

**Summary of evaluation of the
educational psychology service**



A report by HM Inspectorate of Education

**East Ayrshire Council
6 July 2010**

Definition of terms used in this report.

HM Inspectors use published criteria when making evaluations. They are published as quality indicators which relate evaluations to six levels. HMIE began using a six-point scale to make evaluations in August 2005. The table below shows how the six-point scale relates to the four-point scale that we used previously.

Old level	New level	Description
Very good	Excellent	Outstanding, sector leading
	Very good	Major strengths
Good	Good	Important strengths with some areas for improvement
	Satisfactory	Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Fair	Weak	Important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Major weaknesses

This report also uses the following words to describe numbers and proportions:

almost all	over 90%
most	75-90%
majority	50-74%
less than half	15-49%
few	up to 15%

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1. The aims, nature and scope of the inspection

Recommendation 20 of the *Review of Provision of Educational Psychology Services in Scotland (2002)* charged HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), on behalf of the Scottish Ministers, to provide an external evaluation of the effectiveness of the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in improving the impact and outcomes for children, young people and families.

The inspection of East Ayrshire educational psychology provision was undertaken on behalf of stakeholders. The evaluation of EPS was conducted within a framework of quality indicators which embody the Government's policy on Best Value. The inspection team also included two associate assessors who were principal educational psychologists (PEP) serving in other Scottish local authorities.

This web-based report should be read alongside other strategic inspections of East Ayrshire Council which sets out the wider context in which EPS are delivered.

The Educational Psychology Service

The East Ayrshire Council EPS comprised one team based in the Woodstock Centre, Kilmarnock. The complement of educational psychologists (EPs) was nine full-time equivalents (FTE). The EPS had one temporary research assistant. Promoted staff consisted of a PEP and one deputy principal educational psychologist (DPEP). The service received administrative support from a central team. As a result of maternity leave, retirement and unfilled posts the service had been operating below capacity over the last few years.

2. What key outcomes has the service achieved?

There were a number of examples of the EPS supporting schools and partners, through a range of key developments to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. For example, EPs had led on developments that helped to sustain effective mainstream placements including nurture groups, training in relation to conflict prevention and *Cool in School*. The PEP had a central role in the development and operation of the authority social inclusion strategy including community care and the youth strategy. The executive director of educational and social services viewed all EPs as senior officers of the Council making a difference both at strategic and operational levels. Significant EPS involvement in the *Pathways to Inclusion* initiative had contributed to both reduced exclusions and increases in attainment for vulnerable children and young people. Communication between senior officers and EPS staff was very good. The EPS made a substantial contribution to the Department of Educational and Social Services (DESS) improvement plan. Significant EP involvement in *Getting it right for every child* (GIRFEC) and the integrated assessment framework (IAF) developments had improved coordinated approaches to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people. Senior managers within the service were actively involved in strategic planning for children and young people through a range of authority decision making groups including the Community Support Management Team. There had been a significant increase in EP representation on authority working groups over the last

three years. For example, EPs were making a valued contribution to More Choices, More Chances, life long learning, *Curriculum for Excellence* health and well being and the review group for children under three years of age. The service should put in place more systematic collection and collation of data to further demonstrate trends over time. The EPS had recently established a group to oversee the quality assurance and improvement agenda, including the demonstration of improvement over time.

The service had a focused approach to financial budgeting with a section on budget management included in the service Standards and Quality report. The service complied with appropriate guidance including the Health Professional Council and British Psychological Society code of standards and ethics. Statutory requirements were well embedded in individual practice and service documentation. The EPS had been given the responsibility for the development of the *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004* (ASL Act) across the authority. This had involved high quality consultation, training and policy development. The EPS had provided support for implementation of the ASL Act across a wide range of stakeholders.

3. How well does the service meet the needs of its stakeholders?

The service had very effectively supported a wide range of children and young people, through individual work and by building capacity in others. Young people were able to identify impact of direct involvement of the EP including reduced anxiety and successfully returning to school following a long period of non attendance. The needs of vulnerable children and young people were well tracked through universal systems. This included the staged intervention model, school and community assessment team meetings. A rapid assessment pack is well used to address the needs of children new to the authority. Post school psychological services (PSPS) had a positive impact on individual young people at the point of transition through the *Have Your Say* document, transition passports and strategic linkages with Kilmarnock College. The EPS had significant involvement in the authority parenting strategy with early years colleagues including the successful implementation of the Solihull approach to working with parents. Case files reflected well considered parental involvement. EPs kept parents fully involved in a range of ways including through reports, telephone calls and e-mails. EPs used careful questioning and reflection to ensure parents were meaningfully involved in multi-agency meetings. Parents reflected positively on engagement with the EP. There is an increased awareness in the service of the need to develop a robust system to evaluate the impact of service delivery for children, young people and families and consider their views in service developments.

The service was highly valued and respected by almost all local community stakeholders. The EPS provided a wide range of effective support to the local community through high quality advice and joint problem solving. For example, the EPS had been centrally involved in the development and implementation of systems including early years, school and partnership assessment teams to better meet the needs of children and young people. The EPS had a clear role within East Ayrshire staged intervention processes that included a well considered approach to needs led assessment. The EPS portfolio of services had been available since 2008 and was valued by centrally deployed staff and heads of establishments. Headteachers had

been thoughtfully engaged to review service delivery to schools following staffing reductions. This had resulted in a responsive approach to meeting the needs of school clusters and learning communities, clearly understood by headteachers and centrally deployed staff. The service should consider ways in which to further support schools to deliver improvement plans.

EPs were involved in developments at a national level through the Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists (ASPEP) and other professional bodies. The PEP was trained as an associate assessor with HMIE. The service encouraged and supported creativity and innovation through, for example, the nurture developments in a secondary school and creative and responsive approaches to stress management and relaxation for young people and staff. The service had made well received presentations at national conferences sharing effective practice. The EPS should now consider ways in which to increase its impact on the wider community across Scotland by sharing innovative and effective ways of working beyond East Ayrshire.

All EPs within the team felt highly motivated and valued, sharing the vision and aims for the service. All EPs reported the service to be well led. They reported that there is equality and transparency within the service organisation. For example, team meetings and working groups provided the opportunity for high quality reflective professional discussion and sharing of information. There were excellent opportunities for meaningful distributed leadership resulting in all EPs contributing at an authority level to meeting the needs of children and young people. All administrative staff stated that there were positive working relationships with EPs characterised by mutual respect. Poetry written for team meetings by the PEP creatively reflected issues impacting on the EPS team, contributing to the strong service ethos. There were very high levels of staff retention and low absence rates. The senior EP role should be further clarified in relation to service developments and the role in continuous improvement.

Features of good practice: Approaches to non attendance

EPs highlighted concerns regarding the number of young people being identified through the staged model of intervention with attendance issues. A number of strategic groups had identified the need for a more consistent approach towards non attendance. The EPS produced a very helpful draft policy paper as a starting point for consideration by a multi-agency working group. This group, led by the EPS, included participants from primary and secondary schools, youth strategy, Skills Development Scotland, the quality improvement team, community learning and development, social services, child and adolescent mental health services and the police. Current research in this area was presented by the EPS to inform developments. The EPS planned to evaluate the impact of the policy in relation to shared understanding of the issues, consistent approaches to recording figures, increased confidence in addressing non attendance and a resulting decrease in the number of children and young people not attending school.

4. How good is the service's delivery of key processes?

The structure for the delivery of consultation and advice was very well planned, effectively delivered and valued by stakeholders. Consultation was detailed in the EPS portfolio of services, highlighting the ways in which this role had contributed to the effective delivery of both EPS and DESS objectives. The EPS provided a helpful section on consultation for inclusion in school handbooks. The EPS assessment practices linked well to the service vision, values and aims and complied with the ASPEP and Scottish Division of Educational Psychologists guidance on assessment. Assessment was well planned and delivered, taking into account the context of the child or young person. The service worked effectively in partnership with others to provide an integrated assessment. They had made a significant contribution to the development of the authority policy and practices on assessment, for example, through the integrated assessment framework and the ASL Act. Assessment reports carried out individually and in conjunction with colleagues in social work to address the needs of vulnerable children and young people were of a very high quality. Where written reports are not provided, steps should be taken to ensure that the richness and complexity of the EP assessment is captured and widely communicated. The EPS delivered a wide range of evidence based interventions which effectively met the needs of stakeholders. This included the use of cognitive behavioural therapy and solution oriented approaches with individuals and groups. Psychological interventions were systematically planned, implemented and evaluated in partnership with children, their families and schools, for example, the development of *Cool in School*. The service had been very active and successful in promoting the development of nurture groups within East Ayrshire schools. This had been highly valued within the authority and was continuing to develop. The service should carry out an audit of the nature and range of interventions delivered across stakeholder groups to inform future planning and reporting. The service had been integral to a range of authority level training including effective planning using individual education programmes and coordinated support plans and health and wellbeing through resilience and *Bounceback*. Training offered to schools and others was of a high standard. Stakeholders could identify the ways in which training had changed practice to better meet the needs of children and young people. The service delivered effective training with and to other agencies in a coordinated way including approaches to assessing autism spectrum disorders and self harm prevention with intensive support staff in children's units. The service should consider how it will evaluate the longer term impact of training delivered. The service policy to guide research within the service has not yet been put in to operation. This should now be taken forward to support EPs to identify opportunities for extending this role to meet the needs of children and young people. The confidence and skill level of some staff in relation to research should be considered. The profile and understanding of this role should be enhanced through dissemination of current research across stakeholder groups.

The EPS had a strong ethos and practice of inclusion that permeated the work of the service at all levels. A range of clear and appropriate written guidance on equality and fairness was available. The EPS provided effective services for vulnerable groups, including arrangements for early intervention and targeted additional support where required. The EPS worked with colleagues across the authority to promote good

practice in relation to inclusion, equality and fairness. The EPS was centrally involved in the authority equalities forum.

5. How good is the service's management?

The EPS had a range of policies that were generated by the service as a whole and articulated well with the service vision, values and aims and authority priorities. The service was also heavily involved in authority policy development, particularly around the ASL Act and, for example, approaches to school attendance difficulties. This had helped to further ensure that EPS policies articulated with council-wide policy and practice. Case and school files were regularly reviewed by the PEP which allowed consideration of the ways in which policies were being implemented across EPs within the service. A time line was in the process of being developed to support more formal monitoring and updating of policies. This should be taken forward to support the development of policies, their expected outcomes and evaluation of impact. Annual consultation with some stakeholder groups through questionnaires was well established. This information was used to guide practice. More recently, head teachers and other partners have been brought together and consulted to inform service developments. EPs were increasingly involved in education and social services strategic groups with stakeholder feedback sought on their input. Useful service level agreements were well established with schools and had been extended to colleges and to other stakeholders including intensive support units for young people looked after away from home. The EPS website and other forms of communication should be enhanced to improve the range of information available for stakeholders. As is planned, the service should consider ways to meaningfully access the views of parents, children and young people to better inform service delivery. There was an effective planning cycle in place that clearly demonstrated the links between professional review and development, the EPS improvement plan, standards and quality reporting and the wider authority plans. There was an increased focus on outcome and impact with clear targets and agreed timescales. Importantly, there were well considered plans being developed to manage the issue of sustainability in the context of reduced staffing. The processes for ongoing self-evaluation were being reviewed and should be clearly linked to service planning to ensure continuous improvement and support the identification of trends over time.

The EPS was creatively engaged in a wide range of initiatives that involved other agencies including the Prioritisation Group considering the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people, the Attendance Policy Group and the Child and Disabilities Steering Group. EPs were centrally involved in collaborative approaches to assessment of autism spectrum disorder along with clinical psychologists and speech and language therapists. There was effective collaborative working through the pan-Ayrshire client liaison group providing helpful opportunities for delivering post school services to other providers, including the local prison. There was high quality joint working around addressing the needs of children and families at the early years along with allied health professionals. There were regular links with clinical psychology including shared training days valued by all. Partners reported that the EPS brought imaginative and innovative solutions for vulnerable children and young people who didn't easily fit within existing resources. There was highly effective joint assessment

and reporting between EPs and social workers for young people with complex social and behavioural needs. The EPS developed positive working relationships with local key stakeholders and training providers including The Lennox Partnership and The Zone. The portfolio of services and other service documentation should be made more widely available to enhance understanding of the full range of services delivered.

Features of good practice: Post school psychological service

East Ayrshire's Psychological Service established highly effective links with further education colleges, training providers and Skills Development Scotland to develop effective systemic interventions and initiatives to enable young people to realise their potential in post-school settings. The EPS had developed successful transition work targeted at vulnerable young people moving from secondary school in to the post-school sector. These links were generated through the Client Liaison Group that promoted networking and sharing of good practice. All EPs in East Ayrshire were part of the development and delivery of this effective transition planning. The school leaver's passport developed by the EPS was designed to improve information sharing about a young person's additional support needs and had been considered to be both valuable and worthwhile by young people, staff and post school providers.

6. How good is leadership?

Service aims and priorities were generated by the full team within the wider DESS vision. This had fostered a strong common understanding and desire to deliver high quality services to all children and young people in East Ayrshire. There was strong leadership to take forward service planning. The planning framework took clear account of wider authority planning. Communication within the service was highly effective through both planned and informal opportunities for discussion. Joint working was encouraged. Senior managers within DESS were fully aware of EPS developments and contributions to the wider authority agenda and priorities. EPS managers provided strong leadership in targeting resources at key objectives. The service had an informative standards and quality report including stakeholder feedback. Issues around sustainability and succession planning should continue to be reviewed. The service had a strong and creative management team with positive relationships and complementary skills. A range of strategies were in place to support effective distributed leadership with all EPs encouraged to, and delivering, at an authority level. This was acknowledged and valued by DESS senior managers and helped support succession planning. Meaningful support and challenge was evident at all levels. Schools and partner agencies had high expectation of quality service delivery from the EPS. Creativity and innovation was welcomed and encouraged and service managers had a clear view of what constituted best practice. Change was led and managed effectively and managers looked ahead to respond proactively to changing circumstances within the service and DESS. People, structures and systems were carefully aligned to secure improvement within a highly motivated and creative team. Through a cycle of robust self-evaluation the EPS should enhance approaches to identifying impact and trends over time to ensure continuous improvement to meet the needs of children and young people.

Key strengths

The service had:

- effectively delivered key processes that impacted significantly on a wide range of stakeholders through being strongly embedded in authority developments;
- developed strong partnership working, resulting in effective and efficient service delivery to improve outcomes for children and young people;
- delivered high quality training that was carefully considered and effectively planned to meet the needs of a wide range of stakeholders; and
- developed a highly positive service ethos with strong service management and distributed leadership resulting in a creative and motivated team.

Main points for action

The service should:

- put in place systems to identify and demonstrate improvements in performance and trends over time; and
- extend policy management, involving key stakeholder, including taking forward the research role and evaluating the research role.

As a result of the EPS high performance and very good understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement we have ended the inspection process at this stage.

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Appendix 1

Quality Indicator	Evaluation
Improvements in performance	Good
Fulfilment of statutory duties	Very good
Impact on children and young people	Very good
Impact on parents, carers and families	Very good
Impact on staff	Excellent
Impact on the local community	Very good
Impact on the wider community	Good
Consultation and advice	Very good
Assessment	Very good
Intervention	Very good
Provision of professional development and training for other groups including parents, teachers and health professionals	Very good
Research and strategic development	Satisfactory
Inclusion, equality and fairness	Very good
Policy development and review	Good
Participation of stakeholders	Good
Operational planning	Very good
Partnership working	Very good
Leadership and direction	Very good
Leadership of change and improvement	Very good

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