Inverclyde council

Report To:	Education and Communities Committee	**Date:**	**12 March 2019**
Report By:	Corporate Director Education, Communities & Organisational Development	**Report No:**	**EDUCOM/20/19/RB**
Contact Officer:	Ruth Binks	**Contact No:**	**01475 712748**
Subject:	**Overview of ongoing work on school empowerment and national thematic inspections**		

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is to ask the Committee to note the national thematic inspections undertaken by Education Scotland and to update members as to ongoing work towards an empowered system through the Headteachers' Charter for School Empowerment.

2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 The Education Governance Next Steps document was published in 2017 and set out the vision for the future of educational governance in Scotland. Whilst the Scottish Government stopped short of legislation, an agreement was reached to take forward education reform.

2.2 Education Scotland's programme for inspections includes thematic reviews on mathematics and also on readiness for empowerment. The empowerment reviews will cover readiness for empowerment, curriculum leadership and parent and pupil participation. Inverclyde has been, and will be, involved in the national samples for inspection. The first publication on readiness for empowerment was published in December 2018.

2.3 In addition to scrutiny work, national working groups have been established to provide guidance on school empowerment through the Headteachers' Charter and for fairer funding. The first guidance was published in February 2019.

2.4 Whilst headteachers in Inverclyde have very positive working relationships and work in a very collegiate and collaborate way, schools and support officers will explore ways to ensure that all recent guidance builds on and improves the strong practice already in place.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The Committee is asked to note Inverclyde's contribution to the national thematic inspections and to note emerging guidance on school empowerment.

Ruth Binks
Corporate Director
Education, Communities & Organisational Development

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 The Education Governance Next Steps document was published in 2017 and set out the vision for the future of educational governance in Scotland. After extensive consultation Local government representative organisations' responses to the consultation indicated broad agreement with the overall aims and objectives of the proposed direction of travel. However, concerns were expressed about whether legislation was required to deliver on the agreed aims. The consultation responses from COSLA, SOLACE and ADES indicated a desire to work with the Scottish Government to ensure that shared aims can be achieved within a framework that supports both improvement in Scottish education and wider integrated children's services.

4.2 A joint agreement was reached in June 2018 as to Educational reform. The agreement was based on the following key principles:

- Effective system-wide improvement requires strong leadership, collaborative working and clarity of purpose at all layers of the system – school, local, regional and national.

- Headteachers are the leaders of learning and teaching in their school. They are senior officers of the local authority and have operational responsibility for the service they provide, therefore the majority of decisions should be made at school level.

- Schools are empowered to make the decisions that most affect their children and young people's outcomes, while being part of a collaborative learning community, the Local Authority and working with others.

- Empowered schools require both strong and distributive leadership, working in partnership with pupils, parents, staff and the wider community.

- The principle of headteacher empowerment will be applied consistently across Scotland

- Local Authorities' duty to provide education for children and young people means that they must be able to intervene in decisions made by headteachers where statutory, financial, or contractual obligations would be breached.

- Local Authorities and their headteachers should have a mutually respectful and supportive relationship, with clear processes in place to minimise the need for such intervention.

- Decisions by all parties should reflect mutually supportive and respectful relationships.

4.3 The Bill also aimed to establish a Headteachers' Charter that requires authorities to empower headteachers in the areas of curriculum, improvement, staffing and funding.

4.4 In August 2018, Education Scotland published for the first time an overview of all inspection activity. As well as ongoing sector inspections and the functions of local authorities, the inspection programme includes National Thematic Inspections on maths and readiness for school empowerment. The full overview of inspection activity is attached as Appendix 1.

4.5 In addition to scrutiny work, a School Empowerment Working Group was formed to issue guidance and support materials. The first documents were published on 07 February 2019 and are Empowering School Leaders Guidance (Appendix 2) which considers the contribution of school leaders in an empowered system and The Headteachers' Charter for School Empowerment (Appendix 3) which considers the contribution of headteachers in an empowered system.

A Fairer Funding working group has also been established to look at authority arrangements for Devolved School Management. The group has consulted with local authorities and will produce guidance on aspects of school funding.

5.0 CURRENT POSITION

5.1 Education Scotland will carry out three national thematic inspections which focus on school empowerment in academic year 2018/19. Each inspection will focus on a different aspect of school empowerment:

Readiness for empowerment. Findings were published in December 2018.
Curriculum leadership. Findings to be published in March 2019.
Parent and pupil participation. Findings to be published in June 2019.

In addition to the thematic inspections on empowerment, Education Scotland will also undertake a thematic inspection of mathematics across a sample of schools and Early Years establishments.

5.2 Inverclyde has participated, and will participate, in the thematic inspections. Education Scotland conducted a one day visit to Inverclyde in connection with the Readiness for Empowerment Review. They met with central officers as well as representatives from schools. Whilst individual feedback is not given to authorities, the visit contributed to the national review which was published in December 2018 and is attached as Appendix 4.

5.3 Clydeview Academy will be visited as part of the sample of schools for mathematics and St Joseph's Primary School will be visited for curriculum leadership. The sample visits last for one day.

5.4 The ongoing work and guidance on school empowerment and fairer funding will impact the work of Inverclyde Education Services over the coming months and years. Whilst headteachers in Inverclyde have very positive working relationships and work in a very collegiate and collaborate way, we will explore ways to ensure that all recent guidance builds on and improves the strong practice already in place. This work will be undertaken through the Corporate Directorate Improvement Plan and the Education Authority Improvement Plan.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

Finance

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report

Financial Implications:

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report £000	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact £000	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

Legal

6.2 There are no legal issues arising from this report

Human Resources

6.3 N/A.

Equalities

6.4 Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

☐ Yes   See attached appendix

☒ No   This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Repopulation

6.5 N/A

7.0 CONSULTATIONS

7.1 N/A

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Inverclyde will continue to engage with the school empowerment agenda locally and nationally, and through the West Partnership Regional Improvement Collaborative.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 N/A

Annual Programme of Inspection Activity

At Education Scotland we believe that inspection is a key element in supporting and driving improvement in education. Inspection gives assurance that a school or service is providing the high-quality education expected for Scotland's learners; it supports improvement through professional discussion and sharing good practice; and it informs national policy on education.

As a public sector organisation, we are committed to openness and transparency and continually review how we can provide access to accurate and helpful information about our inspection and review programme.

Each year the Chief Inspector agrees the scale and priorities of our inspection and review programme in agreement with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

We are now publishing, for the first time, our intended programme of inspection and review activity across all sectors for the forthcoming academic year (from August 2018-July 2019).

Programme of Inspection Activity (August 2018-July 2019)

	Planned Number of Inspections
Early learning and childcare settings, including nursery classes in schools	Education Scotland will undertake at least 140 inspections in this sector. Work is currently underway to develop a shared inspection framework with the Care Inspectorate. Our annual programme of inspection will be updated to reflect the new arrangements in due course.
Schools	Education Scotland will undertake 250 inspections across the school sector. This will include a sample of 120 inspections which will focus on the following quality indicators: 1.3 Leadership of Change 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement In these inspections we will also gather evidence on school empowerment through the Leadership of Change quality improvement indicator.
Further inspections	We currently anticipate carrying out 50 further inspections of schools where we have identified important weaknesses in the quality of education.
Community learning and development services	We will inspect eight community learning and development services and carry out a further inspection of one community and learning service.
Colleges	The quality assurance arrangements for colleges are agreed annually between Education Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council. These arrangements are built on continuous engagement with all 27 colleges across 13 regions, leading to the production by each college of an

	Evaluative Report and an associated Enhancement Plan for endorsement by Education Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council. These will be published in February 2019.
Private colleges and English language schools	Inspections of private colleges and English language schools are determined by the requirements of UK Visa and Immigration to meet the requirements for educational oversight for Tier 4 sponsor status. Of the eight colleges currently supported by Education Scotland, two will be inspected during 2018-19 with the remaining six being in the cycle for annual engagement. This is dependent on colleges requesting inspection to retain Tier 4 status.
Career information, advice and guidance services	We inspect the quality of careers information and guidance services delivered by Skills Development Scotland across five council areas, (The Moray Council, East Renfrewshire Council, Angus Council, West Lothian Council, and West Dunbartonshire Council). We will also carry out three follow up inspections (Midlothian Council, South Lanarkshire Council, Dundee City Council).
Modern Apprentice training	We will conduct national thematic inspection for Modern Apprentice in Hospitality. A further national thematic inspection for Modern Apprentice sector will be identified through the year.
Prison education	We will join three inspections at request of HM Inspectorate of Prisons.
Education functions of local authorities	We will work in partnership with Audit Scotland, to complete a programme of inspections to evaluate the progress made by local authorities in improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. These inspections focus on the nine local authorities who are designated as challenge authorities within the Scottish Attainment Challenge. We will carry out inspections of Glasgow City Council, East Ayrshire Council and Renfrewshire Council.
	We will carry out a national thematic inspection across of a sample of early learning and childcare settings and schools which focuses on mathematics.
National thematic inspections	Education Scotland will carry out three national thematic inspections which focus on school empowerment in academic year 2018/19. Each inspection will focus on a different aspect of school empowerment:

1. Readiness for empowerment. We will publish our findings in December 2018
2. Curriculum leadership. We will publish our findings in March 2019
3. Parent and pupil participation. We will publish our findings in June 2019

The findings from these thematic inspections will be used to identify what is working well and aspects which need to improve. As part of the inspections HM Inspectors will visit

a sample of schools and have discussions with a range of stakeholders.

We are currently undertaking discussions about the national thematic inspections as part of the steering group for the Joint Agreement and more information will be provided in due course.

We may also carry out further national inspections as identified by the Chief Inspector or at the request of the Cabinet Secretary for Education.

Over and above our planned programme of inspections we may also carry out inspection activity in response to an analysis of risk.

AGREED DRAFT

EMPOWERING SCHOOL LEADERS

Introduction

Scotland has started a collective endeavour to build an empowered, connected, self-improving education system to achieve excellence and equity for all children and young people as set out in the National Improvement Framework (NIF).

School leadership is a key driver for improvement. Evidence from the OECD and elsewhere demonstrates that leaders, at all levels, who are empowered and collaborative, and who empower others, are well placed to ensure the highest quality of learning and teaching.

In an empowered school-led system, school leaders should be part of the collective leadership of the system, as well as leaders within their own organisation. The leadership skills required include: working across organisational boundaries; building shared values and trust; drawing on a wide range of perspectives and resources across systems to design local solutions; and reflecting local context, communities and aspirations.

Effective school leaders support cultures that welcome and foster teacher agency, supporting and enabling collaborative professionalism, including teacher-led professional learning.

As school leaders build upon and extend the foundations already in place, our system will move towards the shared ambition of excellence and equity for all Scotland's children and young people.

Principles

The following principles support the culture of empowering school leaders.

School leaders should:

- Be adaptive and creative in their approach to leading learning and teaching and developing learner pathways that meet the needs of all learners.

- Be collaborative and collegiate in their approach, encouraging and seeking views from across the learning community – from parents, children and young people, teachers and support staff, partners, other schools and the Local Authority.

- Be active partners in multi-agency working to get it right for every child.

- Support, encourage and facilitate children and young people's participation in decisions about their own learning and the life of the learning community.

- Seek to develop trusting relationships with parents and carers and help to foster the home learning environment.

- Be lifelong learners, committed to improving their practice by engaging in professional learning, enquiring collaboratively, engaging in and with research and using evidence-informed practice.

- Make an active and valued contribution to local, regional and national education policy.

The wider education system – including the Scottish Government and Local Authorities – should provide school leaders with the necessary freedom and support to embed these principles in their practice.

AGREED DRAFT

A HEADTEACHERS' CHARTER FOR SCHOOL EMPOWERMENT

Introduction

An empowered system is built on mutual trust, cooperation and highly effective communication. In an empowered system headteachers and Local Authorities are partners, each contributing and supporting each other and respecting the different role each plays.

The role of headteacher is recognised as a distinct leadership position in the General Teaching Council for Scotland's Professional Standards and in national conditions of service. As senior officers of the Local Authority, responsible for the leadership and management of the service provided to children, young people and their families, headteachers are accountable to both their employer and to their learning community for the leadership and management of education within their setting.

The Local Authority has statutory responsibility for the provision and improvement of education in the area. This includes contractual and financial obligations that interact with, and can be dependent upon, decisions made at school level. The Local Authority can intervene in a school-level decision if a statutory, contractual or financial obligation would be breached. Clear processes and mutually respectful and supportive relationships should be in place to minimise the need for such intervention.

In an empowered system Local Authorities add value by enabling key decisions to be made by those who are closest to the educational experience of children and young people, and who best understand the particular context of the learning community. The headteacher is responsible for making such decisions in partnership with their learning community – staff, learners, parents and other partners.

In all localities headteachers and Local Authorities should work in partnership with children, young people and their families to take decisions which reflect the local context. Mutually supportive and respectful relationships should be in place and maintained in order to maximise effective collaboration. Headteachers should lead collaborative, evidence-based decision-making while recognising that they are an integral part of a wider education and children's services system and open to constructive support and challenge by the Local Authority and their colleagues.

In an empowered system, headteachers should lead learning communities to determine the most appropriate approach in the following key areas:

In relation to **leading learning and teaching**, headteachers should:

- Lead collaborative work to co-design and develop the curriculum and learner pathways, including transitions, which best meet the needs of all children and young people. This should take account of the national framework for Scotland's curriculum along with the needs of local context, as agreed between schools and the Local Authority.

- Empower staff to continually improve practice, encouraging professional dialogue, supporting career-long professional learning and collaborative enquiry, and the use of research and evidence-informed practice. Headteachers should model a commitment to lifelong learning through their own practice.

- Lead change and improvement, making decisions in partnership with their learning community about the improvement priorities and plan for their school, reflecting and informing the local improvement plan and the National Improvement Framework.

In relation to **empowering the learning community**, headteachers should:

- Be collaborative and collegiate, enabling staff to lead and co-creating a supportive and empowered culture.

- Work collaboratively with their Parent Council and wider parent forum, encouraging and supporting parents to be involved in the life of the school and in decision-making.

- Support and encourage children and young people to participate in decisions about their own learning and the life of the learning community.

- Promote collaboration for improvement, seeking and building relationships with other schools and partners in order to improve outcomes.

- Be active partners in multi-agency working to get it right for every child and family, working with the Local Authority and other services.

- Champion high quality professional learning for all staff, including supporting students and probationers, and lead by example.

- Actively participate in the wider corporate work of the Local Authority, consistent with their role as leaders of learning and contribute to the Regional Improvement Collaborative – accessing support and working collaboratively to lead improvement.

In relation to **making best use of the school's resources**, headteachers should:

- Manage a delegated budget in a fair, equitable and transparent way, supported by the Local Authority and a fair, transparent and equitable local Devolved School Management Scheme.

- Deploy the school's budget in accordance with best value principles and Local Authority procurement arrangements, with appropriate support and guidance from their Local Authority.

- Play an active role in designing and reviewing recruitment and staffing approaches, both for their own school/s and for the wider Authority.

- Be empowered to design a staffing structure which best supports the school's curriculum and leadership requirements, working within their delegated staffing budget and supported by their Local Authority and SNCT/LNCT agreements and guidance.

- Be integral to the appointment of staff in accordance with the best interests of children and young people and work in partnership with the Local Authority to ensure good practice in recruitment and appointment, in line with SNCT/LNCT agreements and guidance.

- Work in partnership with the Local Authority, and within clearly defined roles, responsibilities and accountabilities, to ensure a highly professional school team is built and sustained to meet the needs of the learning community.

Thematic Inspection of Readiness for Empowerment

December 2018

Contents

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 takes a further step forward with publication of this report.

Part of Education Scotland's role is to carry out three national thematic inspections that will gather evidence on school empowerment. Each thematic inspection will be looking at different themes: readiness for empowerment; curriculum leadership; and parent and pupil participation.

This report draws together the findings from the first of thematic inspection Readiness for Empowerment that took place in the Autumn term 2018.

I am encouraged that the evidence gathered by HM Inspectors shows the positive steps already being taken on the journey towards empowerment and the ways in which different local authorities have embraced the principles set out in the Joint Agreement.

It is evident that a high level of professional commitment to collaboration and co-production exists across Scottish education in order to improve outcomes for children and young people.

This is exemplified by the many strengths highlighted in this report along with examples of practice and comments from leaders and practitioners about the positive impact that empowerment can bring.

Our findings also show clearly that, as expected, there is still more to be done to realise our collective ambition of an empowered, collaborative system. As we move along our journey of empowerment there is a careful balance to be struck between providing the right amount of governance and accountability while at the same time allowing leaders and practitioners flexibility and autonomy to meet their pupils' needs.

Care also needs to be taken to avoid creating unnecessary bureaucracy which draws leaders and practitioners away from focusing on decisions which will have the greatest impact on delivering consistently high-quality learning.

Additionally, we need to ensure school leadership is released to focus on learning – and that other system changes do not detract from this central aim.

I hope national partners, local authorities and schools can benefit from our findings and collectively can use them to support their efforts.

The two remaining national thematic reviews will be published in 2019 and will add to the evidence base and progress being made to ensure an empowered education system.

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 and 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 and 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 first of these thematic inspections on Readiness for Empowerment.

Scope of the Readiness for Empowerment thematic inspection

Over the period September to November 2018, Education Scotland visited all 32 local authorities. During their visits, the Education Scotland teams met with focus groups, including local authority staff, groups of headteachers from primary, secondary and special schools, groups of promoted and unpromoted teachers, professional associations and other stakeholders proposed by the local authority and looked at relevant documentation.

Evidence was gathered for each of the following areas:

1. **Improvement:** How well do local authorities empower headteachers and schools to lead improvement in order to close the poverty-related attainment gap through school improvement planning in collaboration with their school community?

2. **Curriculum:** How well do local authorities empower headteachers and schools to design their local curriculum in line with Curriculum for Excellence and in collaboration with their school community?

3. **Staffing:** How well do local authorities provide headteachers with flexibility to make decisions about staffing and leadership structures in their schools?

4. **Funding:** How well do local authorities empower headteachers to decide how funding allocated to their schools for the delivery of school education is spent?

Local authorities visited were asked to complete a self-evaluation of their readiness for empowerment and to provide evidence against each of the four 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 four headings above. In each section an 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

Number (approx.)	Participants
300	**Local authority – central staff**
200	**Primary headteachers**
170	**Secondary headteachers**
180	**Primary teachers**
180	**Secondary teachers**
130	**Professional associations representatives**
160	**Stakeholders**
1,320	**Total**

Thematic inspection findings

1. Improvement: How well do local authorities empower headteachers and schools to lead improvement in order to close the poverty-related attainment gap through school improvement planning in collaboration with their school community?

While at different stages, almost all local authorities are committed to developing an empowered education system with the aim of improving outcomes for learners, reducing inequalities and closing the attainment gap. Local authority staff provide flexible structures and support to build capacity and enable empowerment of schools in relation to improvement. These include promoting and supporting collaboration, professional learning, leadership development, and supporting evidence-based self-evaluation for improvement. This is allowing headteachers to increasingly take more responsibility and ownership and to be accountable for their actions in the context of their own schools. It would now be helpful to support everyone in the system to develop a shared understanding of what empowerment means for them and the potential benefits for learners.

Key messages

- Local authorities provide flexible structures of guidance, ways of working and support to build capacity and enable empowerment of schools. As a result, headteachers have the autonomy, freedom and responsibility to lead improvement in their own schools. They value the guidance, support and challenge from local authority staff.

- Further work is required to more consistently develop a culture of collective decision-making between local authority staff and headteachers to further empower headteachers as collective leaders.

- Improvement planning processes are now more streamlined than previously and the balance between national and local priorities and those identified from individual school's self-evaluation evidence is better.

- Professional learning, leadership development and access to an increasing range of qualitative and quantitative data are enabling empowerment of headteachers and staff to bring about improvement in their schools.

- Collaboration within and across schools is an increasing feature of practice across local authorities. Local authorities and schools need to build on this positive work. This will help to ensure those involved have a clear understanding of the purpose and focus and are able to demonstrate improvements in learning, teaching, and outcomes for learners as a result of their collaboration.

Responsibility within flexible frameworks of guidance, ways of working and support

Headteachers[1] in most local authorities have the responsibility and freedom to lead improvement in their own schools. Local authorities provide a range of flexible frameworks and guidance to support improvement planning processes. Headteachers in the majority of local authorities value the guidance, support and challenge from the central team in empowering them to lead improvement. In those authorities where headteachers regard themselves as collective leaders within a collegiate partnership with the local authority, support and challenge from their peers gives them the confidence to take forward changes in their own schools.

A culture of collaborative decision-making between authority staff and headteachers is a key enabler for schools to be empowered to influence direction and drive improvement in their local context. This degree of empowerment for headteachers needs to be further developed more consistently across local authorities.

Taking account of local and National Improvement Framework priorities and reducing unnecessary bureaucracy

All local authorities have been developing improvement planning to streamline their approaches. Headteachers and teachers in almost all local authorities agree that this has resulted in the processes being more manageable and has reduced unnecessary bureaucracy.

Headteachers in most local authorities agree that the balance between national and local priorities alongside those identified by their own school's self-evaluation are appropriate and well-judged. Teachers in the majority of local authorities feel empowered to lead improvements in their schools supported by frameworks of guidance and clear expectations. Headteachers and teachers in a few local authorities identified barriers to empowerment in leading improvement in schools related to workload and conflicting advice from national and local bodies. There is scope to involve teachers and professional associations further in discussions about what empowerment means and the potential benefits for learners.

Professional learning and leadership development to enable school improvement

In most local authorities, a range of school level, local and national professional learning opportunities is supporting headteachers and teachers in driving forward improvements in their schools. Common areas of focus include improvement methodologies, learning and teaching, self-evaluation, use of data to support improvement and understanding the poverty-related attainment gap. Developing leadership capacity at all levels to take forward improvements is a key focus in most local authorities. This includes staff accessing national and local leadership development programmes as well as taking on leadership roles such as leaders of learning, literacy, numeracy and STEM champions within and across schools. As a result, headteachers and teachers in most local authorities report that they are gaining confidence, and increasingly motivated to take forward improvements.

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

Using a range of data and evidence to determine school priorities

Most local authorities have an increasing focus on supporting schools in using a range of data and evidence. This is helping them determine key priorities for improvement which focus on the needs of learners and reducing inequalities of outcomes. Headteachers and teachers agree that data provided by their local authority is supporting them well in their school self-evaluation. They welcome the accessible presentation of data and feel that this supports them in developing a shared understanding of priorities within their school communities. Teachers, especially primary teachers, are becoming more confident in analysing data. They report that this helps them understand better the attainment gaps in their schools and choose suitable interventions to support improving attainment.

Collaboration across the school community to support improvement

Staff in almost all local authorities have a range of opportunities to collaborate within and across schools through networks, working groups, school improvement partnerships, clusters and families of schools. These allow staff to share practice, knowledge, skills, experience and evidence of what works within their schools' contexts to varying effect. In around a third of local authorities, this is leading to agreeing common local priorities. Around a quarter of local authorities identified that developing collegiate professional enquiry approaches is supporting schools in working together in solution-oriented ways to lead improvements. This is helping ensure that those involved have a shared commitment to improvement priorities identified, building on a research evidence base and focusing on bringing about changes in learning and teaching. Staff in a few local authorities identified that constraints of time and workload can limit the impact of collaboration and access to opportunities for professional learning. Further work is required to ensure that those involved in collaboration have a shared understanding of the purpose and focus and are able to demonstrate the impact on improving learning and teaching and outcomes for learners as a result of their collaboration.

Using qualitative and quantitative measures of success to monitor and evaluate progress

Local authorities and schools are continuing to develop approaches to self-evaluation for improvement and using an increasing range of qualitative and quantitative data to monitor and evaluate progress. This includes performance data, evidence from evaluation of quality indicators and stakeholders' views. Increasing opportunities for a range of stakeholders, including learners, parents, partners and the wider community, to participate and engage in improvement planning is a key priority for schools in the majority of local authorities. In around a quarter of local authorities, staff are developing how they use evidence from research to inform measures of success and to evaluate the impact of their work. In the majority of local authorities, staff are focusing more on evidencing impact and improving outcomes for learners. Teachers in the majority of local authorities feel they have the responsibility and ownership of improvement priorities in their own school. They are clear that they need to provide a range of evidence of improvements related to improving attainment and outcomes for learners. Further work is required to improve the focus on the use of a range of evidence to evaluate the progress in bringing about improvements.

Headteachers' views on improvement

'The local and national agendas are more dovetailed. Everything fits better now. We have freedom to apply our own strategies within our own schools.'

'It is refreshing to set out our own priorities and no-one will meddle with our plan. I am trusted to know what is right for my school.'

'There is real momentum with leadership in this local authority. We can talk from personal experience about how the leadership programme has helped us grow as system leaders. Its main impact is on pedagogy.'

'We have a flexible framework and structure to lean on in driving forward improvement; empowerment within a structure.'

'We have both accountability and autonomy within a supportive structure.'

'We are very lucky. The Director's vision is very strong in the empowerment agenda. We don't have to ask permission, but we have the framework of support from the authority. The authority has this just right.'

'Our collaboratives are very empowering. We do focused collaborative reviews of each other's schools. This is great professional learning.'

'The focus, rigour and aspiration are super. The passion is there because it is relevant to our school.'

Teachers' views on improvement

'Access to the university modules to support self-evaluation, learning and teaching has been good. As a result, we have used our data to highlight what is making the biggest impact and what are our areas of concern.'

'As practitioners we are shaping how leadership and empowerment are being developed across the authority. We are not constrained but supported.'

'Empowerment means being able to take decisions that are right for your school and community whilst having support, a team that has your back.'

'It feels good to be able to suggest ideas that are right for your pupils. I know as long as I can back up my idea I'll be supported to try it out.'

'Our plan comes from the bottom up. Our own department priorities and teachers' professional learning needs to feed into the faculty plan and the overall strategic plan. That way we can take forward key projects.'

'There are many opportunities for young people to be empowered and lead change. There are clear strategies in our improvement plans. Pupil voice is really important in our school.'

'Self-evaluation is planned much better and this is helping the improvement plan. Strategic priorities are more consistent but the tasks can change.'

'As a result of professional learning, empowered school assistants deliver professional learning on effective interventions to other schools. Now they have created their own network.'

Illustrations of practice related to improvement

The local authority actively encourages and facilitates open dialogue about the philosophy of empowerment. The central team believe their role as an education authority is to bring about strategic purpose and direction. They demonstrate that empowerment underpins their work. An empowering common moral purpose that exists across education services is fundamental to the values base that permeates their schools. The local authority believes this enabler is guiding officers, headteachers and schools to take appropriate actions that will lead to greater excellence and equity.

The range and quality of professional learning and the highly-valued leadership programmes provided by the authority are empowering staff at all levels. Staff have benefited from professional learning which they report has made a positive impact on children and young people. Of particular note is the 'Aspiring Principal Teacher' programme which has empowered teachers to take time to focus on the craft of teaching and learning and to lead improvement in their schools. The 'Step Back' headteacher programme has further developed leadership skills and skills in coaching to support their peers. This approach is continued through the headteacher leadership and professional learning days to further support knowledge and understanding of evidenced-based approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

The local authority has a very wide range of data available to evaluate its work and is interrogating this in increasingly sophisticated and rigorous ways. It is presenting attainment and contextual data to schools in ever more accessible ways. Annual data packs are used by headteachers and senior managers as starting points to identify vulnerable groups and to deploy support and strategies accordingly. Data analysis is supported by school data coaches and authority workshops.

Thematic inspection findings

2. Curriculum: How well do local authorities empower headteachers and schools to design their local curriculum in line with Curriculum for Excellence and in collaboration with their school community?

Headteachers and schools are embracing empowerment to design and deliver a curriculum which meets their own school's local context. They are supported by a range of policies, guidance, curriculum frameworks and shared resources. The full benefits of this empowerment have yet to be realised in practice. Improving the curriculum is a work in progress with developing partnerships being key to improving the curriculum offer. There is now a need to further enable schools and teachers to take the initiative and be creative and innovative in developing and delivering a curriculum to meet local needs. The school community needs to be more actively engaged in designing the local curriculum and in its evaluation.

Key messages

- Improving the curriculum continues to be a high priority for schools across local authorities. Developing their curriculum rationale with the school community has helped develop a shared understanding of their unique local context.

- Developing partnerships with colleges, employers, community learning and development services (CLD) and third sector organisations to enhance the curriculum offer continues to be a key focus for schools. These are supporting schools in designing curriculum interventions to tackle inequity of outcomes and increasing the range of progression pathways, especially in the senior phase.

- Schools need to take full advantage of curriculum flexibility to continue to improve progression through the broad general education (BGE) especially at points of transition from primary to secondary and from the BGE to the senior phase to reflect their individual school context and learners' needs and interests.

- Further work is required to maximise the potential impact of the support offered by the local authority Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officers (QAMSOs) across local authorities.

Policies and practice promoting empowerment to design and deliver a curriculum which meets a school's local context

All local authorities have a wide range of policies and guidance to support schools in designing their curriculum in line with Curriculum for Excellence. As a result, headteachers in almost all local authorities are empowered to design and deliver a curriculum which meets their own school's local needs. In half of local authorities, teachers are also empowered to initiate and lead on the curriculum. In the majority of local authorities, the collaborative, co-production of flexible curriculum frameworks, guidance and shared resources are key to enabling empowerment.

Headteachers and teachers feel these resources support consistency and planning for progression in learning while allowing them to adapt their approaches to meet their learners' needs and interests. Headteachers and teachers in a minority of local authorities, feel that their empowerment is limited by pressure of workload and too many priorities to deliver through the curriculum. Headteachers and teachers in a few local authorities feel that they are constrained by national expectations about the curriculum.

Engaging the school community in designing and evaluating the curriculum

Almost all local authorities have clear expectations that schools will design and evaluate their curriculum in collaboration with the school community. In the majority of local authorities, schools are working with staff, learners, parents and partners to develop a curriculum rationale tailored to their own school context. This is helping develop a shared understanding of their unique local context and needs, and of the interests of their children and young people. Schools in around half of local authorities are prioritising improving ways they involve parents in developing the curriculum and around a third are increasingly involving children and young people. Further work is required to ensure parents, learners and partners are more actively engaged in designing the local curriculum and in its evaluation.

Providing flexible learning pathways to support different needs of learners and raise attainment

Across all local authorities, the curriculum in schools is under constant review and development. Headteachers and teachers agree that there is a need to continue to improve progression through the BGE especially at points of transition from primary to secondary and from the BGE to the senior phase. In around half of local authorities, schools are increasingly using a range of data such as attainment information, Skills Development Scotland 16+ data on post-school destinations as well as local labour market information to review and inform curriculum development. In the majority of local authorities, schools are developing partnerships with colleges, employers, CLD and third sector organisations to enhance their curriculum offer.

In most local authorities, schools have a focus on developing flexible pathways to meet the different needs of learners. In primary schools, this includes improving personalisation and choice, using the local environment as contexts for learning, developing play-based approaches and supporting family learning. Secondary schools seek ways of providing a wider range of courses in the senior phase at different levels to meet the different needs and interests of young people and to support progression. Taking forward the Developing the Young Workforce agenda and understanding the employability skills required for the local context is an increasing priority. Improving the range of vocational pathways and providing Foundation Apprenticeships is seen as key to this. Schools in the majority of local authorities are designing curriculum interventions to tackle inequity of outcomes. Common areas of priority include interventions related to literacy, numeracy, STEM, nurture, and social, emotional and mental wellbeing. Schools in a minority of local authorities are developing the use of digital technology and E-learning as ways of increasing the range of flexible progression pathways to meet learners' needs. Teachers now need to be further enabled to take the initiative and be creative and innovative in developing and delivering a curriculum to meet local needs.

Headteachers and teachers in a minority of local authorities report that assessment and moderation activities are building capacity and supporting curriculum planning. Further work is required to maximise the potential impact of the support offered to help improve assessment and moderation, including the Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officers (QAMSOs) across local authorities. Increasing the range of collaborative moderation activities is an important way to empower staff in planning curriculum progression and interventions.

Headteachers' views on curriculum

'We are now stopping talking about the model of the curriculum and focusing on planning learning pathways that meet young people's needs, provide progression and support positive destinations.'

'The local authority does not prescribe a model for the broad, general education but I am accountable for ensuring that my young people receive all of their entitlements.'

'Partnership, authority support and autonomy enable us to deliver flexible pathways.'

'We are empowered by our Director's vision for headteacher autonomy in the curriculum A great degree of trust has been placed in us and we accept that and are responsible as a result.'

'The authority adds tremendous value to our work in the curriculum. We worry that it won't be sustained. We feel very supported.'

'The partnerships we have established have supported us to go beyond what is traditional for young people. Members of the Central Team support and challenge us to ensure our focus is clear and is bringing about equity.'

'Cross-school collaboration in cluster groups on curriculum planning has helped free up teachers' time to focus on delivering the curriculum in ways that meet pupils' needs.'

Teachers' views on curriculum

'Curriculum design is spectacular in our area because we have a belief in what our children and community need.'

'Self-evaluation gives us confidence in what we are doing with the curriculum. We use national guidance and set goals for ourselves and our pedagogy. We make sure it is right for our children and community.'

'Schools are looking at other schools with similar issues. We are working much more with partners to widen options. Our senior phase model is under review. We are doing a big consultation with staff and young people and families.'

'Teachers are embracing working with the community. Children do not see pathways but they see things they want to learn about. We look for the best person to do the job.'

'Headteachers are putting the power back to the class teachers regarding the curriculum. Headteachers know that we are the ones who deliver and trust us to do this.'

'As an authority we are much better at using data. It has made us think. We are more empowered because we know our young people so much better. We can make good decisions with them about the transition from BGE through to senior phase. We have the autonomy to meet their needs.'

Illustrations of practice related to improvement

The E-Learning project continues to grow from strength to strength. It empowers headteachers and whole communities to benefit equitably from a much broader curriculum than might have been offered, particularly in smaller schools. Both primary and secondary schools across the authority benefit from E-Learning. Several local authorities across Scotland now provide courses through the authority E-Learning programme. The continued educational needs of young people and adults who have temporarily or permanently left the authority have been met through E-Learning. Some young people maintain important aspects of their Gaelic Medium Education as a result of E-Learning courses delivered from for example, Malaga, Spain.

The authority has had a rich debate over many years about approaches to curriculum development and delivery. Headteachers are now very satisfied with the extent to which the authority empowers them to structure and deliver progressive learner pathways, which take account of their local geography, economic infrastructure and demographics. The authority has collaborated very well with headteachers to develop a framework to support their thinking. As a result, a range of support materials are available which make expectations clear. Sound arrangements are in place for central officers and peer headteachers to support and challenge each other's thinking in relation to curriculum development and delivery.

Schools work at cluster level to undertake joint planning. An outstanding, but not isolated, example is the Cluster Science project which is particularly aimed at involving families in STEM subjects. The project involves all schools, including family centres, and works with local businesses, parents and partners. Transport to the school is provided so that all interested families can attend. Other award-winning projects that involve the community in the design and evaluation of the curriculum include reading projects and family learning.

Thematic inspection findings

3. Staffing: How well do local authorities provide headteachers with flexibility to make decisions about staffing and leadership structures in their schools?

Headteachers have varying degrees of flexibility to make decisions about staffing and leadership structures in their schools. Further improvement is needed in the consistency of how headteachers and schools are empowered in relation to staffing. Their key focus needs to be on leading school improvements and being leaders of learning and the curriculum. Staffing shortages need to be addressed to ensure these do not limit empowerment of schools.

Key messages

- Where there are staffing shortages, these are barriers to empowerment. They limit opportunities for collaboration for improvement, access to professional learning and the provision of flexible pathways in the curriculum.

- Headteachers are empowered to varying degrees in relation to recruiting staff. Further consistency is required to achieve the right balance between having flexibility in teacher appointments and support from the local authority to minimise workload.

- Schools welcome the additional flexibility that Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) has given them to create a range of posts, including promoted posts, targeted at particular needs in their schools.

- Headteachers value collegiate approaches with the local authority to addressing a range of staffing issues and indicate that this support is crucial to their protection and empowerment in relation to staffing.

Involvement in recruitment processes

The majority of local authorities have clear, effective and transparent processes and procedures for recruiting school staff. Difficulties with recruitment of staff is a concern in the majority of local authorities and this is regarded as a national issue. Staffing shortages are considered barriers to empowerment in that they limit opportunities for collaboration for improvement, access to professional learning and the provision of flexible pathways in the curriculum. A minority of local authorities are taking positive action to address staffing issues in line with their local needs. This includes consolidation of part-time or temporary vacancies to full-time positions, relocation packages, 'grow your own' approaches such as supporting sponsorships for Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) qualifications and return to work opportunities. A few local authorities share staff across schools, for example to address shortages in areas of specialism.

Local authorities have a range of approaches in place, such as an annual recruitment exercise for unpromoted posts, to support schools in filling vacancies. This aims to ensure economies of scale in advertising, recruitment and selection of staff. In most local authorities, headteachers play a direct role in the recruitment

process. In around half of local authorities, headteachers feel there is the right balance between headteachers having flexibility in teacher appointments and support from the local authority to minimise workload and bureaucracy. However, headteachers in around half of local authorities are concerned about workload associated with recruitment and find processes slow and time-consuming. Around half of local authorities highlighted the positive relationships and contributions of professional associations in developing recruitment and other staffing policies and processes.

Headteachers in the majority of local authorities feel well-empowered in relation to recruitment of staff. Headteachers in a minority want to be able to appoint staff with the skills and experience more suited to their school. In around half of local authorities, headteachers are responsible for the advertising, recruitment and selection of promoted posts. Primary headteachers in a few local authorities do not feel sufficiently empowered in relation to staffing and feel that they are not engaged in recruitment as much as secondary headteachers.

Flexibility in staffing and leadership structures

Headteachers in the majority of local authorities have sufficient flexibility in staffing and leadership structures to meet the needs of their school. Local authorities have a range of ways to support schools in decisions about staffing. These include management points systems or formulae based on criteria such as school budgets, rolls and deprivation. Headteachers in a minority of local authorities feel that the processes to bring about changes in staffing and leadership structures bureaucratic and time-consuming. Headteachers in schools with PEF have valued the flexibility to create a range of posts targeted at particular needs in their schools. This has enabled them to create additional promoted posts and posts with responsibilities related to for example, raising attainment, supporting transitions, nurture, equality and inclusion and to involve a wider range of staff such as family support workers, counsellors and school-based social workers.

Roles and responsibilities in developing and sustaining a professional school team

Local authorities have a range of policies and supportive guidance in place that clearly outline roles and responsibilities in relation to developing and sustaining a professional school team. Headteachers in the majority of local authorities value the quality advice and guidance from Human Resource (HR) professionals from the local authority. They appreciate the collegiate approach with the local authority to staffing including staff recruitment exercises, grievance, disciplinary, occupational health support, workload and working time agreements and supporting professional learning. Headteachers indicate that support from HR specialists is crucial to ensure they work within employment law and other statutory requirements. Headteachers in a few local authorities explicitly stated that they do not want any further empowerment in relation to staffing since they want to focus on improving their school, learning, teaching and the curriculum.

Headteachers' views on staffing

'We have got the right balance here. The mix of individual autonomy and collective responsibility, together with strong HR support is working for us.'

'It's annoying when local authority pupil support teachers get pulled from your schools because of staff absences; but we understand it is part of being part of the collective and that we work together for all of the authority's children rather than just for our own schools. It's part of our moral compass.'

'We don't want empowerment to be about more admin. We need quality HR support so we can focus on the curriculum and improvement.'

'Recruitment is clear. I have access to my own HR Advisor and have quality, instant support. I get the same consistent advice and the 'human element'.'

'Parents expressed a view that they want their headteachers to lead schools, not do HR. I would find it extremely challenging to do my job if these services were taken away.'

'The large recruitment exercise works well. Headteachers can go on the panels if they have a vacancy. There is always discussion about the 'right fit' for your school. HR are always very keen to have these discussions.'

Teachers' views on staffing

'Additional staffing enables us to work more directly with our families in different ways. This is taking our impact way beyond schools now.'

'We need to understand when our colleagues need support in challenging situations. The central team organised training to help us be the best mentors and coaches we can be.'

'Teachers are empowered to lead on staffing too. Headteachers are more empowered than ever to use the staff they have, especially across the partnerships.'

'Tricky situation with staff. We have to beg, borrow and steal. It is not always possible to get any supply cover and so some development days for particular staff cannot always happen. People pick up the slack because they have to.'

'Headteachers value the wellbeing of staff and have invested in them through approaches such as mindfulness to keep their staff well.'

Illustrations of practice related to staffing

A key enabler to the empowerment of headteachers in relation to staffing is the high-quality advice and guidance provided by trusted HR professionals with a deep knowledge of education policy. Headteachers highly value the support they receive in relation to local and national conditions of service, alignment of promoted posts to appropriate remits and job-sizing to ensure equity and avoid equal pay claims. Headteachers are very positive about the clear processes and procedures in place to support the employment and wellbeing of staff. Where intervention is needed, it is done at the earliest stage possible. HR support extends well beyond recruitment processes. HR professionals are highly-effective in applying their expertise to promote and uphold professional standards, including through provision of professional learning. The HR team has developed strong professional networks, for example, in developing bespoke arrangements with a university to address a shortage of drama teachers

The local authority has been proactive in taking forward a number of initiatives to increase the workforce. This includes training for returning teachers who have had a career break and opportunities through the 'Career Change Programme', which gives employees of the local authority an opportunity to retrain as a teacher. Distance learning opportunities are offered in partnership with universities. The local authority has recruited agency staff to target recruitment in remote areas. It has also looked globally and has successfully recruited sixteen teachers from Canada who have made a commitment to work in the local authority for at least one year.

Locality forums for additional support needs (ASN) have recently been introduced and are being piloted in one cluster. This allows resources to support children's ASN to be shared across a locality and gives a degree of flexibility to the allocations of support staff, depending on changing levels of need. Headteachers spoke very positively about this development, highlighting the authority's very enabling culture of collaboration and sharing.

Thematic inspection findings

4. Funding: How well do local authorities empower headteachers to decide how funding allocated to their schools for the delivery of school education is spent?

Headteachers have varying degrees of flexibility to make decisions about funding. Greater consistency is needed in the empowerment of headteachers and schools in relation to funding. This needs to ensure their key focus is on leading school improvements and being leaders of learning and the curriculum.

Key messages

- Overall, headteachers are supported well with a range of financial management information and guidance. Support and challenge from the local authority in relation to how funding is spent is appropriate.

- Support from local authority finance officers and business managers is crucial to empowering headteachers in making decisions about how their funding is spent.

- Some headteachers have concerns about the constraints of procurement processes but others understand that these procedures protect schools in a range of ways.

- Further work is required to ensure that staff, parents and learners are more involved in decisions about how funding is spent.

- Headteachers identified council budget efficiencies and not being sufficiently involved in decisions about how efficiency savings can be made within their schools as barriers to empowerment.

Flexibility available to senior managers on finance

Headteachers in the majority of local authorities feel sufficiently empowered in relation to deciding how funding allocated to their schools for the delivery of education is spent. They have freedom in decisions about their devolved school budgets and day-to-day running of their schools. They feel they have the right level of support and challenge from the local authority in relation to how funding is spent. Headteachers in around a half of these local authorities explicitly stated that they do not want more responsibilities in relation to funding since they feel this would prevent them from focusing on leading school improvements and being leaders of learning and the curriculum. Headteachers in a minority of local authorities want to be more empowered in relation to funding. Barriers to empowerment in relation to funding include council budget efficiencies and not being sufficiently involved in decisions about how efficiency savings can be made within their schools. Headteachers from a few local authorities indicated that they are having to rely increasingly on fundraising and sponsorship from businesses and partners.

Support for financial management processes

Headteachers from most local authorities highlighted the support from local authority finance officers and business managers as being crucial to empowering them in making decisions about how their funding is spent. They are supported well with a range of financial management information and guidance. Headteachers in around half of local authorities highlighted the good quality of support and guidance they received from the local authority about using PEF allocations. This enabled them to make the right decisions for their schools.

Those with access to business managers, sometimes located in schools, are highly appreciative of the support they receive in relation to budgeting, staffing, health and safety and procurement. Headteachers in a few local authorities indicated that they now have less access to business managers as they are located centrally or responsible for clusters rather than just secondary schools. This is resulting in workload issues for headteachers. Concerns about constraints of procurement processes were raised in around a third of local authorities. However, in around a quarter of local authorities, headteachers understand that procurement procedures protects them in a range of ways. Headteachers in a minority of local authorities are concerned about too much of their time being spent on administration related to funding. A few would like more regular and more detailed budgetary information to enable them to make financial decisions more timeously. Further work is required to ensure that staff, parents and learners are more involved in decisions about how funding is spent.

Headteachers' views on funding

'There could be unintended consequences of having more autonomy in that we would not be protected by being part of the big team.'

'We don't want empowerment related to finance to mean that we get everything to do. Without the right support from the local authority, we would focus more on admin rather than leadership of education.'

'We have confidence that we can be creative in how we spend our budget linked to our school improvement plan; we also have strong accountability linked to leading improvements in pupil progress – we revisit our impact statement regularly.'

'I have so little money left to improve the school that I find it difficult to empower staff to make the changes we need to make.'

'We have not yet been involved in strategic discussions about what empowerment means in relation to staffing and funding and how accountability ties in with that.'

'The infrastructure around finance has improved. There is more scrutiny and more support. It is great to meet finance staff face-to-face on a regular basis and the Education Group meetings have finance on the agenda each time.'

Teachers' views on funding

'There are many procedures that we do not understand. There is heavy bureaucracy and they can be tricky. But we know why these are needed.'

'The authority do very well to empower schools to decide how to use their own budgets and get the best from it.'

'We have full autonomy to spend our PEF money but we are accountable. Interventions that work are still in place, others have been dropped.'

'We are a 'jack of all trades' filling in grant forms to secure additional funding. If we are to support the next generation we should not have to spend hours of our own time fighting for money through applying for grants.'

Illustrations of practice related to funding

A tool available to schools provides headteachers with the opportunity to place annual revenue funding into council reserves. This allows planning for larger areas of investment in the future to meet the needs of the school. This tool enables headteachers to essentially 'save up' for the purpose of defraying expenditure to be incurred from time-to-time in repairing, maintaining and renewing any buildings, works, equipment or articles belonging to the school. This allows resources to be more efficiently managed and offer greater flexibility and control of budget at a local level within the principles of the scheme.

Given levels of flexibility within staffing budgets, headteachers are able to make local decisions on how best to utilise the budget associated with the approved staffing model for their school. Using virement and carry-forward facilities, headteachers can decide locally on the most effective use of all devolved budget lines, subject to financial/HR procedures and policies. This also applies to managed/efficiency savings targets which each establishment has to meet each year in order to contribute to the overall saving requirement of the department/council.

Readiness for empowerment overall findings

Empowered, responsible and collaborative schools are an important part of the shared vision for Scottish education in delivering excellence and equity for all. The evidence from this thematic inspection on Readiness for Empowerment indicates that local authorities, while at different stages, are implementing a range of strategies and approaches to develop an empowered education system.

The following dimensions of empowerment are emerging as features of practice within and across Scottish schools.

Dimensions of Empowerment

Autonomy:	having permissions and freedom to take the initiative and be creative and innovative in meeting the needs of learners and individual school's context within a flexible framework of delegated leadership responsibilities.
Professional learning:	enabled through engaging in career-long professional learning which challenges thinking, develops skills of enquiry and criticality, promotes collaborative practices and impacts on learning of children, young people and adults.
Participation and engagement:	involvement in, and ownership of, evidence-based decision-making about the life and work of the school built through consensus.
Collaboration:	engaging in co-production, solution-orientated activities to deliver and improve education and achieve collective goals and aspirations for learners and schools.
Resources:	having access to skills, information, guidance, tools and resources to bring about improvement to school practices and performance.
Impact:	being responsible, trusted and accountable for actions leading to improved outcomes for learners.

These dimensions of empowerment are important levers for change to support further discussions and developing further empowerment of headteachers and schools. They can apply at all the 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.

Key strengths

1. Headteachers have the freedom and responsibility to lead improvement in their own schools enabled by flexible structures and support and challenge from local authority staff.

2. Improvement planning processes are now more streamlined and the balance between national and local priorities and those identified from individual school's self-evaluation evidence is appropriate.

3. Professional learning, leadership development, access to an increasing range of qualitative and quantitative data and increasing collaboration within and across schools are enabling empowerment of headteachers and schools to bring about improvement in their schools.

4. Within a range of supportive policies, guidance, curriculum frameworks and shared resources, headteachers and schools are empowered to design and deliver a curriculum which meets their own school's local context.

5. The collegiate approaches between the local authority and schools to staffing supports empowerment of headteachers and schools.

6. Support and challenge from local authorities are empowering headteachers in making decisions about how their funding is spent.

Aspects for improvement

1. Continue to develop and apply the range of qualitative and quantitative measures of success to monitor and evaluate improvements and to ensure high priority is given to gathering evidence of impact on excellence and equity for all.

2. Ensure consistency in empowerment of headteachers in leading improvement through collective leadership and developing a culture of decision-making and influencing direction.

3. Build on the emerging approaches to collaboration to support empowerment, both within and across schools. These approaches need to have clarity of purpose and focus. Schools need to be able to demonstrate improvement in learning, teaching and outcomes for learners as a result of their collaboration.

4. Further support teachers to take the initiative and be creative and innovative in continuing to improve progression, through the broad general education (BGE), especially at points of transition from primary to secondary, and from the BGE through to the senior phase to reflect individual school contexts and learners' needs and interests.

5. Consider ways to further improve the consistency of headteacher empowerment in relation to staffing and funding while ensuring their key focus is on leading school improvements and being leaders of learning and the curriculum.

6. Address staffing shortages to ensure these do not limit empowerment of schools in relation improvement and developing the curriculum.

7. Ensure parents, learners and partners are more actively engaged in contributing to improvement, in designing the local curriculum and in its evaluation, in recruitment of staffing and in decisions about how funding is spent as appropriate.

8. Engage staff and school communities further in discussions about what empowerment means and the potential benefits for learners.

Recommendations

National partners

1.1   Develop and promote a shared understanding of empowerment at each level in the system (practitioner, school leader, authority, regional and national) and ensure that the potential benefits for learners are clearly understood.

1.2   Identify ways to further clarify national expectations in relation to the curriculum to maximise school empowerment to design the local curriculum.

1.3   Identify actions needed by national and local partners to address staffing shortages in order to ensure these do not limit empowerment of schools in relation improvement and curriculum leadership.

1.4   Reflect the dimensions of empowerment in evaluation frameworks and toolkits being devised to support the development of an empowered system.

Local authorities

2.1   Further develop a culture of collective leadership and decision-making where headteachers regard themselves as system leaders.

2.2   Ensure arrangements are in place to promote collaboration within and across schools and beyond to improve education standards and achieve collective goals and aspirations for learners and schools.

2.3   Develop and provide guidance, ways of working and support to promote autonomy and enable empowerment of schools in relation to improvement and curriculum leadership.

2.4   Ensure appropriate arrangements are in place for staff at all levels to access high-quality professional learning which challenges thinking, develops skills of enquiry and criticality, and promotes collaborative practices.

2.5   Develop collective leadership through co-producing with schools a range of supportive policies, guidance, curriculum frameworks and shared resources to ensure headteachers and schools are empowered to improve school practices and performance.

2.6   Put in place suitable arrangements to ensure greater consistency of headteacher and school empowerment in relation to staffing and funding processes. These should ensure that headteachers' key focus is on leading learning and school improvements.

Headteachers and schools

3.1 Promote empowerment of the school community through participation and engagement of staff, children and young people, parents and partners. This should ensure involvement in, and ownership of, evidence-based decision-making about the life and work of the school built through consensus.

3.2 Ensure staff at all levels are responsible and trusted to bring about improvements which impact on learning and teaching and outcomes for learners.

3.3 Support staff to take the initiative and be creative and innovative in continuing to improve progression through the learner journey, particularly at transition points.

Appendix 1:
Local authorities visited

- Aberdeen City Council
- Aberdeenshire Council
- Angus Council
- Argyll and Bute Council
- Clackmannanshire Council
- Dumfries and Galloway Council
- Dundee City Council
- East Ayrshire Council
- East Dunbartonshire Council
- East Lothian Council
- East Renfrewshire Council
- Falkirk Council
- Fife Council
- Glasgow City Council
- Inverclyde Council
- Midlothian Council
- Moray Council
- North Ayrshire Council
- North Lanarkshire Council
- Orkney Islands Council
- Perth and Kinross Council
- Renfrewshire Council
- Scottish Borders Council
- Shetland Islands Council
- South Ayrshire Council
- South Lanarkshire Council
- Stirling Council
- The City of Edinburgh Council
- The Highland Council
- West Dunbartonshire Council
- Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)
- West Lothian Council

Appendix 2: Explanation of terms of quantity

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

All 100%

Almost all 91%-99%

Most 75%-90%

Majority 50%-74%

Minority/less than half 15%-49%

A few less than 15%

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

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