

Thematic Inspection of Empowerment for Curriculum Leadership

March 2019

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Foreword

Together we can achieve change quicker and better than working alone. That has been a key theme of the Joint Agreement between Scotland's stakeholders in education, the School Empowerment Steering Group. That progress was seen in the publication of the [Thematic Inspection of Readiness for Empowerment](#) (December 2018) and is further evidenced with the publication of this report.

Part of Education Scotland's role is to carry out national thematic inspections that will gather evidence on school empowerment. Each thematic inspection looks at a different theme: readiness for empowerment; curriculum leadership; and parent and pupil participation. This report draws together the findings from the second thematic inspection Empowerment for Curriculum Leadership that took place in the spring term of 2019.

I am once again encouraged that the evidence gathered by HM Inspectors provides examples of education staff across Scotland working collaboratively with pupils, parents and partners to provide more flexible curriculum pathways and learn together.

There continues to be more to be done as schools are empowered to lead curriculum change within an ethos of collaborative learning. Schools should continue to discuss and review the curriculum in line with Curriculum for Excellence, the changing workforce and the skills required for the 21st century. Care should be taken to ensure that the curriculum guidance and frameworks provided to support schools in their curriculum journey are not restrictive, but support teachers to be innovative to improve outcomes for children and young people.

I hope staff can benefit from the findings of this report and use them to design a curriculum that is local, based around the learner and clearly reflects the needs of the local community. The final national thematic review on empowerment will be published later in 2019 and provide further evidence on the progress being made to establish an empowered education system.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gayle Gorman".

Gayle Gorman

HM Chief Inspector of Education

Introduction

The [Education Reform – Joint Agreement](#) published in June 2018 sets out the collective agreement by a commissioning group including the Scottish Government, COSLA, SOLACE, ADES and Education Scotland:

‘Improving the education life chances of our children and young people is the defining mission of our Scottish education system. Our shared ambition is to close the unacceptable gap in attainment between our least and most disadvantaged children and to raise attainment for all. We are clear that our vision of excellence and equity cannot be achieved by one part of the system alone; all partners must work together in a collegiate and collaborative way, keeping the interests of children and young people front and centre. Empowered, responsible and collaborative schools are an important part of our shared vision for Scottish education.’

The Joint Agreement sets out agreed principles, enablers and measures that will support and encourage the empowerment of schools in Scotland. These include the commitment that Education Scotland would carry out three inspections in the 2018-19 academic year looking at the following themes: Readiness for Empowerment; Curriculum Leadership; and Parent and Pupil Participation.

This report provides the findings related to the second of these thematic inspections on Curriculum Leadership.

Scope of the Empowerment for Curriculum Leadership thematic inspection

Over the period January to March 2019, Education Scotland visited 43 schools from the primary, secondary and special sectors across 32 local authorities. During their visits, HM Inspectors discussed how schools are leading collaborative work to co-design and develop the curriculum and empower collaboration and collegiality. They engaged with various groups, including senior leadership teams, teachers, non-teaching staff, pupils, parents¹ and wider partners and looked at relevant documentation.

¹ Throughout this report, the term ‘parents’ should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

Evidence was gathered for each of the following areas:



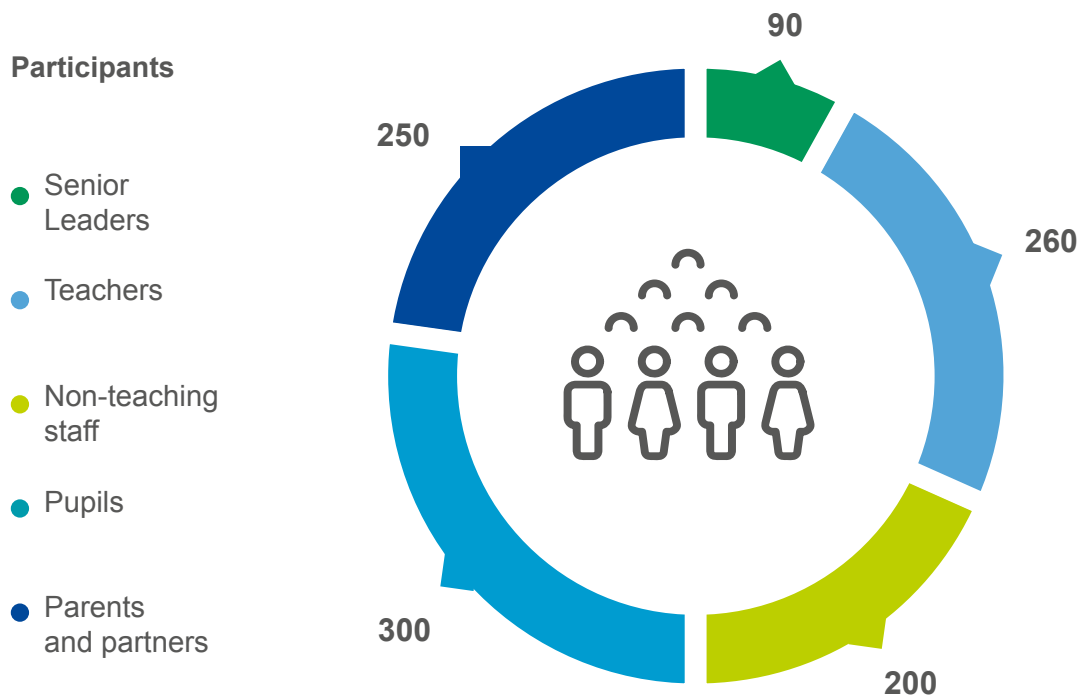
Curriculum: How well are headteachers and schools empowered to design their local curriculum in line with Curriculum for Excellence and in collaboration with their school community?

Leadership of learning: How well are headteachers and schools empowered to lead learning in line with Curriculum for Excellence and in collaboration with their school community?

Schools visited were asked to complete a self-evaluation of their empowerment for curriculum leadership and to provide evidence against the two categories above. This was used as a starting point for gathering evidence for the thematic inspection.

Education Scotland's findings are summarised in the remainder of this report under the headings above. In each section and overarching narrative key messages, information on evidence from the thematic inspection visits together with views from participants and illustrations of practice are provided.

Participants in the thematic inspection



Thematic inspection findings

1. Curriculum: How well are headteachers and schools empowered to design their local curriculum in line with Curriculum for Excellence and in collaboration with their school community?

Almost all headteachers² and schools feel empowered to make decisions about their curriculum to best meet the needs of their children and young people within the local community. They develop distributive leadership and staff feel empowered to work with pupils, parents and partners with the aim of improving outcomes for learners, reducing inequalities and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. In most schools, the curriculum rationale is reviewed regularly. Almost all schools are increasingly consulting pupils, parents and partners on the design of the curriculum. However, schools now need to include pupils, parents and partners much earlier in discussions about curriculum design to ensure they have increasing influence on developments. Schools should also provide more opportunities for pupils to be part of the evaluation of the impact of curriculum changes.

In almost all primary schools, there is a focus on improving curriculum breadth and progression, particularly in literacy, numeracy, science and skills for work. In secondary schools, teachers are concerned about the number and timing of changes to Scottish Qualification Authority's (SQA) courses over the last few sessions, which has impacted on planning for progression. Almost all are now revisiting the broad general education (BGE) to plan better aligned learning pathways between the BGE and senior phase. In conjunction with colleges, schools are improving vocational pathways for young people. In a majority of secondary schools difficulties in recruiting staff in some subjects is constraining curriculum developments.

Key messages

- Improving the curriculum continues to be a high priority for schools. Headteachers welcome the autonomy they have to work with their staff to develop a curriculum, which best suits the needs of their local community. They often find the support, challenge and guidance from their local authority helpful when considering changes to the curriculum.
- Headteachers work in collaboration with staff on curriculum design. There is now a need to more consistently collaborate with parents, pupils and wider partners on the design and evaluation of the curriculum.
- Teachers increasingly use a range of local, national and international evidence to inform curriculum development. Most adapt curriculum frameworks and courses to suit their local circumstances and to provide interesting and relevant learning experiences.
- Schools, particularly in rural areas, continue to find it difficult to recruit teachers. This limits opportunities to lead curriculum improvements and, in some instances, provide a local curriculum which meets the needs of children and young people
- Collaboration with colleges is an increasing feature of practice. Schools and colleges now need to build on this positive work to develop an appropriate range of vocational learning pathways for all young people.

² Throughout this report references to headteachers, teachers and others relate to those who participated in this thematic inspection



Structuring and delivering a curriculum to provide flexible learning pathways

Headteachers in almost all schools are empowered to structure and deliver a curriculum, which takes account of local and national circumstances. This supports them to provide flexible learning pathways for children and young people. In almost all schools, staff are encouraged to take the lead in aspects of curriculum design in order to improve outcomes for children and young people. Most local authorities provide curriculum support to schools through the collaborative development of progression frameworks. Teachers value this guidance and can adapt these frameworks to meet the needs of their pupils. A few secondary teachers are concerned that a reduced choice of courses in S4 leads to a perception of more limited options for young people following academic pathways in S5 and S6. This continues to be part of the curriculum discussion across secondary schools. In most schools, staff are using Pupil Equity Funding creatively to provide opportunities to introduce learning experiences that are bespoke to the needs of children and young people who face the greatest barriers in their learning.

Using information from a range of sources to support informed debate

Most senior leadership teams use an appropriate range of local and national sources of information to encourage debate about the curriculum. This is resulting in teachers developing a much better understanding about how learning can be delivered within their school. A few schools make use of current curriculum research to refresh, review and shape programmes of learning to ensure children and young people are motivated and engaged in their learning. To support an empowered system all teachers need to be involved in discussions about the curriculum and how it meets the needs and aspirations of children and young people.

All schools are using information from Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) to inform debate and discussion about the curriculum they need to deliver. Most are taking account of Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) to deliver a curriculum, which includes an understanding of the world of work and vocational pathways. However, there continues to be a need to increase progress in delivering DYW priorities and ensure pupils and parents are aware of the range of vocational options and pathways available.



Engaging with pupils, parents and the local community

While almost all headteachers consult with parents and pupils on the vision for the curriculum, they do not yet collaborate with them sufficiently in discussions about curriculum design or evaluating the impact of curriculum change. In a few schools, ongoing involvement of the school community and partners in the design of the curriculum helps them contribute to planning. This is leading to greater involvement of local employers to strengthen the delivery of aspects of DYW, including opportunities for work experience.

A few schools have formal mechanisms in place which harness the skills and knowledge of parents and partners to support the delivery of the curriculum. Where this works well it promotes co-designing learner pathways which best meet the needs of all children and young people.

Views of headteachers on curriculum

'We have a social mandate to help young people out of poverty. Our curriculum is designed to support that.'

02. 'We need to be flexible and creative with our staffing, our resources, our partnerships and our curriculum pathways. We couldn't do this without the support and understanding of the education authority.'

03. 'We are confident and empowered within a supportive framework.'

'The Pupil Equity Fund has allowed us to deliver learning experiences that we couldn't have done before.'

05. 'Partnerships are wonderful and they bring the skill set we need but they bring challenges too.'

06. 'Vocational education has impacted significantly on attainment.'

Views of teachers on curriculum

01. 'I feel quite empowered to make connections and decisions about the curriculum. Where it works really well is where there are good relationships. It feels very much like we're all in this together.'

02. 'There continues to be disconnect in the system between the BGE in primary and secondary. Exams are still the gold standard which creates tension in the system.'

03. 'We are enabled to deliver a pertinent and relevant curriculum.'

04. 'We empower young people to work alongside industry professionals.'

'Our curriculum goes everywhere to meet the needs of all.'

05. 'I feel empowered to offer additional opportunities to young people. Through the Eco Club young people are learning about sustainability and the impact of plastics in the world.'

Views of parents and partners on curriculum

01. 'The school nurtures all of its pupils: those who are academic and those who have different skills and interests.'

02. 'The school has developed my skills and confidence as well as my child's.'

03. 'Staff here understand my child as an individual and plan activities which help them progress.'

05. 'If the school thinks something can add value then they are keen to embrace it.'

04. 'We are able to shape what we are doing when we know the needs of young people.'

06. 'In this school parents are seen as co-educators, learners, policymakers and change agents.'

Views of pupils on curriculum

01. 'All staff are very supportive. They go out of their way to ensure you get the subject of your choice.'

02. 'If we're interested in something the school will find a way for us to learn about it.'



Illustrations of practice related to the curriculum

As part of a primary curriculum refresh, school staff engaged with almost all stakeholders and over 70 community partners and businesses. This is helping staff to build a curriculum which is embedded in the local community and provides opportunities for learning in wider contexts. As part of the ongoing development of the curriculum, staff, parents and children worked together to identify five mind frames which children are encouraged to develop as they progress through their learning.

The school's partnership model of curriculum development is very effective. The partnership group consists of staff, parents and partners. Aspects of the curriculum are given to the group to develop and evaluate. The partnership model successfully created a three-year school community wellbeing strategy. This brought about significant change in relation to mental wellbeing, nurture, knowledge of adverse childhood experiences and how they can be addressed through a community approach.

In response to the impact gang culture was having on the local community, teachers from a few schools established a group to support children to make better choices. They met with parents, health practitioners, the Violence Reduction Unit and many other community groups to identify the main challenges faced by children and young people living in the area. A driver document was written in collaboration with partners. Children in P7 were then involved in developing the curriculum. Pupil Equity Funding has secured the services of a community youth worker to continue to develop this area of the curriculum.

A rural secondary school has collaborated very well with a neighbouring secondary school, the local authority and the college to provide increased vocational learning pathways. Through a consortium arrangement there continues to be a wide range of academic options for young people.

Thematic inspection findings

2. Leadership of learning: How well are headteachers and schools empowered to lead learning in line with Curriculum for Excellence and in collaboration with their school community?

Headteachers are increasingly adept at creating the conditions for effective empowerment of staff to improve learning and teaching. They support staff well to undertake roles which focus on leading improvements in the curriculum. Difficulties in staffing mean that headteachers sometimes have to cover classes which impacts on how well they can lead learning and how often staff participate in a range of professional learning and dialogue. Most support staff feel they would be further empowered to support children and young people through improved access to high quality professional learning.

Local authorities and regional improvement collaboratives need to continue to increase opportunities for staff to work across schools and authorities to share practice and improve leadership of learning and pedagogy. Where collegiate learning cultures are developing, it is important to evaluate how well these lead to improved pedagogy and measurable impact on outcomes for children and young people.

Key messages

- Teachers should continue to take advantage of increasing opportunities to work collaboratively across schools and local authorities. This will support improvement across the system and an increasingly consistent quality of learning and teaching across the country.
- The quantity and quality of collegiate learning continues to improve. Schools are finding creative ways to use time for professional learning. The Attainment Scotland Fund is supporting schools to build in ways to evaluate the impact of improved pedagogy on outcomes for learners.
- Where there are difficulties in staff recruitment this impacts on teachers participating in collaborative activities such as professional enquiry, action research and curriculum development.
- The level of professional learning for support staff in schools is too varied. There is a need to increase opportunities for support staff to participate in high quality professional learning relevant to their local context.



Conditions for empowerment focusing on leading learning and teaching

Almost all headteachers create conditions for effective empowerment at all levels, supporting staff to undertake roles which focus on leading and improving learning and teaching. In secondary schools, almost all principal teachers and faculty heads continue to be key leaders of learning and teaching within curriculum areas, supporting teachers to lead within their subjects. While almost all staff are keen to take a lead on elements of learning and teaching they sometimes find this challenging due to difficulties finding staff cover.

Collaboration within and across schools to strengthen their understanding and implementation of the curriculum

Almost all staff work collaboratively within their schools. They participate in collegiate working groups and stage or departmental activities to improve learning and teaching. In primary schools, joint planning across Curriculum for Excellence levels is improving teachers' understanding of standards across the curriculum. Most teachers take part in professional learning led by collaborative networks to develop their understanding of curriculum areas and subjects. Most work collaboratively across their associated school group, particularly on moderation activities and arrangements to support learners at points of transition. In a few local authorities, schools work together more widely to help teachers share high quality learning and teaching. A few schools benefit from partnerships developed through the regional improvement collaboratives to extend collaboration and their understanding of key national policies.

Collegiate learning culture leading to improved pedagogy and outcomes

Almost all teachers are participating in different forms of collegiate learning within their schools. They are making good use of peer observation and using it to share practice and improve learning and teaching. Increasingly, teachers are participating in professional enquiry or small-scale research projects which are impacting positively on outcomes for children and young people. There continues to be a need to ensure that, in all cases, the impact of professional learning on improving quality and consistency in learning and teaching and outcomes for learners is evaluated.

Views of headteachers on leadership of learning

01. 'Closing the poverty-related attainment gap is a key purpose and goal for the school.'

'Developing leaders is the key to improving learning and teaching.'

03. 'If we were fully staffed developing leadership across the school would be easier.'

04. 'Creating an ethos where teachers are happy to take risks helps to develop a culture of distributed leadership.'

Views of teachers and support staff on leadership of learning

01. 'It would be a rare occasion that we were not able to attend a course or network meeting. Our own professional learning is seen as very important to school life'

02. 'Staff constraints means it is almost impossible to get cover for classes and attend opportunities for our own learning.'

03. 'I am participating in the council's leadership for learning programme. As a result I am leading on digital learning within the school and getting a chance to see the bigger picture.'

04. 'The leadership team are good at identifying people's strengths and supporting them to build on these.'

Views of pupils on leadership of learning

01. 'There are no barriers here. The school is always bringing out opportunities for us to lead.'

'My job as a digital leader is to harness new software and programmes and to help teachers and pupils make better use of technology.'

03. 'The school is creating young people with a strong sense of right and wrong who can add to the community.'

04. 'When you suggest things, normally they will happen.'

05. 'The school teaches us to have a voice and not just be a by-stander.'

06. 'Pupils are not involved in decisions, just the staff.'



Illustrations of practice related to leading learning

Across the school, teachers undertake a broad and varied range of lead roles, which impact positively on learning and teaching and outcomes for children. They co-ordinate aspects of curriculum development, for example 1+2 languages, creativity, physical education and nurture. All P3 to P7 teachers support pupil leadership groups. Working alongside pupils, staff use these groups to bring about effective change within the school and the local community. The groups also provide very good opportunities for children to contribute to the life and ethos of the school as a community.

The school has strong international links and uses them well to encourage leadership of learning. All primary teachers and some support staff participated in an immersion course in French as part of a commitment to delivering French as an additional language. This experience increased the confidence of staff in delivering French in the school and enabled staff time to learn and engage in discussion with colleagues from other schools in Scotland and beyond.

Empowerment for curriculum leadership overall findings

The thematic inspection 'Readiness for empowerment' identified six dimensions of empowerment which are important levers for change. The inspection report highlighted that the dimensions can apply at all different levels of the education system to ensure that decisions about children's and young people's learning and school life are taken within schools, supported by parents and the local community. The following table uses the six dimensions of empowerment to highlight practice which is emerging in schools and next steps to continue to increase empowerment for curriculum leadership.

Autonomy

Senior leaders are developing a culture of leadership for learning which allows teachers to take measured risks, be creative and innovate across the curriculum. All teachers should continue to embrace this developing culture and regard themselves as leaders of learning across the system.

Professional learning

Teachers are increasingly participating in professional learning which is collaborative and generating evidence of improvement in outcomes for learners. Further extension of these approaches would increase improvement across the system.

Participation and engagement

Increasingly schools are developing processes to engage more fully with pupils, parents and wider partners to develop the curriculum. They should accelerate the collaboration with these groups to gather evidence on the impact of the curriculum and make decisions about next steps.

Collaboration

Teachers are collaborating within their schools and across associated school groups. They are starting to explore the benefits of engaging with schools who have similar goals in other local authorities. Engagement with regional improvement collaboratives will help to increase collaboration across schools.

Resources

The Attainment Scotland Fund and Pupil Equity Funding are providing resources to some to bring about improvement. There is a continuing need to focus on increasing the number of teachers, particularly in rural areas where access to additional funding is more limited.

Impact

Teachers are aware of the need to demonstrate the impact of the developments they implement. They should continue to build on the increasing use of data to demonstrate the impact of interventions and identify next steps.



Key strengths

- Improving the curriculum remains a high priority for schools across Scotland. Headteachers are empowered to work with staff, pupils, parents and wider partners to design learner pathways which best suit the needs of their local community. In most cases, they are well supported to do this by their local authority.
- A broad range of local, national and international evidence is being used to inform curriculum development. Teachers are developing curriculum frameworks and courses to suit their local circumstances and provide relevant learning experiences.
- Within a range of supportive policies and guidance, teachers are increasingly being creative and taking the lead to improve learning and teaching across the curriculum.
- There are increasing opportunities to work collaboratively across schools and local authorities. This is supporting improvement across the system and an increasingly effective implementation of the principles of Curriculum for Excellence across the country.

Aspects for improvement

- Build on current approaches to more consistently collaborate on curriculum development with parents and wider partners, including other schools across local authorities and regional improvement collaboratives.
- Involve children and young people more in the development of the curriculum and evaluation of its impact.
- Address staffing shortages, particularly in rural areas, to ensure teachers can participate in opportunities for professional learning and schools are able to deliver a curriculum that best suits the needs of children and young people.
- Continue to develop partnerships with colleges, employers and third sector organisations to further improve progression through the curriculum, increase the pace of delivering DYW priorities and provide an appropriate range of learning pathways for all young people.



Recommendations

- Support children and young people, parents and wider partners to engage with schools in evidence-based decision making about curriculum design and development.
- Further develop partnerships across the system to improve curriculum flexibility and provide progression pathways which prepare learners for lifelong learning and the world of work.
- Ensure all teachers have access to high quality professional learning; can collaborate across schools; and are able to be system leaders who energise and share curriculum developments across the country.

Appendix 1: Schools visited

School	Local authority
Kaimhill Primary School Hospital and Home Tuition Service	Aberdeen City Council
Auchenblae Primary School	Aberdeenshire Council
Maisondieu Primary School Monifieth High School	Angus Council
Oban High School	Argyll and Bute Council
St Bernadette's RC Primary School	Clackmannanshire Council
Creetown Primary School Sanquhar Academy	Dumfries and Galloway Council
Mill of Mains Primary School Grove Academy	Dundee City Council
Kilmarnock Academy Park School	East Ayrshire Council
Bearsden Academy	East Dunbartonshire Council
Dunbar Primary School	East Lothian Council
Eastwood High School	East Renfrewshire Council
Falkirk High School Maddiston Primary School	Falkirk Council
Kilmaron School Lochgelly High School	Fife Council
Croftcroighn Primary School St Margaret Mary's High School St Thomas' Primary School	Glasgow City Council
St Joseph's Primary School	Inverclyde Council
Beeslack Community High School	Midlothian Council
Speyside High School	Moray Council
Lawthorn Primary School	North Ayrshire Council
Firpark Special School Kilsyth Primary School	North Lanarkshire Council
Stromness Academy	Orkney Islands Council
St. John's RC Academy Luncarty Primary School	Perth and Kinross Council
Inchinnan Primary School	Renfrewshire Council
Parkside Primary School	Scottish Borders Council
Aith Junior High School	Shetland Islands Council
Carrick Academy	South Ayrshire Council
Townhill Primary School Trinity High School	South Lanarkshire Council
Stirling High School	Stirling Council
Currie Community High School St Margaret's RC Primary School	The City of Edinburgh Council
Holm Primary School Kilchuimen Academy	The Highland Council
Edinbarnet Primary School	West Dunbartonshire Council
Sgoil an lochdar	Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)
Bridgend Primary School	West Lothian Council

Appendix 2: Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All <i>100%</i>	Almost all <i>91%-99%</i>	Most <i>75%-90%</i>
Majority <i>50%-74%</i>	Minority/less than half <i>15%-49%</i>	A few <i>< 15%</i>

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.

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