

## **Item: 9**

**Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 15 November 2023.**

**Collaborative Review of Secondary Broad General Education.**

**Report by Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

To advise of the findings of the Three Island Authorities, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and Education Scotland Collaborative Improvement Review of Secondary Broad General Education.

### **2. Recommendations**

The Committee is invited to note:

#### **2.1.**

The findings of a Collaborative Improvement Review of Secondary Broad General Education in the three island authorities of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Shetland Islands Council and Orkney Islands Council, undertaken under the leadership of the Association of Directors of Education for Scotland and in partnership with Education Scotland, attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

**It is recommended:**

#### **2.2.**

That the findings of the Collaborative Improvement Review of Secondary Broad General Education be used to inform a local review of the secondary Broad General Education in Orkney, to be undertaken in year three (2024/25) of the National Improvement Framework: Orkney Islands Council Report and Plan 2023-2024.

### **3. Background**

#### **3.1.**

Under the leadership of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) and in partnership with Education Scotland, all local authority areas in Scotland have made a commitment to work together to undertake Collaborative Improvement Reviews.

#### **3.2.**

The critical role of cross-authority collaborative improvement work has been recognised for several years as a key approach to improving outcomes for Scotland's learners, strengthening professional practice and decreasing inequalities.

### **3.3.**

Working closely with ADES and Education Scotland, it was identified that the three island authorities of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Shetland Islands Council and Orkney Islands Council would be able to form a strong partnership to undertake a review, recognising the similarities, cross-cutting themes and issues of delivery of education in island settings.

### **3.4.**

The first three island authorities' review focused on Senior Phase Education (S4-6), which was reported to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee in March 2023 for scrutiny and informed the Education Service Plan 2022-25, which includes a commitment to a Senior Phase Curriculum Review in Orkney, which is due to report to the Committee in February 2024.

### **3.5.**

One of the three themes of the Three Island Authorities, ADES and Education Scotland Collaborative Improvement Review of Senior Phase was "The Broad General Education in S1-3 and the Support Given to Transition to Senior Phase". Findings under this theme indicated that the Secondary Broad General Education Curriculum warranted a focused review, which was carried out in June 2023.

## **4. Focus of Review and Summary of Findings**

### **4.1.**

The overarching theme of the review was:

- In the context of island communities, how well does the secondary BGE Curriculum engage and meet the needs of all learners, equipping them for learning, life and work?

### **4.2.**

The focus of the review was then further distilled into three key areas to allow for more detailed analysis of contributing elements.

### **4.3.**

Appendix 1 to this report details the full findings of the review.

### **4.4.**

It is proposed that the findings be used to inform a local review of the Secondary Broad General Education in Orkney, to be undertaken in year three (2024/25) of the National Improvement Framework: Orkney Islands Council Report and Plan 2023-2024 (the Education Service Plan).

## **5. Links to Council Plan**

### **5.1.**

The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan strategic priority of Strengthening our communities.

### **5.2.**

The proposals in this report relate directly to Priority C4: Improve Education Standards (Scottish Attainment Challenge) of the Council Delivery Plan.

## **6. Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan**

The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priority of Local Equality.

## **7. Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

## **8. Legal Aspects**

There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

## **9. Contact Officers**

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## **10. Appendix**

Appendix 1: Report of the Three Island Authorities, ADES and Education Scotland Collaborative Improvement Review Programme, October 2023.

## **Three Island Authorities, ADES and Education Scotland Collaborative Improvement Review of Secondary Broad General Education - October 2023**

### **1 Introduction**

Under the leadership of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) and in partnership with Education Scotland, all local authority areas in Scotland have made a commitment to work together to undertake Collaborative Improvement Reviews.

Working closely with ADES and Education Scotland, it was identified that the three island authorities of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Shetland Islands Council and Orkney Islands Council would be able to form a strong partnership to undertake a review, recognising the similarities, cross-cutting themes and issues of delivery of education in island settings.

The first three island authorities collaborative improvement review focused on Senior Phase Education (S4-6). The [report](#) of this review came to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee in March 2023 for scrutiny. This report informed the Education Service Plan 2022-25, which includes a commitment to a Senior Phase Curriculum Review in Orkney, which is due to report to ELH in February 2024.

One of the three themes of the Collaborative Improvement Review of Senior Phase was the Broad General Education in S1-3 and the Support Given to Transition to Senior Phase. Findings under this theme indicated that the Secondary BGE Curriculum warranted a focused review.

### **2 Process**

A Collaborative Review Project Team was established in May 2023 with a remit to agree the focus of the review and design a delivery programme. The project team involved a senior officer from each of the three authorities along with a senior representative from ADES and the Education Scotland Northern Alliance Regional Team. Whilst much of the review took place online, in response to learning from the Senior Phase Review sessions with young people and with parents were carried out in person as far as possible, with remote joining options available where needed.

Focus groups met in June 2023, bringing together a broad range of stakeholders. Each session included representatives from the three authorities alongside a member of the project team. Membership of various groups included:

- ADES representatives.
- Education Scotland staff.
- Local Authority education department staff.
- Headteachers and deposes.

- Subject teachers.
- Learners.
- Parents.
- College staff.
- Community delivery partners.
- Trade unions/professional associations.
- Employers/industry partners.

Feedback from the focus groups was collated and discussed in verbal feedback sessions with ADES, Education Scotland and the Project team, with each Local Authority then using the common feedback in producing its own report of the review.

### **3 Review focus**

The overarching theme of the review was:

- In the context of island communities, how well does the secondary BGE Curriculum engage and meet the needs of all learners, equipping them for learning, life and work?

The focus of the review was then further distilled into three key areas to allow for more detailed analysis of contributing elements, as detailed below, with each theme having some suggested areas for discussion in focus groups.

#### **Theme 1: Curriculum**

- The purpose of S1-3: preparation for Senior Phase or an education in itself.
- The role of the S3 year.
- Does the S1-3 curriculum work for all learners, e.g. those struggling to engage with school.
- Breadth of subjects vs quality vs equity (can we or should we offer everything everywhere?).
- Curriculum structural models (2:2:2 years or 3:3, breadth vs depth in S3).
- IDL vs SQA subjects vs curriculum areas, transferrable skills vs. subject content.
- Use of digital platforms to enable access.
- Gaelic curricular pathways.

#### **Theme 2: Curricular Transition and Articulation (Primary to Secondary, BGE to Senior Phase)**

- Collaboration between staff across phases.
- Curricular progression and avoiding duplication of content.
- Skills progression (for learning, life and work).
- Validity of assessment across phases.
- Summer loss.

- Consistency/standardisation of curriculum in primary schools associated with the same secondary setting.
- Does the S1-3 curriculum work for all learners, e.g. those struggling to engage with school.
- Impact of the type/model of primary school on transition to secondary curriculum.

### **Theme 3: Assessment, Moderation and Achievement**

- Assessment of progress – in the “responsibility of all” areas, in subjects/curricular areas.
- Accreditation of attainment (availability, equity, desirability, early presentation).
- Recording of achievement at end of BGE.
- Confidence in assessment judgements.
- Approaches to moderation.
- Meaningfulness of assessment information provided to parents and learners.
- Preparation of learners for formal assessment in Senior Phase.

## **3 Findings**

### **3.1 What is going well?**

- a) There is a desire to have a BGE curriculum that offers a wide range of experiences to give breadth of learning, which is complemented by a commitment to supporting all young people. Staff are keen to find innovative solutions to provide the best curriculum they can.
- b) There are some strong examples of Inter-disciplinary Learning (IDL) and working with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to interweave elements of Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). This incorporates strong partnership links, especially from colleges and local employers, to support skills development.
- c) There is a strong feeling from Head Teachers that small class sizes support inclusion. Children and young people with complex needs are able to access learning and staff are able to differentiate and provide appropriate support and challenge.
- d) Generally, transitions from P7 to S1 are well organised and focus on making relationships with new peer groups. P7 activities in primaries are organised as part of transitions and end of year projects. One parent described the young people as already feeling part of the family of the secondary school whilst still in primary.
- e) There is good information given to learners to prepare them for transition from S3 to S4.
- f) There is a willingness to look beyond subjects at pupil readiness for the world ahead. This involves improving confidence and awareness of options available on and off the island(s), providing experiences in local workplaces and providing experiences beyond what’s available on the island(s).

- g) The focus in many schools has been on building on progression frameworks to ensure continuity and progression in learning. However several constraints such as lack of collaborative working across and within the local authority are acting as barriers. In one school, clear self-evaluation resulted in a focus on problem solving skills.
- h) The focus of enhanced transitions in even the smallest school and evident commitment to meeting the broad needs of learners is very strong.
- i) There are strong pastoral transitions no matter what type of school, with staff from different contexts working together to ensure young people feel confident and secure in their next stage of education.
- j) Some examples of cluster working across the primary sector are impacting positively on transitions.
- k) There are examples of collaborative approaches to moderation being supported.
- l) Some very strong partnership working with service level agreements is making a real impact re. DYW and career planning.
- m) Partners work very well with schools and are beginning to become embedded in aspects of the curriculum. A few are involved in curriculum planning.
- n) Some good examples were given of backwards tracking/moderation to evaluate how learners progressed in the senior phase and reflecting back on what was awarded at the end of the BGE. However, the impact of this work was not clear.
- o) Schools reported good systems to make sure pupils were supported in assessment to ensure barriers were removed.
- p) Cross-sectoral activities were seen as particularly beneficial.
- q) Benefits of discussions with colleagues were noted, although time/travel challenges were discussed.
- r) Networks were welcomed for single-person departments.

### **3.2 Possible areas for further follow-up**

- a) Collective view that, despite teachers' best efforts, the curriculum doesn't work for all learners with some pupils 'treading water' and not being challenged enough. A few comments that learners feel it is a waste of time.
- b) There were concerns shared about the structure of the S1-3 BGE curriculum with most preferring a 2-2-2 model (courses organised as S1-2, S3-4, S5-6) but young people suggesting that there is a 2-2-2 curriculum being taught within a 3-3 structure. It would be worth exploring what pupils and teachers feel is best. Young people felt there was fragmentation where there are choices at the end of S2 and again at the end of S3.
- c) The purpose of S3 is unclear and views varied:
  - Too much for those who are struggling to make the jump into National Qualifications.
  - Lack of challenge for some: seen as a waste of time, leading to issues with engagement.

- the broadly traditional model in place does not develop appropriate skills/experiences to support all young people.
- d) Little evidence of IDL coming through from some focus groups but there were suggestions that the pandemic had been a set-back in this regard.
  - e) Digital/remote access to learning was not seen as a good option in terms of whole-course delivery: the human relationship is still the most important thing and some areas have poor broadband to support this approach. How can this be altered?
  - f) Issues with repetition of content from Primary in S1 in some settings, offset by the need to mitigate re 'loss of learning' over summer. Is there a compromise position all can follow?
  - g) What is hindering staff from engaging with the latest curriculum ideas and how can the barriers be removed?
  - h) Variance in the level and quality of transition experiences dependent on which schools (not just which Local Authority) pupils belong to. How can discussions to support consistency happen?
  - i) How can Local Authorities build on some of the strong partnership working to encourage all schools to review skills progression, career planning and DYW from an earlier stage within the BGE, ensuring there is a minimum offer for all young people.
  - j) Why do parents continue to not understand the BGE and the reporting of levels used by secondary schools? How could this be rectified?
  - k) No focus in discussion about wider achievement. How is this recognised, recorded and built upon?
  - l) Lack of evidence of strategic policies on assessment – development need?
  - m) The focus was on subjects, and to an extent the 'responsibility for all' areas of Literacy, Numeracy and Health & Wellbeing; less so on wider achievement.
  - n) Moderation is lacking strategic direction and is far too focused on being in sectoral silos, and the focus in secondary is too greatly on senior phase (linked to provision of evidence for the Alternative Curriculum Model used for SQA assessment in 2022). A much stronger focus is needed on S1-3 moderation linked to primaries.
  - o) It was very challenging to move teachers from focusing on the operational and procedural (e.g. tracking) to the principles, purpose and pedagogy of assessment and moderation. More focus is needed from Local Authority and school leaders to build this capacity.
  - p) School staff use too much professional language and educational abbreviations when speaking to and reporting to parents. Clear plain language is needed.



### 3.3 Possible Focus Moving Forward

- a) Are there opportunities to design/evaluate/refresh the curriculum? Perhaps build on the national reform to carry out a curriculum review. Are colleagues plugged into these discussions?
- b) Provide space for teachers to develop a better understanding of the totality of the curriculum in which they teach. This could help staff to better articulate and deliver through a shared understanding of the purpose of the curriculum. This could also support curriculum development and move away from more traditional curriculum approaches.
- c) There could be mileage in deciding on what can be delivered and what cannot – being upfront with all stakeholders. This might help in developing a core curriculum that everyone receives in an equitable manner.
- d) How is space created for professional learning and curriculum planning against a backdrop of staff shortage?
- e) How can we support a more joined up approach across the BGE in relation to taking forward skills, especially meta-skills, across the curriculum. Could this be a way to have a commonality of approach across the authorities and engage young people more?
- f) There was a Gaelic Medium transition project based around the Clearances before Covid that was highly effective. This needs to happen again (possibly with a different theme on a rolling programme as these projects have to take into consideration that some of the classes involved will be composite classes). Lional do John Muir Award with Shawbost and Taobh Siar. Football and other sports are vital for transitions, in particular post-Covid.
- g) Some parents have interesting and helpful views on the curriculum e.g. the addition of money, finances and budgeting as part of the curriculum
- h) How can young people's achievements be recognised at the end of the BGE?
- i) There is general awareness of how schools could evaluate their curriculum although this mainly focuses on attainment levels as opposed to entitlements, or principles of curriculum design. What approach is there to curriculum review?
- j) Further develop IDL/skills based transitions projects. This could support consistency of curriculum and experiences from feeder primaries
- k) Consider giving more time for transition – starting earlier, involving more people and further building capacity. This includes opportunities for moderation and ensuring shared understanding of standards and expectations.
- l) Standardising the information that comes from primaries to secondaries would be useful.
- m) It would help to find space for teachers to consider how to improve curricular transitions. There is a willingness to collaborate but the drive is inhibited by a clear structure which provides time to work together.
- n) The Northern Alliance is working on a moderation programme and participation in this may help teachers to support accurate professional judgements and smoother curriculum transitions for young people.

- o) There is a need to develop a framework for skills progression through and across the curriculum which all staff can understand and see where they fit.
- p) Support from the local authority in establishing more robust networks to really focus in on the curricular aspect of transition planning - even in all-through settings this appeared an area of need.
- q) Although Young People in S3 experience wider curriculum experiences, such as sports leadership, wider achievement is not recorded by pupils. Is this something that could be tracked more carefully?
- r) Encourage all headteachers to review the curriculum through the lens of skills development and how subjects, working alongside partners, can add value in this area.
- s) Headteachers could collaborate on a strategic and consistent approach to work with partners to support a whole island offer for children and young people. This may need to be facilitated through virtual access.
- t) If LAs/schools were given carte blanche (within financial constraints), how would they design the S1-S3 curriculum?
- u) The purpose of BGE: learning time vs preparation for qualifications, skills development and recognition of achievement in BGE.

### **3.4 Some Emerging Themes from Pupils and Parents**

- a) Learners enjoy a breadth of subjects but the systems used for curriculum choice place some limitations.
- b) P7 - S1 transitions are not a concern for the learners, but the focus was more on pastoral than curricular transition.
- c) S3 - S4 transition does not generally prepare learners well, and there is a significant change in expectations without the required support and preparation in S3. This does not apply in the Junior High Schools as they choose National Qualification subjects in S2.
- d) Many learners in the large schools expressed the view that S3 was of little value and did not challenge them.
- e) Young people generally do not understand attainment levels.
- f) Parents feel that reporting to parents is too full of jargon and needs to be simplified.
- g) Progression in S1-3 appears uncertain to parents.
- h) Parents on the whole believe their children are looked after well and that teachers do their best to support them.

## **4. Conclusion**

Participation in the Collaborative Review enabled the Council to receive high-quality collegiate feedback on its own work within the secondary BGE as well as to contribute to evaluation of the work of colleagues in the Western Isles and Shetland, including finding areas of strength and good practice that can be developed locally.

The collaboration has fostered links between staff across the three island areas and forms a platform for further networking and collaboration into the future.

When considering the original question posed by the Collaborative Review: “In the context of island communities, how well does the secondary BGE Curriculum engage and meet the needs of all learners, equipping them for learning, life and work?” the evidence points to some areas of good practice in inter-disciplinary learning and skills development and staff working together to provide a positive P7-S1 pastoral transition. There are, however, significant concerns raised around curriculum design, including lack of progression in S1-3, lack of articulation in the curriculum between primary and secondary, insufficient focus on skills development, and a curriculum model which leaves pupils treading water in S3. Staff are keen to find solutions to these issues but need to be given structured time to work collaboratively on this across sectors.

## **5. Next Steps**

### **5.1 Next steps for Orkney Islands Council**

A review of the secondary BGE is planned for year three (24-25) of the Orkney Education Service Plan, and the findings of the Collaborative Review will be used to support the planning of that review and subsequent actions.