving performance year on year in key areas of service delivery. In relation to authority objectives they had made significant contributions to supporting children with additional support needs (ASN), and vulnerable young people who were for example, looked after or in danger of missing out from education. The service's contribution to the Social Inclusion Partnership Group (SIPG) had ensured that more young people were successfully remaining within their community and were in receipt of enhanced provision to meet their needs. The EPS had made significant contributions to policy and practice within the authority which had improved services for children and young people. This included, for example, the development of staged intervention procedures to ensure more effective implementation of the ASL Act. They had also provided advice and guidance to the authority on supporting children with dyslexia and the roll out of *Let's Encourage Thinking* (LET) to improve teaching and learning in the early years sector. The service had successfully helped and advised other agencies within the Council, leading to improvements in provision for young people. Examples included the development of post-school psychological service (PSPS) to provide young people with more choices and

opportunities when they leave school, and the evaluation of the Council's Inclusive Child Care Initiative, which led to changes in service delivery to improve performance.

All EPs across the service had very good knowledge and understanding of their statutory requirements. The service effectively complied with appropriate guidance and legislation which was well embedded in individual practice and service documentation. Robust monitoring of service areas such as research and development ensured that all EPs complied with British Psychological Society guidance.

3. How well does the service meet the needs of its stakeholders?

Children and young people regarded the EPS very positively. Children's views were sought effectively during their reviews using the EPS Pupil Participation Pack. Pre-school children with severe and complex learning difficulties had their needs very well met by the Pre-school Community Assessment Team, a multi-agency planning group chaired by the EPS. Primary and secondary-aged children with ASN were well supported by the EPS at times of transition. Parents, families and carers reported that they found the EPs advice to be helpful, that their views were listened to and that the EPs intervention had made a positive difference. A few parents would have liked the EP to be more directly involved with their child. Parents with children with autism spectrum disorders were actively involved by the service in the Early Bird programme. This helped them to become more confident in supporting their children's learning needs. Schools, the authority and agencies were positive about the work of the EPS. Areas of particular note included the quality and effectiveness of their advice and consultation, intervention, staff development and training and research. A few schools would have liked more individual assessment to better inform intervention approaches. The service should continue to develop its assessment role to provide added value to the staged intervention model. In the wider community the service had established innovative approaches such as the Pupil Participation Pack and LET which were highly effective in supporting young people. They had also adopted approaches from other services for use in North Ayrshire. For example, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) had been rolled out to an increasing number of nursery classes and primary schools, improving teachers' interactions with children. The service now needs to be more outward focused to make an impact beyond its locality.

All EPS staff felt that they were very well supported by the authority and the Principal Educational Psychologist. Their work was regularly reviewed and they felt that their professional development needs were well met. This enabled them to improve services to children and young people. All staff participated in the development of quality improvement for their sector. For example, pre-school, primary or secondary aged work. They also contributed to improvements for the service as a whole. Robust transition planning for individual children and young people and the sharing of good practice, ensured that all staff were informed about developments across the sectors and how these impacted on their work. Stakeholders reported positively about the expertise which EPs were able to demonstrate as a result of concentrating on one sector of service delivery. Movement of EPs across sectors was well planned and discussed at annual reviews. Retention of staff had improved over the last two years

and staff felt that this had improved teamwork and services to schools. Generally, most staff felt that they were appropriately consulted about service and authority initiatives and that they made a positive contribution to educational developments.

4. How good is the service's delivery of key processes?

The EPS provided a broad and balanced range of services to meet the needs of all its stakeholders. Consultation and advice, and intervention, were used effectively as part of a staged intervention process to support children and families. Assessment strategies were generally well delivered but greater consistency of approach across the service was required together with better reporting of the findings from assessment information. This would add further quality to the information gathered by others as part of the staged intervention model and ensure equality of service delivery to all stakeholders. Where possible, the service provided support to other professionals and families to improve their skills, thereby building capacity within the community. For example, the service had very successfully trained a significant number of key staff in 18 schools and 25 early years establishments in solution oriented approaches. This was designed to improve staff skills in finding more positive solutions to children's and young people's difficulties. Evaluation of the intervention demonstrated that staff skills had improved and that they were now more confident in resolving children's difficulties on their own. Through the use of high quality advice, staff development and research, the service had made significant contributions to authority and council policy and practice. For example, EPs evaluated a behaviour management programme for parents which was run by the Child Care Partnership. This identified positive outcomes and informed future programmes for parents. Due to the strategic involvement at authority and council levels, the EPS was able to offer very effective services to impact significantly on stakeholders. They now needed to continue to develop their research role with schools. PSPS provided an equally broad range of services. The emphasis of PSPS was on supporting the most vulnerable children and young people at a strategic level. For example, children and young people who were looked after and accommodated were better supported as a result of the training received by residential care workers from the EPS. Very good individual work was also offered at transition from school to further education, training or work. In all areas of work the EPS provided an inclusive approach with a strong emphasis on equality and fairness.

Features of good practice: Post school psychological service (PSPS)

The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) was one of the first groups of pathfinder authorities to develop psychological services to the post school sector. From being identified as a separately funded post it is now integrated into the authority's More Choices, More Chances strategy. The service has developed very effective transition work targeted at vulnerable young people moving from secondary to post school life. Very effective links have been made with further education colleges, training providers and Careers Scotland to create more opportunities for young people when they leave school. The work has extended across the secondary sector and is now delivered and developed by all educational psychologists linked with this sector. In addition, joint planning with social services has extended the post school work into supporting young people who are looked after and accommodated. Positive evaluations of this area suggest that children are beginning to benefit from the support and advice.

More detailed report is available at www.hmie.gov.uk.

5. How good is the service's management?

The EPS had an effective range of policies which linked directly to the Council's and service's, vision, values and aims. Policies were regularly reviewed and updated and every school had access to them through the service handbook. Web-based access was being developed to improve accessibility to all stakeholders. Key policies such as those relating to the ASL Act, were written in consultation with other stakeholders. Regular stakeholder evaluations of practice informed future policy and practice. For example, service level agreements with Careers Scotland and schools were regularly reviewed and adapted as a result of stakeholder evaluations. Stakeholders were consulted using a wide range of approaches which met the needs of individual groups. This included the use of questionnaires, telephone interviews, reviews of school level agreements and focus groups of service users. The service was very responsive to stakeholder evaluations and had adapted and modified its approaches to improve the quality and reliability of its consultation processes. Stakeholder evaluations also led to improved practice. Operational planning and review was robust and sector leading. The service plan set clear and precise targets based on stakeholder evaluations and audits of previous performance. The planning cycle mirrored that of the authority and council and was informed by national and local priorities. Regular authority performance reviews of the service's progress towards meeting its targets were thorough and provided very good information for service users and to the Council scrutiny body. In addition, the service produced an annual standards and quality report which provided additional information for stakeholders and was clearly focused on measurable outcomes. Each sector team had its own development and action plans which reflected the aims and objectives of the service plan. This ensured that all members of staff had a clear focus on the overall aims and priorities for the service. Plans were actively used by managers and EPs to inform and improve practice and to monitor the progress of service priorities. A quality improvement group ensured that

systems and processes related to planning, policy development and the involvement of stakeholders were constantly reviewed and evaluated. Other stakeholders were involved in the planning process as a result of the service's close alignment with the children's service's planning group. For specific targeted areas, relevant stakeholders were involved at the initial planning stage to set relevant targets and then to review progress and impact. In developing PSPS, for example, relevant stakeholders were involved in discussion about the targets which should be set and the contribution which each agency would make.

Features of good practice: Operational Planning

The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) has a very comprehensive planning process which is fully integrated into the authority and council planning cycle. This allows the service to ensure that service targets are in line with, and add value to, national and local priorities. Plans are evaluated regularly within the service and formal reports of progress are provided every six months to the Council's scrutiny body. Targets are bench-marked against previous performance and evaluated in relation to expected outcome. Action plans are developed by sector teams in collaboration with stakeholders and are reviewed by the sector and shared with the whole service. A quality assurance group ensures that planning, monitoring and reporting is undertaken regularly and that formal reports are provided for stakeholders. A wide range of effective evaluation strategies ensure that the service has a rich source of high quality data to track performance and ensure continuous improvement. As a result of the high quality of operational planning the service is able to demonstrate sustained improvement year on year and evidence the value added by the EPS to authority and council objectives.

More detailed report is available at www.hmie.gov.uk.

6. How good is leadership?

The Principal Educational Psychologist worked very well with his team to ensure that all EPs were clearly focused on the service aims. The quality management group were very effective in monitoring the performance of the service, to ensure high levels of delivery. There was a very strong emphasis on adding value to services for children and young people and to continuously improve. Senior psychologists had clear roles and responsibilities and provided strong leadership in their areas of work. Succession planning was well managed and the Principal Educational Psychologist had been very successful in retaining and developing staff. He encouraged innovation and creativity, and sector groups were being given increasing responsibility to develop, plan and evaluate services in their area. Demanding and realistic targets were set by the service which ensured that all staff felt a sense of ownership and responsibility for the targets. Staff now needed to build on these positive developments and extend the service's impact nationally.

Key strengths

The service had:

- Developed very robust and comprehensive self-evaluation and operational planning systems and processes leading to continuous improvement.
- Strong leadership across all staff with a clear focus on adding value through the delivery of high quality psychological services.
- Developed very good partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders, particularly in the post school sector.
- Made significant contributions to the authority's aim of building capacity in the community.

Main points for action

The service should:

- Continue to develop its services so that it has more impact on policy and practice nationally.
- Extend its assessment services to ensure equality of service and improved outcomes for all stakeholders.

As a result of the very high performance, and the very effective leadership of this service, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. The service and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report.

Annette Bruton
HM Chief Inspector
Directorate 5
14 April 2009

Appendix 1

Quality Indicator	Evaluation
Improvements in performance	Very good
Fulfilment of statutory duties	Very good
Impact on children and young people	Very good
Impact on parents, carers and families	Very good
Impact on staff	Very good
Impact on the local community	Very good
Impact on the wider community	Good
Consultation and advice	Very good
Assessment	Good
Intervention	Very good
Provision of professional development and training for other groups including parents, teachers and health professionals	Very good
Research and strategic development	Very good
Inclusion, equality and fairness	Very good
Policy development and review	Very good
Participation of stakeholders	Very good
Operational planning	Excellent
Partnership working	Very good
Leadership and direction	Very good
Leadership of change and improvement	Very good

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