

**INSPECTION OF THE EDUCATION FUNCTIONS OF ARGYLL AND BUTE
COUNCIL (INEA):
INSPECTION CONCERNS**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Elected Members with an update of Community Services concerns in relation to the recent INEA inspection. The report outlines a number of areas of concern associated with the inspection carried out by Education Scotland in September 2016.
- 1.2 It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:
- a) Note the concerns raised by Community Services arising from the recent inspection of the Education functions of Argyll and Bute Council;
 - b) Note the actions taken by Community Services in responding to these concerns, and
 - c) Note that the Council will continue to work with Education Scotland to respond to the actions arising from the INEA inspection.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Elected Members with an update of Community Services concerns in relation to the recent INEA inspection. The report outlines a number of areas of concern associated with the inspection carried out by Education Scotland in September 2016.
- 2.2 Education Scotland undertook an Inspection of the Education Functions of the Authority in September 2016. The conclusion to the inspection, with the publication of a public report was anticipated by the end of November 2016. Following a number of delays to the inspection the final inspection report was published on 21 March 2017.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:

- a) Note the concerns raised by Community Services arising from the recent inspection of the education functions of Argyll and Bute Council;
- b) Note the actions taken by Community Services in responding to these concerns, and
- c) Note that the Council will continue to work with Education Scotland to respond to the actions arising from the INEA inspection.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 The process developed for the inspection of the education functions of Argyll and Bute Council has given rise to serious and significant concerns by Community Services. These were raised at an early stage with senior officers of Education Scotland, have been the subject of a number of submissions by Council staff and latterly and regrettably in the form of a formal complaint to Education Scotland (see Chronology report for details). Despite a period of 6 months having elapsed since the inspection week, it is the view of officers that these concerns have not been addressed, responded to and further

concerned that Education Scotland have chosen to publish the report without due consideration of the concerns.

4.2 In summary the issues raised with Education Scotland include:

- The notification of inspection timetable given the day before the start of the school summer holidays which limited the engagement of school based staff in the preparation for inspection;
- The application of a revised set of quality indicators (updated QMIE2) during the inspection of Argyll and Bute Council. These were not tested, consulted on or even published prior to their engagement with Argyll and Bute (they remain unpublished at this time). We further understand the indicator set will not be used in any subsequent authority inspections;
- A change to the inspection programme one week prior to commencement, requiring a substantial rearrangement and limited the engagement of stakeholders then involved in the inspection;
- The inspection team featured 8 Education Scotland Area Lead Officers without any Associate Inspectors from other authority areas who are routinely used to moderate inspection from the perspective of current practitioners;
- The inspection and construction of the final report appears not to have followed Education Scotland's own PRAISE framework and protocols which is used to guide the approach to inspection and reporting on inspection. In particular, the report appears to feature inspection gradings that are not based on verified evidence. Feedback from a range of Education personnel post inspection generally agreed that the inspection did not follow Education Scotland's stated principles of inspection, notably adherence to the PRAISE framework. Examples are highlighted below.

4.3 **Purpose** – *being clear throughout about the overall purpose of the inspection:* Participants in the inspection reported a detailed and disproportionate focus on the role and performance of named officers or on the political management arrangements of the Council reflecting the position in 2013. The Managing Inspector was viewed as having shared very limited information on the purpose or shape of the inspection with the group attending the presentation at the start of the week of inspection activity.

4.4 **Relationships** – *building and maintaining constructive relationships throughout the process as the basis of a high quality inspection/review:*

During a formal debrief exercise with Central Officers feedback from their experience as participants consistently reported that interviews and focus groups were at times adversarial in tone, for example a

young person attending a focus group explicitly asking if the purpose of the group was to get a specific manager 'in to trouble'.

- 4.5 **Awareness** – *maintaining a high level of awareness of the context in which staff are operating, of their feelings and reactions to the process and of the inspector's own approach and its impact:*

It was highlighted that it was unusual, if not unknown, for an inspection team to feature no current practitioners as associate inspectors to assist with moderation activities. We view this as a digression from normal practice which suggests that Argyll and Bute was not treated in the same way as with other authority or even establishment inspection activities.

Staff reported the process of this inspection (not the outcome) to have been very "bruising" in the manner it was carried out. There appeared to be a lack of awareness of the feelings and reactions of those participating in the inspection.

- 4.6 **Information gathering** – *careful inquiry to gather and analyse evidence. Retaining an objective stance, testing assumptions and assimilating data before evaluating:*

Reports from participants indicated that frequently the content of focus groups appeared far from objective with concerns raised about pre-conceptions or clear agenda in place, often at odds with the stated purpose of the activity. For example, significant time in the learning technologies group focused on leadership. The draft report and the subsequent comments on the draft would appear to confirm that insufficient time was spent during interviews and focus groups testing assumptions and assimilating data to ensure clear evidence for evaluation.

There was an apparent absence of appropriate and rigorous triangulation of information and evidence by the inspection team in forming conclusions and drafting opinions featured in the final report. As illustration, whilst noting positive actions by the authority in relation to ASN services resulting in fair and equitable resource allocation, the report references negative comments by "several" head teachers regarding reductions in ASN allocations. Appropriate triangulation would have confirmed that those schools received resources according to their entitlement based on a consistent needs led allocation formula related to individual pupil assessed need.

- 4.7 **Sharing information** – *communicating thoroughly throughout the process to prepare and inform staff. Encouraging staff to be open in providing their perspective and providing appropriate feedback as the inspection/review progresses:*

Feedback from participants indicated this inspection process was a return to much earlier models of inspection where inspectors shared little or nothing of what they were learning throughout the week. There was no appropriate feedback as the inspection progressed which did not allow for collaborative dialogue and clarification to take place. Of all the PRAISE elements, had this been done differently, there could have been a more positive experience with shared learning taking place throughout.

Proper engagement during the inspection process would have ensured that inspectors were signposted to evidence to allow for proper checking and triangulation of statements.

4.8 ***Enabling*** – *treating people with respect, engaging them in professional dialogue, recognising their efforts and providing feedback in a constructive way to encourage ownership and learning to take place:*

Through our formal debrief process participants reported that not all members of the inspection team took an enabling approach. Participants advised, in almost all cases, it did not feel that ownership was being encouraged.

- Significant evidence of a lack of checking of statements made in focus groups or through questionnaires or triangulation of evidence to verify the accuracy of statements made. In particular this has meant that the published report continues to feature inaccurate conclusions;
- Report writing – the report features numerous examples of being written to present a negative counterpoint to any positive statements. For example the section on outcomes for learners makes no reference to the national Participation Measure (outcomes for young people aged 16-24 years) which places Argyll and Bute 5th highest in Scotland for positive destinations for this group.
- There appears to have been limited reference to the significant volume of information prepared by the council in its self-evaluation submission. That evidence would have been a source for checking a number of the statements and conclusions made in the inspection report; and
- Timescales for the inspection engagement with the Council and production of the inspection report have consistently not been met.

4.9 Following the initial verbal feedback to the Council's Chief Executive and senior education staff, the Chief Executive raised a number of serious concerns with the process and conduct of the inspection. More formally, Council staff presented their response to the initial findings of Education Scotland, as presented in their initial draft inspection report which was issued to the Council's Chief Executive on 9th December 2016.

- 4.10 A number of Education Scotland protocols are in place, in line with Education Scotland procedures for inspection. These include:
- The discussions within the initial summary of findings meeting;
 - The issue of the draft inspection report, and
 - The issue of the final report, which has specific embargo procedures prior to the confirmed Education Scotland publication date.
- 4.11 Despite these protocols and the associated confidentiality the Authority expressed concern that there has been a number of breaches in the protocols resulting in approaches to members of Authority staff during which confidential information was relayed.
- 4.12 A further report on the inspection chronology provides an outline of the contacts between council staff and Education Scotland in relation to the inspection leading to the publication of the report on 21st March 2017.
- 4.13 The published report presents very negative evaluations of the Council's Education provision, these are set out below alongside the self-evaluation gradings as presented to the Community Services Committee on 8 December 2016 as follows:

Quality Indicator	Argyll and Bute Evaluation	Education Scotland Evaluation
QI 1.1: Improvements in performance	Satisfactory	Weak
QI 2.1: Impact on children, young people, adult learners and families	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
QI 5.1: Delivering and improving the quality of services	Satisfactory	Weak
QI 9.2: Leadership and direction	Satisfactory	Weak
QI 9.4 leadership of change and improvement	Satisfactory	Weak

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This report provides an overview for Elected Members of Community Services concerns in relation to the recent INEA inspection. The report outlines a number of areas of concern associated with the inspection carried out by Education Scotland in September 2016. It further notes

the actions taken by Community Services to respond to these concerns and to mitigate potential challenges and risk for the Council.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1	Policy	The <i>Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000</i> places a duty on education authorities to provide children and young people with school education and (in terms of raising standards) requires authorities to endeavor to secure improvement in the quality of that school education.
6.2	Financial	None.
6.3	Legal	None.
6.4	HR	None.
6.5	Equalities	None.
6.6	Risk	The outcome of the INEA inspection reports presents a significant reputational risk to the Council.
6.7	Customer Service	None.

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25 March 2017

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