

**The Highland Council
Follow-up Inspection Report**

May 2003

Definition of terms used in this report

HM Inspectors use published criteria when making judgements about the work of a school. These performance indicators relate judgements to four levels of performance. This report uses the following word scale to make clear the judgements made by Inspectors:

very good	major strengths
good	more strengths than weaknesses
fair	some important weaknesses
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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Introduction

The education functions of each local authority in Scotland will be inspected between 2000 and 2005. Section 9 of the *Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000* charges HM Inspectorate of Education, 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. Inspections are conducted within a published framework of quality indicators (*Quality Management in Education*) which embody the Government's policy on Best Value.

Each inspection is planned and implemented in partnership with Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission for Scotland. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the *Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000*. It provides services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland. Together they ensure that the Scottish Executive and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

The external auditor member of the inspection team carries out a performance management and planning (PMP) audit of the education functions of the authority. The inspection team also includes an Associate Assessor who is a senior member of staff currently serving in another Scottish local authority.

All inspections of the education functions of educational authorities are followed up by inspection teams, normally around 2 years from the date of the original published inspection report.

Follow-up to the inspection of the education functions of The Highland Council

1. The aims, nature and scope of the inspection

The education functions of The Highland Council were inspected during the period August-November 2000 as part of national inspection programme of all education authorities in Scotland over a five-year period.

The local authority prepared and made public an Action Plan in April 2001, indicating how it would address the main points for action identified in the original HMIE inspection report published in February 2001.

An inspection team revisited the authority in January 2003 to assess progress made in meeting the recommendations in the initial report and the extent of continuous improvement.

2. Changes in Education Service operational context

Since the initial inspection of the education functions of Highland Council in August-November 2000 there had been significant changes within the Council and the Education Service.

Following a strategic review of all services provided by Highland Council, restructuring resulted in the reduction in Service Departments from twelve to nine and the appointment of new Strategic Directors. In April 2002 the Education Service was integrated with the Culture and Leisure Service. The building, cleaning, and catering functions of Commercial Operations was integrated into a

new Education, Culture and Sport Service (ECSS) under a single Strategic Director.

The previous Director of Education Services was appointed as the new Strategic Director for ECSS. Six senior members of the former Education Service and the former Cultural and Leisure Service retired. A new senior management structure was created for the new ECSS and remits were rationalised and clarified. Three Heads of Service were appointed to manage Support Services, Education Services, and Community, Learning and Leisure Services. A Head of Children, Young People and Families was appointed as a joint post with the Social Work Service and NHS Highland. A Head of Transition was appointed on a fixed term to June 2003 to manage the merger of the services, the McCrone agreement, Best Value reviews and implementation of the Action Plan in response to the report on the education functions of the Council. New structures were clearly defined and a range of third and fourth tier postholders appointed. A strong emphasis on decentralisation had been maintained. It was intended that managers deployed in headquarters would become more strategic and that there would be greater operational delivery at area level through the five Area Education Managers.

Service aims had been revised to reflect the new ECSS. These were incorporated into the new ECSS Service Plan 2002-2005, published in May 2002. Improvement objectives had been devised to reflect the scope and customer base of the new service. This clear statement of objectives embodied the National Priorities for education.

The revised objectives of ECSS had been communicated directly to schools and reinforced at meetings with headteachers. A comprehensive and well-presented summary of the Service Plan had been issued to stakeholders.

Benefits of the new integrated structure were already evident through effective joint working among the school, culture and sport sectors. This had resulted in additional opportunities being made available for pupils in a number of schools to engage in enhanced activities in drama, art and making films. Youth development workers had worked closely with support for learning staff and made contributions to personal and social development lessons in a number of secondary schools across the authority. A local cultural co-ordinator now provided specialist support for an arts programme in a secondary school and seven of its associated primary schools. There were plans to extend this programme later this year. The School Sport Co-ordinator Scheme had been further enhanced through local sport development officers working collaboratively with schools to enhance pupil's achievement. The New Community Schools (NCS) roll out featured co-ordinated approaches to service delivery including education, health, cultural and sports functions. The introduction of the management of the school meal's service from a commercial operation to the ECSS had already shown benefits in delivering the health improvement objectives in the service plan.

Overall, significant changes had been made to the structure and organisation of the Education Service. This reorganisation had required a substantial management input from senior staff. Although it was too early to assess the full impact of these changes there was evidence of more effective joint planning and working to improve the quality of services and provide enhanced opportunities for pupils to raise their levels of achievement.

3. Continuous Improvement

Since the inspection report was published in February 2001, the education authority had shown that it

had the capacity to continue to improve its overall effectiveness.

ECSS had responded very positively to national developments, and planning, policy and practice fully reflected the National Priorities for education. For example, increased opportunities had been provided for young people through an extension of vocational courses provided in partnership with further education colleges. Considerable progress had been made in the 21st Century School Improvement Programme. Two secondary schools and two primary schools had been opened under the Public Private Partnership (PPP). A second, more ambitious scheme, including school rationalisation, was planned. Since 1999 science laboratories in nine secondary schools had been completely refurbished. ECSS had continued to refine and improve mechanisms for consultation, communication and Public Performance Reporting. The effective use of newsletters, web-sites and e-mail had been developed further. Consultation with pupils had increased through the Highland Youth Voice and Pupil Councils. Joint working with other departments and agencies had strengthened considerably and had resulted in a number of successful initiatives to improve services to children and their families, and meet the needs of a broad range of stakeholders. In particular, the Area Children's Service Forums, which comprised officers from ECSS, Health and Social Work, had resulted in improved service provision. An innovative co-funded post of Head of Children's Services with health and social work had led to more co-ordinated joint working in a number of areas, particularly through the NCS approach.

The Council had continued to give high priority to the development of Gaelic medium education. ECSS had recently adopted a *Gaelic Education and Early Years Strategy* which set new priorities for the development of the language. There had been a steady expansion in the number of pre-school children receiving education in the

medium of Gaelic. The number of secondary school pupils receiving Gaelic medium education had increased over the last three years.

The authority had maintained a continued focus on improving the achievement and attainment for young people. In primary schools Early Intervention had continued to have a significant impact on levels of attainment in P2 in reading and writing, and to a lesser degree in mathematics. Since 2000 the percentage of primary school pupils attaining appropriate 5-14 levels¹ for their stage had increased in reading, writing and mathematics. Relative to national averages and comparator authorities² performance was strongest in writing. Performance in reading and mathematics was marginally below that achieved nationally, but broadly in line with comparator authorities. In secondary schools, attainment at 5-14 had improved in reading, writing and mathematics. Performance was well above national averages in all three aspects. Performance in writing was below that in comparator authorities.

Although some aspects of pupils' achievement and attainment had improved, in other areas improvement was less secure. In National Qualifications between 2000 and 2002, from a high position, the percentage of the S4 roll who gained five or more awards at Level 4³ or better had declined by 3% and those who gained five or more awards at Level 5 or better had remained steady. This was compared to a relatively stable pattern at both levels nationally and in comparator authorities. The percentage of the S4 roll who gained three or more awards at Level 6 had declined by 2%, between 2000 and 2002, when the national figure remained steady. The authority was aware

¹ Level A by end of P3. Level B by end of P4. Level C by end of P6. Level D by end of P7. Level E by end of S2.

² CA (comparator authority) average refers to the group of education authorities that are most similar to each other in terms of various socio-economic and demographic factors.

³ Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels. 7: CSYS at A-C. 6: Higher at A-C. 5: Intermediate 2 at A-C; Standard Grade at 1-2. 4: Intermediate 1 at A-C; Standard Grade at 3-4. 3: Access 3 Cluster: Standard Grade at 5-6.

that while pupils performance was generally above national average, performance required to be sustained and very good attainment at Standard Grade more fully reflected in S5 and S6.

The education authority had demonstrated a capacity for continuous improvement in many areas. It needed to sustain this momentum and focus on areas where further improvement needed to be secured.

4. Progress towards the main points for action

The initial inspection report published in February 2001 identified eight main points for action. This section evaluates the progress the authority has made with each of the main action points and the resulting improvements for pupils and other stakeholders.

4.1 Further improve approaches to performance monitoring and measurement by increasing the rigour of school reviews, targeting scarce resources where needs are greatest, evaluating the impact of initiatives on improving pupils' attainment and indicating how overall findings would be used to effect improvement.

Overall, the education authority had made very good progress in improving approaches to performance monitoring and measurement. The quality assurance framework had been strengthened and a culture of self-evaluation promoted more systematically.

A Quality Development Team (QDT) had been established with a clear and appropriate remit to focus on monitoring, evaluating and supporting the work of schools. The team had developed thorough and systematic procedures for evaluating school development

plans, and made effective use of these evaluations to target school visits for quality assurance and support.

All schools had been given, and were making good use of, clear guidance on development planning and self-evaluation. They also had access to a very helpful electronic planning format with direct links to national quality indicators and to an impressive and comprehensive online library of curricular and other policy frameworks provided by the ECSS. These had provided considerably increased rigour and quality in schools' planning for improvement.

Quality assurance visits were now more rigorous and had a clearer focus on attainment, and learning and teaching, especially in primary schools. Visits to secondary schools should continue to develop a sharper focus on attainment and the analysis of Scottish Qualification Authority results, and how these related to the quality of learning and teaching. The inclusion of headteachers in some of the quality assurance teams had been very successful. The introduction of targeted visits had ensured that schools in need of support were given most attention. Whilst there was a consistent agenda set by QDT in visits this needed to focus more on educational outcomes for pupils, including attainment.

Quality Development Officers made very good use of national quality indicators to evaluate school performance and provided clear advice on school self-evaluation. Following each quality assurance visit, schools received a written report which was clear, evaluative and constructive. Recommendations were thoroughly followed up by the QDT in subsequent visits to effect improvement. Quality development officers should continue to develop their skills in the evaluation of aspects of management and attainment in secondary schools, and in linking these evaluations to learning and teaching.

4.2 Develop a system for the more systematic collection, analysis and reporting of management data on improvement. Improve reporting on performance to elected members, parents and other stakeholders.

Overall, good progress had been made towards meeting this main point for action.

The Best Value review of *Support for the Curriculum* identified the need to establish a QDT and, within it, a Performance Management Unit (PMU). Following visits to other authorities across Scotland to identify good practice the PMU team was formally set up in September 2002. The team comprised a Quality Development Officer, a statistician and a research assistant. The PMU had gathered and analysed data on quality assurance and development planning throughout the Service and had provided benchmarking information on performance across schools and between authorities. Although the PMU had not been physically established until September 2002, considerable work had been undertaken prior to that time to develop systems and procedures, prepare software to support planning for improvement and support some secondary schools in interpreting attainment data.

The relevant information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure had been installed and a review undertaken of the information already being collected and processed. This resulted in the identification of gaps in data and additions made to the current data-gathering measures. A system had been established to store and process the data gathered through school development planning, quality assurance monitoring and HMIE reports. There was now an extensive source of qualitative data and good practice to inform the education authority's decision-making and policy direction.

The PMU had provided data to support senior managers to develop the authority's statement of *Improvement Objectives* and provided evidence used in the compilation of the *Standards and Quality Report 2002*. Helpful work had been undertaken to monitor and report on improvement made through key developments such as Early Intervention and 5-14 writing. Good work was on-going to develop quality standards and to support schools in self-evaluation in health promotion, ethos and mentoring. Support had been given to assist schools and the authority to monitor and report on the implementation of National Priorities in education. All headteachers had received worthwhile training on monitoring National Priorities. The systematic review of Continuing Professional Development activities, provided helpful information on which to base future provision. Good support had been provided to secondary school headteachers to plan new curriculum structures and staffing models.

Since 1999 the percentage of total absences in secondary schools had risen by around 2%. In response, an analysis of attendance data had been undertaken to identify particular schools and year groups where individual support was required.

Training had been provided for school staff and officers in analysis and interpretation of statistical data. The use of benchmark information with comparator schools and authorities, particularly on pupils' attainment, required to be extended. Further support and challenge in these areas was needed for headteachers to help them set targets, monitor attainment and plan for improvement.

Improved information had been made available to Elected Members and the PMU responded well to requests for data on schools and educational issues. Attainment data was provided in school handbooks, the Service Standards and Quality Report, and through the service web-site and the Council's Public Performance Report.

Positive steps had been taken to develop a co-ordinated management information system and improve reporting on performance. Continued work needed to be done to further develop and extend the role and work of the PMU as part of a strategy to promote continuous improvement across the education authority.

Overall, the steps taken by the authority to improve its management information system and reporting procedures had clear potential to further enhance support and challenge to schools and promote further continuous improvement to the benefit of pupils.

4.3 Review administrative provision at area level to provide consistency of effective practice and ensure Best Value.

Good progress had been made in reviewing administrative support at area level, but it was too early to judge its impact. The ECSS had reviewed provision in Area Education Offices within a wide-ranging Best Value review (BVR) on *Administration in an Integrated Education, Culture and Leisure Service*. The review clearly identified a number of factors which had contributed to variable standards of service across the areas. These included the inefficient use of accommodation and of human and financial resources, the duplication of administrative functions, and the requirement for staff to cover too broad a range of tasks.

The BVR made clear proposals to improve services to the public, improve efficiency and make best use of resources. They included replacing the current area offices for Education and Culture and Sport with a rationalised network of offices. The review also took good account of the need to integrate access to the public with Highland Council's development of one-stop service points.

The full implementation of proposals from the BVr clearly had the potential to increase Best Value, improve the consistency of service and to provide better access to stakeholders. The revised structure should also enable Area Managers to play more strategic roles in local decision-making and quality assurance, although their exact roles had yet to be defined.

4.4 Prepare and implement a comprehensive programme of Best Value Reviews covering major aspects of provision.

Overall, the education authority had made very good progress with this main point for action.

A three-year comprehensive programme of BV Reviews had effectively been incorporated into the ECSS's Development Plan, and was currently being implemented. Eight areas of the Service were planned to be reviewed by December 2004. The prioritisation of the service areas for review had a clear rationale, to ensure that Cultural and Sports Services were integrated within the Education Service, that their value to the community was maximised and that consistency of provision for all children requiring additional support was ensured. However, the BVr on *Support for Learning* had not met its proposed completion date of October 2002 and the timescale for reviews requires to be reassessed.

The principles of Best Value had been effectively integrated into remits of promoted staff and into the goals of the service. Three thorough BV reviews had been completed recently. These related to *Provision for Home to School Transport*, *Improving Administration in an Integrated ECSS* and *Support for the Curriculum*. Each BVr involved a number of consultation forums and working groups and produced clear outcomes for cost effective service improvement.

The *Home to School Transport* Review resulted in significant improvements to the safety of pupils by the introduction of seatbelts and the provision of new vehicles. It had also improved the punctuality of pupils arrival at school through the introduction of penalty clauses for contractors when transport arrived late. The re-tendering process had produced a significant saving. Further work was needed to take forward the decision to establish an Integrated Transport and Management Unit to oversee the on-going effective delivery of school transport.

The review on *Support for the Curriculum* was completed in May 2002. This resulted in creation of the QDT which was clearly focused on monitoring and evaluating the performance of schools. Seconded headteachers provided specialist quality input to supplement the team. The authority had recognised the importance of Gaelic and music within Highland culture by including specialists within these fields as members of the QDT. An innovative approach had been adopted to the provision of curriculum support. As part of a vision for a Highland Virtual School, the Virtual Library Service had been developed to provide curriculum packages, policy guidelines and opportunities for networking via the web-site. This strategy for curriculum support was already showing success and had considerable potential. Further consideration now needed to be given to maximising opportunities for professional networking, particularly for those members of staff who were working in isolated situations. The vision of the Virtual School had the potential to deliver improvements in this area.

4.5 Ensure all teaching and centrally-deployed staff benefit from a programme of staff development and review.

Very good progress had been made on this point for action, after a slow start.

A target had been set to involve all teaching staff in the process of staff review by June 2001. When this target had not been met further advice was issued to all headteachers to ensure that staff development and review of teaching staff was fully established in the management of schools. This was further reinforced in the course of subsequent quality assurance visits and through surveys to monitor progress. Almost all headteachers and teaching staff had taken part in the process of staff development and review within the last two years.

Centrally deployed staff had benefited from the Council's Corporate Professional Development Programme. All staff in first and second tier posts in the new ECSS had personal development plans and the programme was currently being extended to third tier postholders.

Staff development and review was being extended to all non-teaching staff in schools. A pilot programme had been conducted successfully in four areas across the authority, and a target had been set to include all non-teaching staff by June 2003. The authority was on course to meet this target.

Senior staff now needed to clarify aspects of the *Staff Development and Review Policy* for teaching staff, continue to emphasise the importance of the staff development and review cycle and monitor the implementation and impact of the policy.

In recent years, there had been particular budget pressures on provisions for Continued Professional Development. However, the authority had continued to provide a broad range of opportunities for staff to develop their knowledge and skills. Within the staff development programme there had been a shift in emphasis from subject specific training to more general training related to learning, teaching and management. Continued training opportunities had been provided for probationers, middle-managers and headteachers. A range of courses

had been provided on learning and teaching approaches, and specific training had been planned to support initiatives in 5-14 writing and science. Commendably, alternative innovative approaches to the delivery of curriculum support and development, particularly through the use of ICT, were being introduced. A headteacher had been seconded to develop learning and teaching through further alternative delivery approaches based on new technology and to provide additional support for staff development.

Procedures for Staff Development and Review and Continued Professional Development provided a very strong basis on which to update and develop the skills of all staff, to the eventual benefit of pupils and parents.

4.6 Develop a more comprehensive and integrated planning and budget cycle.

Overall, the education authority had made very good progress with this main point for action.

The ECSS now had a cyclical planning programme incorporated into the three-year development plan for the Service. It articulated with the school year planning cycle, as well as addressing the timescale for reporting on National Priorities. Service aims had recently been revised and published to reflect the scope and customer base of the new service. ECSS was therefore well placed to address local and national improvement priorities. The Service Plan, informed by biennial Consultation Forums, contained a useful audit section. This was followed by a clear and comprehensive set of improvement objectives aligned to specific measured outcomes.

The Council's three-year budgetary cycle coincided with the ECSS's planning cycle. Significant progress on budget planning and monitoring against service improvement objectives had been achieved through the introduction of rigorous financial procedures and practice

across all areas of the service. Each improvement objective was fully costed with clear budgetary links to the National Priorities Action Fund. Growth bids and cost pressures which required consideration for future budget planning were prioritised in accordance with priorities in the Service Plan.

Regular presentation of financial statements to Senior Managers and Elected Members had ensured increased accountability throughout the service. Budget monitoring was well-embedded into routine practice at operational and strategic levels. There had been a significant increase in support given to headteachers in managing their budgets and in improving their accountability procedures.

Overall, the steps taken by the authority had significantly enhanced procedures for planning for improvement.

4.7 Improve arrangements for property maintenance and asset management.

Overall, the education authority had made good progress with this main point for action.

Joint working between the Property and Architectural Service Project Team and ECSS had increased. Regular joint meetings provided opportunities to monitor progress on projects, develop policy guidance and agree proposals on revenue and capital programme expenditure. An audit of need for cyclical maintenance had been undertaken and prioritisation of projects mutually agreed. There was a need now to share this information more consistently across all Council areas and schools to explain the prioritisation of expenditure. Commendably, Property and Architectural Services and ECSS were preparing a booklet which clarified their respective roles in relationship to schools, cultural and sports facilities. The proposal to issue joint letters to schools on planned

maintenance and school improvement fund projects now needed to be implemented.

Several commendable developments had taken place towards the creation of an overall Asset Management Plan for the service. The Capital Plan was now appropriately based on school capacity requirements. The prioritisation of spending was focused on strategic themes such as Disability and Risk Assessment legislation rather than on uncoordinated projects.

In addition, the Council's first PPP project had been delivered successfully and preparations were underway for a second project as part of a 21st Century school improvement programme. A Facilities Management Strategy was at an early stage of development. Property and Architectural Services were in the process of establishing an Asset Management Strategy for school houses, which took account of the number of properties, their condition and the nature of their lease. ECSS had agreed a contract to remove and store hatted accommodation which could be reintroduced as necessary to respond to changing demands on school capacities.

The PPP project and revised arrangements for property maintenance had resulted in an improvement in facilities for staff and pupils. Further efforts however, were needed to develop a cohesive and over-arching Asset Strategy allied to the council's Asset Management Plans.

4.8 Review the Service Level Agreements for provision of pre-school education to improve communication and support for partner centres.

Very good progress had been made towards meeting this main point for action.

Pre-school education was provided to eligible three- and four-year-olds in 152 local authority nurseries and 106 partner centres. The rapid expansion of provision for

three-year-olds from around 36% in 2000 to 95% in 2002 had been planned and implemented very effectively. Staff in the Childcare and Early Education Team contributed significantly to the success of this substantial increase in provision.

Twenty-two of the partner centres were from the private sector and 84 were from the voluntary sector. Seven of the voluntary groups provided pre-school education in the medium of Gaelic. The umbrella organisations supporting these centres were Highland Pre-school Services (HPS) and Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Araich (CNSA). Service Level Agreements (SLA's) with HPS, CNSA and individual partner centres had been reviewed and were now clearer, more user-friendly and specified expectations of partner centres and the support provided by the Council. All SLA's were reviewed annually, but it was intended to move to three-year agreements when provision stabilised. Partnership work with HPS, CNSA and individual centres had strengthened as a result of the revised SLA's.

Although HPS and CNSA were important means of communication and support for partner centres, very good communication and support were provided to all centres by the Council. This ensured a high level of partnership, and more uniform and improved quality across all nurseries and pre-school centres.

Partner centres were required to prepare a plan for development in June each year. An exemplar was issued, and training on self-evaluation and planning for improvement had been provided to support centres in the planning process. Plans were reviewed and evaluated by a joint team of local authority and HPS staff, and written feedback was given.

Very good support had been provided to assist staff in recording and reporting on children's progress, and communicate this between centres and primary schools.

A comprehensive and helpful *Next Steps* document was used in all pre-school centres to record progress.

A comprehensive, well-planned and high quality Early Years Staff Development Programme was planned and delivered jointly with HPS. Courses were open to staff from all centres. Three levels of courses, Foundation courses, Basic courses and a Further Development programme, were tailored to meet the needs of all centre staff. Appropriate courses were provided to meet the needs of staff from the Gaelic medium centres.

There was a high level of inclusion of pupils with Special Educational Needs. Special training courses, including training on the preparation of Individual Education Plans, were provided to support staff. All staff had received clear guidance on the authority policy on Child Protection.

The authority was developing an innovative Nursery Cluster Co-ordinator Teacher Scheme. This had operated as a pilot scheme in 12 areas this session and plans were in place to extend it next year. Each teacher was linked to a cluster of education authority nurseries and partner centres. As well as providing a teacher input and support, this encouraged a network among staff in centres and schools to exchange information and share good practice. This scheme provided clearer professional support to all centres, enhanced communication and improved the quality of experience for children. A network of Early Education Development Officers was being set up to provide additional support to education authority nurseries.

The Early Education Quality Assurance Team was an integral part of the wider authority Quality Development Team. Members of the team included practising teachers, HPS staff and Early Education Development Officers. An annual programme of visits was carried out to a sample of local authority and partner centres. These

visits had generally been well received and had helped improve the quality in individual centres.

Communication with partners had been enhanced through a newsletter and packs of general information which accompanied their regular commissioning payments. A Childcare and Early Education Team newsletter was produced and included information on training and examples of good practice from centres across the authority.

Overall, there had been a rapid and well-managed expansion in pre-school provision, providing a more extensive and higher quality of service. Reviewed SLA's, and enhanced communication and support for partner centres had contributed significantly to improved provision for children, parents and carers. The authority needed to continue to review provision in relation to demographic trends.

5. Conclusion

Overall, considerable progress had been made to support improvement and add value to the work of the authority's schools. This improvement had taken place during a period of significant internal restructuring of the Council, as well as significant continuing national developments.

Approaches to quality assurance and data management had been strengthened. Systems for school review were more targeted and rigorous. Pre-school provision had expanded and the quality enhanced. Best Value reviews had resulted in a number of improvements to the services ECSS provided. Very good progress had been made in responding to the points for action in the HMIE inspection report. Since the publication of the report pupils' attainment had improved in some key areas, but in others it still required to be sustained and improved. Given the developing culture of continuous improvement

and the balance of support and challenge provided to its schools, the authority was very well-placed to respond to future challenges. There was clear evidence of a strengthening service and an education authority improving from an already strong base.

As a result of the overall considerable progress made by the authority, HMIE will make no further visits in connection with this inspection.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ian Gamble". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal dashed line.

Ian Gamble
HM Chief Inspector
Quality, Standards and Audit Division

May 2003

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from the address below or by telephoning 0131 244 0746. Copies are also available on our web site: www.hmie.gov.uk

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HM Inspectorate of Education
Quality, Standards and Audit Division
1-B95
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

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The Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Professor Alice Brown
The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
23 Walker Street
Edinburgh
EH3 7HX

Telephone number: 0870 011 5378
e-mail: enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk

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HM Inspectorate of Education

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