



REPORT TO: MORAY COUNCIL EMERGENCY CABINET ON 12 AUGUST 2020

SUBJECT: NATIONAL EDUCATION PRIORITIES – EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY

BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Cabinet on the National Improvement Framework plan return which is submitted to the Scottish Government in August each year.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Emergency Cabinet following a decision of Moray Council on 17 June 2020 to convene a meeting of the Emergency Cabinet as and when required until a new simplified Committee structure commences on 2 September 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that Emergency Cabinet:

- (i) **scrutinises and notes the contents of the report; and**
- (ii) **agrees the annual National Improvement Framework (NIF) return to be submitted to Education Scotland on 24 August 2020.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The First Minister launched the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) in February 2015 to achieve equity in Educational outcomes for all children and young people irrespective of their economic background. It is underpinned by the NIF, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC).
- 3.2 A report outlining the SAC and the then draft NIF was presented to Children and Young People's Services Committee on 9 December 2015 (para 8 of the minute refers).

4. STANDARDS IN SCOTLAND'S SCHOOLS ACT

- 4.1 The NIF for Scottish Education was launched by the First Minister in January 2016. The Framework supports Scottish Government ambition to achieve excellence and equity for every child in Scotland and builds on the Raising

Attainment for All agenda. Importantly it places a legal duty on local authorities to actively address the poverty related attainment gap.

The NIF identifies 4 key priorities for action:

- Improvement in attainment, particularly literacy and numeracy;
- Closing the attainment gap between most and least disadvantaged children;
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing; and
- Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people.

The Framework is underpinned by a series of new planning and reporting duties designed to support transparency and accountability. These legal duties have been integrated into the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 through amendments contained in Part 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016.

- 4.2 The Scottish Government has published statutory guidance to support education authorities to carry out the new legal responsibilities.
- 4.3 The statutory guidance clarifies how the 2000 Act has been amended through the 2016 Act in order to:
- impose duties on education authorities to enhance equity and promote a reduction in inequalities of educational outcome experienced by pupils as a result of socio-economic disadvantage;
 - impose a duty to secure improvement in the quality of school education with a view to achieving the strategic priorities of the NIF; and
 - impose duties in relation to annual planning and reporting and annual school improvement planning
- 4.4 A revised approach to planning and reporting based on NIF priorities was introduced in order to improve the quality of information to:
- children, young people, parents and carers;
 - support education authorities and Community Planning Partnerships in planning and delivering services; and
 - support the development of national education policy
- 4.5 School improvement plans (SIP) should be informed by the priorities of:
- the NIF;
 - the appropriate Local Authority strategic plans (Corporate Plan, Moray Children's Services Plan and the Education Strategic Plan); and
 - the priorities of the school community plan.

The process should be underpinned by consultation and engagement with stakeholders.

- 4.6 SAC and PEF plans are incorporated within the school improvement planning documentation thereby reducing the need for additional bureaucracy and

considering workload. The advice and guidance to schools on plans was approved by the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers and is updated on a yearly basis. PEF planning must be aligned to pupils, levels of attainment and the impact of this has to be in measurable outcomes for children and young people. This is a key focus during an inspection of a school for Quality Indicator 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement. Headteachers are allocated PEF to use knowing the context of their school, community and learners, making local decisions which make a difference.

5. PROGRESS, PLANS AND REPORTING

- 5.1 The draft Education Strategic Plan 20-23 which was scheduled for Committee prior to the Covid pandemic, but will now come forward for formal consideration by Committee in September 2020 outlines the priorities and actions necessary to improve outcomes across Education. The previous Schools and Curriculum Development Plan 2018-21 progressed improvement activities across 6 key areas and the evidence gathered to produce the department's Standards and Quality Report has been used to provide the necessary evidence for the NIF return. Key progress in each area is:

- 5.2 Improvement in attainment, particularly literacy and numeracy

Overall, good progress has been made over the course of the year with improvements across the Broad General Education. An improving four year trend in Achievement of a Level (ACEL) data as previously reported to Children and Young People's Services Committee. In most areas, we are now reaching National averages as well as National Improvement Framework (NIF) stretch aims. Progression in attainment between Early and First level continues to be a focus area for our Primary Schools and in particular, with Writing. Using relevant Central Officers and data analysis, we will target relevant support and challenge to particular schools, implement interventions and monitor progress. This will include development of core progressions, engagement with relevant strategies and continued focus on moderation, tracking and monitoring. This will also be a focus at Head Teacher meetings.

At fourth level, attainment is variable across the four year period with particular gaps emerging for Reading. Robust planning and assessment opportunities will be introduced along with bespoke literacy and numeracy periods across the BGE. Curriculum groups will support development of interventions to be further implemented, increased cross-sector moderation and extending use of attainment data sets through personal learning opportunities.

In Senior Phase, achievement in literacy for leavers at levels 4 and 5 has improved from previous years and is broadly in line with national comparators; for Numeracy, attainment at levels 4 and 5 has improved for leavers from previous years and at level 5, is a four year high. There has been focused work to improve literacy and numeracy to close identified gaps previously evident. Restructure of the Secondary School week has enabled flexibility to provide additional Literacy and Numeracy periods in the Senior Phase to ensure learners have access to opportunities to achieve at the highest levels. This is also being aided by an improving overall trend in BGE Literacy and Numeracy attainment. Schools have benefited from a wide range of data to

support a more rigorous scrutiny of performance in addition to improved school tracking of literacy and numeracy across Moray. We will continue to focus on maximising improvement of attainment for all learners at point of exit.

As schools return in August, there will be a focus on assessing children's progress and learning during lockdown and determining emerging gaps in literacy, numeracy and other curricular areas. This will be vital work in order to support further progress in this area.

5.3 Closing the attainment gap between most and least disadvantaged children

Overall, some progress has been made in order to close the poverty related attainment gap and address aspects of rural inequity. Progress in this area has been hampered by changes in our allocated Education Scotland Attainment Advisor and ongoing issues with balancing use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) with the identified cohorts. For example, pupils may be entitled to Free School Meals but may not be in SIMD 1 or 2 and as a result our gaps are not always with the most disadvantaged children. As Moray is not a Scottish Attainment Challenge authority, we do not benefit from additional monies which can provide a strategically sustained approach across the authority. For some schools, the amount received is decreasing and is not able to provide the impact expected. Next steps include a more strategic input from our Attainment Advisor along with a baseline data set for all schools in order that targets can be set. For a number of learners, the effects of disengagement from formalised learning are as yet unknown and this will have an impact on emerging gaps. This will be a key area of focus and relevance as schools reopen, post Covid-19.

5.4 Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing

Overall, schools are embracing the Moray approach to Relational Schools underpinned by a rights based education philosophy. Good progress has been made in reviewing Child Planning processes to support learner health and wellbeing through an increase in multi-agency working. Implementation during Covid-19 lockdown of a multi-agency Connect approach has led to a greater understanding of the support available to children within single agencies and across Moray. Supporting a number of vulnerable children within Childcare Hubs has enabled us to monitor wellbeing and support learning in order to mitigate some of the potential negative aspects of health and wellbeing while supporting families. Our data tells us that exclusions have reduced at both Primary and Secondary levels, resulting in better attendance and readiness to learn. Our priorities moving forwards are being determined by the Realigning Children's Services which includes the Mental Wellbeing of teenage girls in particular. Wellbeing will be a particular focus as schools reopen.

5.5 Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people

Positive leaver destinations (S4, session 2018/2019) were particularly positive at 97%. This has been aided by successful Pathway Planning meetings across all schools in Moray. Unfortunately, the overall leaver destinations

figure was disappointing for this session due to lapses in the recording of leaver destinations which is used to calculate overall statistics. Steps have already been taken to improve this through the implementation of a more robust method of data gathering and input to National data banks. Senior Leaders in Secondary Schools have taken a proactive approach in overseeing and managing this process alongside a more robust partnership with Skills Development Scotland. We anticipate an improvement in our overall leaver data when this becomes available in February 2021. We will continue this process along with a revised rationale for Pathway Planning which will begin in August 2020.

- 5.6 This year due to the COVID-19 pandemic there is an additional section to the NIF return to provide evidence of work during school lockdown and preparations and plans for school recovery.
- 5.7 The NIF return is submitted to the Scottish Government in August each year by a return to Education Scotland in a template provided for this purpose. The first part is school's own self-evaluation against three key quality indicators as seen in **Appendix 1**.
- 5.8 When comparing the self-evaluation gradings from last year's return to this, the following changes have been identified:

Quality Indicator	Improved	Maintained	Decreased
1.3	16	34	3
2.3	10	37	6
3.2	6	41	6

The School quality improvement team scrutinise the gradings and have confirmed that these are accurate. Some are as a result of Education Scotland Inspection processes. Although the aim is to improve standards, where there has been a decrease in a grading this is evidenced in each school and normally due to changes in staffing, leadership or instability in each area. School improvement plans identify priorities for improvement and the progress with these are monitored and scrutinised by the quality improvement team. Visits and the format of them are adapted in order to add additional challenge where necessary or to provide greater support to a school. Where gradings have improved, this is as a result of improvement

- 5.9 A summary of the number of schools who have graded themselves according to the 6 point scale for each quality indicator is:

Grading	Quality Indicator/No of Schools Evaluating the grading		
	1.3	2.3	3.2
1	nil	nil	nil
2	nil	1	1
3	22	26	30
4	19	18	20
5	12	8	2
6	nil	nil	nil

The gradings are:

- 1 unsatisfactory
- 2 weak
- 3 satisfactory
- 4 good
- 5 very good
- 6 excellent*

* excellent gradings can only be awarded by Education Scotland and not as part of a school's self-evaluation

- 5.10 The final part of the return is an evaluative report against each area of the NIF in **Appendix 2**. This must be sent to Scottish Government by the end of August.

6. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS.

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

This report relates the priority 'Provide a sustainable education service aiming for excellence' from the Corporate Plan and to 'Building a better future for our children and young people in Moray' from the LOIP.

(b) Policy and Legal

The Education Act and Standards in Scotland's Schools Act have been adhered to.

(c) Financial implications

The cost of all improvement actions are undertaken within schools existing budgets, the central education budget and any additional funding through PEF funding streams.

(d) Risk implications

Risks are related to any inability to raise standards or improvements in relation to the NIF priorities and aims of the PEF. The impact of COVID-19 lockdown and school closures are not yet known and how this will influence improvement in outcomes for children and young people across Moray as well as any impact on their health and wellbeing.

Staffing has continued to create challenges, particularly at Senior Leadership level with several posts re-advertised on various occasions prior to appointment. Across Secondary Schools, we continue to have difficulty in filling posts across Maths, English, Science, Computing, Home Economics and Technical. This has a great impact on stable learning and teaching, and attainment. During Covid-19, there was period where recruitment processes stalled and this has impacted on

the appointment of several Head Teacher posts which will be advertised in August.

Delays to new build schools (Linkwood Primary School and Lossiemouth High School) and major works planned for the learning estate has a negative impact on accommodating pupils in positive learning environments.

Being a small local authority, with a small Central Team, this restricts the ability to take forward a wide range of strategies to drive improvement. With the increased expectations on Head Teachers and Senior Leaders to prioritise remote learning during Covid-19 and to plan for school recovery as well as future contingencies, their capacity to support system leadership has been adversely affected.

Normal School Improvement Planning processes have been affected with plans adjusted for remote learning and initially planning for contingency with a further change to an expected 100% return. School Improvement activities will be adversely affected by this and the capacity to support strategies to raise attainment will be impacted upon. Statutory requirements including gathering and submitting Achievement of a Level (ACEL) data have been suspended.

The immediate effect of the cancellation of this session's SQA examination diet is as yet unknown. However, this will have a wider ranging impact on Senior Phase pupils and will continue for session 2020/2021 with an almost certain alteration to next session's examination diet 2021.

Should there be a spike in Covid-19 cases, this may result in local school closures and interrupted learning or a return to National lockdown. This will further impact on our ability to improve.

(e) Staffing implications

None arising directly from this report although the ongoing impact of COVID-19 may affect staffing across Education in the months ahead.

(f) Property

Property issues may arise as we implement return to schooling with strict adherence to social distancing as well as ensuring that schools are maintained to the correct levels of health and safety and cleaning requirements to keep staff and children safe.

(g) Equalities

None arising directly from this report

(h) Consultations

Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development), Head of Education Resources and Communities, Senior Education Officers, the Senior HR Adviser, Paul Connor, Principal Accountant, Tracey Sutherland, Committee Services Officer, and the Equal Opportunities Officer have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report as regards their respective responsibilities.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Cabinet is asked to review the evidence provided in the NIF return documents and agree the submission to the Scottish Government.

Author of Report: Vivienne Cross (Head of Education, Chief Education Officer)

Background Papers: