

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

EQUITY TEAM – SCOTTISH ATTAINMENT CHALLENGE

REPORT BY HEAD OF EDUCATION (SECONDARY, COMMUNITY LEARNING & INCLUSION) AND HEAD OF EDUCATION (PRIMARY, EARLY YEARS AND RESOURCES)

A PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform members of the work of the Equity Team as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

B RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Panel notes the progress made by the Equity Team in supporting schools to improve outcomes for learners impacted by the poverty-related attainment gap.

C SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

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|---|---|
| I Council Values | Caring and Compassionate;
Open, Honest and Accountable;
Collaborate, Inclusive and Adaptive |
| II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment) | The work of the Equity Team forms part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, the work of which is contained within the publication of the Annual Plan and Report – National Improvement Framework and Reducing Inequalities of Outcome as required by the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000. Raising Attainment is a key strategic objective of West Lothian Council. First amongst the key priorities of the National Improvement Framework is placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education, and West Lothian Council's plan and report provide local context for this national ambition. |
| III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers | None |
| IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators | The work of the Equity Team will have a positive impact on performance indicators including those relating to attainment and positive destinations. |

V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	The work of the Equity Team will have a positive impact on performance indicators within the Single Outcome Agreement including those relating to attainment and positive destinations.
VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	The work of the Equity Team is delivered within the Scottish Attainment Challenge funding.
VII Consideration at PDSP	Underway
VIII Other consultations	Stakeholders including pupils, parents/carers, head teachers, staff and other partners are involved on an ongoing basis as part of the planning process as required.

D BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

The five key priorities of the Scottish Government National Improvement Framework Plan published are

- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people
- Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people
- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

The mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) is to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap i.e. supporting the third priority above.

West Lothian is fully committed to ensuring excellence and equity for all children and young people. Progress continues to be made across Education Services in tackling the poverty related attainment gap through the work featured in the Annual Plan and Report – National Improvement Framework and Reducing Inequalities of Outcome West Lothian – approved by Education Executive in September 2024.

A partnership approach to Strategic Equity Funding planning continues to be taken in order to collaborate with a range of services across the local authority including the anti-poverty team, social policy, community learning and development, educational psychologists and others. Collaborative projects were identified which have a specific targeted focus.

One of these projects is the work of the Equity Team. An overview of all projects is contained within the Annual Plan and Report of which there is a link in the background references.

D1 EQUITY TEAM OVERVIEW

The Equity Team was established in 2021 to promote the primacy of equity and assist schools in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap in line with the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The work of the team is both universal and targeted. It supports and influences the work of school leaders, teachers, Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) practitioners, pupil support workers, family link workers and partners including speech and language therapists.

D2 UNIVERSAL SUPPORT

Professional learning, collaboration and sharing practice

Universal support is provided through a comprehensive programme of professional learning related to equity which is open to staff across schools at all levels. Professional learning sessions are consistently evaluated as very good or excellent and there has been a high level of engagement. Participants report increased understanding of equity and greater awareness of evidence-based learning and teaching approaches which accelerate progress in tackling poverty-related attainment gaps. Inspection and Validated Self-Evaluation (VSE) evidence also demonstrates increasing staff knowledge, confidence and skills in tackling equity in the classroom.

The Equity Team has also designed a range of professional learning opportunities for headteachers and school leaders. Training sessions have included developing an equity strategy, planning an inclusive curriculum and leading Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). In addition, by June 2025 middle leaders in every primary and secondary school will have participated in the Leading Equitable Schools Programme. This programme is designed to build capacity in all schools for continuous improvement in equity.

Equity Network meetings and the PEF Sharing Event (March 2024) have created opportunities for school staff and partners to share how they are improving outcomes for children and families, tackling gaps and reducing the cost of the school day. This has promoted partnership working across sectors and communities resulting in increased collaboration which is maximising collective efforts in tackling poverty-related gaps.

Supporting PEF planning, implementation and evaluation

The Equity Team supports all schools to maximise their use of PEF. This has included training in data, measures and outcomes to identify and track poverty-related gaps. A PEF planning tool and accompanying resources have also been created. These resources are used across sectors to plan and monitor PEF approaches and interventions. This has significantly improved the quality of PEF planning and reporting.

D3 TARGETED SUPPORT**Equity Schools Programme**

In addition to universal support, the Equity Team has provided targeted support to 24 schools. These schools are located in areas where poverty-related gaps are more concentrated or equity is a specific focus. The Equity Team works collaboratively with each school to identify gaps and to plan improvements. Support is tailored to the school and incorporates data analysis and quality improvement activities with the leadership team, PEF planning and intervention support and bespoke professional learning for staff. A particularly important feature of the Equity Schools Programme, is the work undertaken with class teachers and learners. This classroom-based support focuses on maximising learning and teaching approaches and interventions to tackle specific gaps in learning.

D4 IMPACT

The impact of the Equity Team's universal and targeted support is evident in the consistent increases in West Lothian Quintile 1 (Q1) attainment at P1, 4, 7. Since 2021 Q1 attainment has increased overall by 6.00 percentage points in literacy and 2.89 percentage points in numeracy. In June 2024, West Lothian's Q1 data was also ahead of national averages by 8.7 percentage points in literacy and 5.5 percentage points in numeracy. There is evidence that the targeted support provided through the Equity Schools Programme is narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap, particularly in literacy.

Since His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIe) inspections resumed in West Lothian in 2022, approaches to equity and tackling poverty-related gaps have been reported positively. These findings have been echoed in VSE visits to West Lothian schools by local authority officers and VSE teams. Improvements highlighted have included effective use of data to identify gaps which has led to more focused PEF planning and targeted interventions. Furthermore, it has been recognised that schools know their families and their local context well. They use this knowledge to shape the culture and ethos of the school, to remove barriers and stigma, and reduce the Cost of the School Day.

E. CONCLUSION

The work of the Equity Team is positively supporting schools to tackle the poverty related attainment gap. Accelerated progress in performance in literacy and numeracy is improving in a number of targeted schools. Universal support is welcomed by all schools and is leading to enhanced understanding in planning, tracking and monitoring effective interventions.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Education - achieving excellence and equity: National Improvement Framework 2025
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/achieving-excellence-equity-2025-national-improvement-framework/documents/>

NIF Annual Plan and Report

<https://coins.westlothian.gov.uk/viewDoc.asp?c=e%97%9Dj%95j%7B%88>

Scottish Attainment Challenge: framework for recovery and accelerating progress

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-attainment-challenge-framework-recovery-accelerating-progress-2/>

Appendices/Attachments:

Presentation – West Lothian Equity Team

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Date of Meeting: 4 February 2025