



Validated self-evaluation



South Lanarkshire Council
8 July 2011

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http://www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk/info/695/council_information_performance_and_statistics

1. Validated self-evaluation in South Lanarkshire Council

Information about validated self-evaluation can be found by following this link:

[The aims, nature and scope of validated self-evaluation](#)

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) joined Education Resources in South Lanarkshire Council to carry out the validated self-evaluation (VSE) as part of the Council's ongoing self-evaluation. As a regular part of HMIE's work with Education Resources, the District Inspector (DI) had worked closely with staff on an ongoing basis to support and challenge them to improve and in preparation for the VSE. This report includes HMIE's assessment of the rigour of South Lanarkshire's self-evaluation and includes a summary of the agreed key strengths and also what the Council plans to do to continue to improve. The VSE was planned as part of Education Resources' ongoing self-evaluation and improvement planning process which is focused on improving outcomes for learners¹, families and communities.

In discussion with HMIE, senior managers identified priority areas of Education Resources' work for the focused, in-depth analysis enabled by the VSE. These were areas which identified strengths in outcomes for learners and families, and how these might be improved further. The ongoing implementation of Curriculum for Excellence presented an opportunity to consider approaches to learner transitions. Improving approaches to quality assurance within a context of diminishing resources was a further key focus area. Attainment trends highlighted the need to look more closely at the performance of lower-attaining pupils, and other factors associated with their learning and achievement. The implementation of the *Parents as Partners Strategy* prompted a further consideration of how Education Resources could continue to develop greater engagement with stakeholders.

As a result, the following themed groups were established for the four key areas of the VSE.

1. Transitions.
2. Closing the Gap.
3. Stakeholder Engagement.
4. Quality Assurance.

¹ The term 'learners' includes children, young people, and adult learners.

Each theme group carried out a commendably wide range of activities, but with a major focus on the work of learning communities². In South Lanarkshire, a learning community consists of a secondary school with its associated primary schools, pre-school centres and partner agencies.

During the first stages of the VSE, HM Inspectors (HMI) worked with the theme groups to support group members in a range of self-evaluation activities. This included analysing available data and information, interviewing a wide range of stakeholders and partners, and examining practice in other council areas. Inspectors supported the groups and also ensured that the work was both rigorous and robust. They also took part in professional dialogue and modelled effective questioning in focus groups. This allowed group members to develop their skills in probing and examining evidence further through discussion. Inspectors encouraged and supported all group members in their role in the groups to ensure that everyone played an active role in gathering and analysing high quality evidence. The presence of HMI on theme groups ensured, and contributed to, the rigour of the work, and also gave a wider, external, perspective on practice.

Following the first full VSE week, the senior management team and the theme group chairs met with HMI to take stock of the initial findings of the VSE. This meeting considered and tested the findings of the VSE so far, the learning that had taken place and the rigour and robustness of the process. This allowed senior managers and HMI to plan the next stage in response to the needs of the Council, in ways which would have greatest benefit. During the next stage, a small group of HMI worked with task group chairs, members of staff who had not been involved in the VSE to date as 'critical friends', and senior managers, to carry out additional evaluative activities and to test some of the findings more fully. Inspectors also worked with staff to further refine their evaluative statements.

South Lanarkshire Council's full report on the findings of the VSE can be found here

http://www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk/info/695/council_information_performance_and_statistics

² The area-based structure of learning communities is very well established. The 17 learning communities enable early years centres, primary and secondary schools and specialist provision to work closely together and with partner agencies. They provide a very effective model for delivering a coherent continuum of educational provision for children and young people from birth until 18 years of age, with a focus on attainment, achievement and support for all children and young people.

2. HMIE's assessment of the quality of self-evaluation in South Lanarkshire Council

The approach and resulting improvement planning priorities used by South Lanarkshire Education Resources are comprehensive and are supported by a robust system of performance monitoring, including analysing information from external scrutiny. There is effective joint working between elected members and officers, which ensures very strong coherence between the Council's strategic goals and its improvement priorities.

Throughout the VSE, senior managers of Education Resources, group chairs and team members demonstrated enthusiasm, motivation, very high quality team working and a very high degree of openness and frankness. The wide range of members involved showed a clear commitment to using the VSE as a further means to support the improvement of outcomes for learners and families in South Lanarkshire.

Senior managers set out high expectations for all team members including the need to work with HMIE colleagues as equal partners in theme groups. All involved in the VSE were expected to demonstrate rigour and challenge in their work, such as in questioning each other, and stakeholders, to check that evidence was widely-gathered and robust. Each chairperson demonstrated clear and imaginative leadership which supported team members and guided their scrutiny of the evidence, their synthesis and their judgements. For example, the theme group on 'Closing the Gap' began by identifying where there were gaps in young people's experiences, attainment and achievements, and what they might miss out on in their later lives. This led to their identifying strengths in current approaches to supporting these young people, and weaknesses in the consistency of those approaches across the authority. Overall, theme group chairs ensured that groups gave due attention to the outcomes for those learners who had significant potential barriers to participation and success.

From the evidence of this process and ongoing challenge and support, HMIE are confident that the existing quality of self-evaluation in South Lanarkshire's Education Resources is very strong overall, though not yet consistent across establishments and services. The VSE process further improved this high quality, and the capacity to carry out future self-evaluation. It did this by directly involving a very wide range of partners, including parents and social workers, on theme groups. This helped to ensure that a very broad range of evidence was gathered, including direct observation of activities such as 'The Street', and discussion with stakeholders, such as in joint meetings of children and parents in school.

What strengths has the validated self-evaluation identified?

South Lanarkshire Council and HMIE jointly identified the following high-level strengths.

- Very clear vision and strong leadership demonstrated by councillors, the executive director, the education management team, and senior managers

resulting in positive outcomes for learners, families and communities in South Lanarkshire. Positive outcomes include high quality learning experiences, high and improving levels of attainment and achievement at all stages, an improved school estate, and high proportions of positive and sustained destinations for school leavers.

- Education Resources' rigorous self-evaluation and robust improvement planning that has ensured continuous improvement in a time of reductions in resources.
- Very effective partnership working within Education Resources, for example, with community learning, and services such as educational psychology, which delivers support and is leading to very positive outcomes for children, young people and families.
- Impact of learning communities in delivering effective integrated provision for children and young people.
- Innovative and successful approaches in engaging with groups of stakeholders and involving them in improving outcomes for all. These include families who do not readily become involved with education, and young people who have significant barriers to achievement arising from personal circumstances.

What is the Council's capacity for improvement?

South Lanarkshire Council has a long track record of delivering high quality education services and of working to continuously improve outcomes for children, young people, adult learners, families and communities. This work has confirmed that it has robust processes in place for evaluating its work across establishments and services. Approaches for engaging with stakeholders and making use of rich sources of evidence and data are strong and continue to improve.

Senior managers and staff have developed further their understanding of how VSE approaches could be used to support the ongoing work of Education Resources to continue to improve its work. Through its strong leadership and a track record of sound, strategic planning, Education Resources is in a very good position to continue to improve in a time of considerable financial constraint.

As a result of our engagement with South Lanarkshire Council through the VSE and also the work of the DI, we are confident that the Council has capacity to continue to improve.

3. What does the Council plan to do next?

As a result of the work undertaken within the VSE process, South Lanarkshire Council and HMIE have agreed the following areas for further improvement. These reflect Education Resources' continuing commitment to improving outcomes for learners and families.

In order to deliver the Council's priorities for improvement, Education Resources will continue to:

- build on the learning community model as the key mechanism in providing consistently high quality, integrated working across establishments and services;
- identify and share best practice, for example, in supporting vulnerable young people, and ensure that establishments, learning communities and services are more consistent in using that best practice to support improvement; and
- ensure that the culture, approaches and impact of self-evaluation for improvement within all establishments and services are more consistent.

Further details of the areas identified for improvement are given in the attached report prepared by South Lanarkshire Council as part of the VSE process. Details of case studies which illustrate developing, good and interesting practice are also available from

http://www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk/info/695/council_information_performance_and_statistics

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South Lanarkshire Council

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How can you contact us?

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of validated self-evaluation you should write to Dr Gill Robinson, HM Chief Inspector, at HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA. Alternatively, if your query is related to this report, you may also write to Mr Archibald Strang, Chief Executive, South Lanarkshire Council, Almada Street, Hamilton, ML3 0AA.