Raising the Bar, Closing the Gap
Orkney’s Strategy for Raising Attainment (2016-18) and the Delivery of the National Improvement Framework Outcomes

Working to ensure that ‘Our young people, parents, staff and elected members have confidence in the quality of the learners’ experience of the curriculum and improvements in attainment across our schools’

Contents:
• Introduction page 2
• Raising Attainment in Orkney page 3
• National Improvement Framework page 3
• Poverty and Rural Disadvantage page 4
• Baseline Review of Attainment and Achievement page 5
• Working with Partners, Working in Context page 6
• Action on Attainment page 7
• Summary of Action in relation to the Improvement Framework page 10
• Noticing the Difference page 11
• Appendix 1: The Orkney Offer page 12

1 Orkney Attainment and Achievement Review (November 2015)
Introduction

In general terms, in Orkney children and young people’s experience of school is a positive one. When asked almost all children continue to say that they enjoy being at school and most feel that they are getting on well. Parents agree and almost all report that they feel their child enjoys learning at school and is succeeding. Most parents also believe that the staff at their child’s school really know their child as an individual and support them well.  

Our schools are well resourced and provide for both a formal and informal curriculum. For example, one quarter of pupils benefit from the school instrumental service and are able to learn a musical instrument. In addition, there are a wide range of opportunities for young people to have their ‘wider achievement’ recognised including, but not exclusively, at public award ceremonies.

Students leaving school also do better in Orkney than many of their contemporaries in the rest of Scotland, with nearly 95% continuing to engage in education, employment or training.

In terms of performance in national exams Orkney continues to be one of the better performing and improving authorities. Orkney also has a very small ‘attainment gap’ and young people who, if elsewhere, would be at risk of not achieving their potential generally do well.

Orkney schools, therefore, are successful in their effort to help young people to ‘get the best start in life’; become ‘successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens’; and leave school ‘better educated, more skilled and more successful’.  

However across the full range of measures, at each age and stage, there is no room for complacency.

There is more to be done, particularly in relation to ‘raising expectation’ and ensuring each child and young person gets ‘the right help at the right time in the right way’ and achieves the very best outcome possible.

It is to the credit of each and every member of staff working in schools and across the service that their commitment to ensuring the very best experience possible for each and every child and young person is relentless.

The National Improvement Framework places a renewed emphasis on ‘excellence and equity’ in education and this paper sets out Orkney’s strategy for raising attainment for the next two years.

Peter Diamond
Head of Schools

---

2 Data taken from school inspections ‘additional evidence’ 2013, 2014 & 2015
3 Local Government Benchmarking Framework
4 Data provided by Skills Development Scotland
5 Data taken from ‘School Education’ a report published by the Account Commission June 2014
6 Scottish Governments’ National Outcomes 3, 4 & 5.
7 Orkney’s approach to ‘Getting It Right for Every Child’
Raising Attainment in Orkney

The local approach to raising achievement has asked schools to place particular focus on using evidenced based methodologies\(^8\) and put dialogue between teachers, students and carers at the heart of the process of learning and teaching.

Since August 2014, in developing this strategy across all schools, staff teams have been working with the Tapestry Partnership\(^9\) to revisit formative assessment approaches\(^10\) and develop practice through collaborative working with a Teacher Learning Community (TLC).

TLCs encourage teachers to reflect on theory and practice, plan and carry out a small test of change and feedback to their peers the difference this has made. All teachers have been encouraged to take this action oriented approach to improving outcomes; even our newly qualified teachers are engaged in developing ‘Peedie Projects’ that explore the difference made inside classrooms.

In visiting classrooms where formative assessment practice is embedded, it is noticeable that the children are more engaged in their learning. They understand what they are doing and why; the learning environment itself supports reflection on learning; and conversations about learning between peers, as well as the teacher and pupils, are the norm. In these settings children show a very high level of motivation in their learning and are being helped to make very good progress\(^11\).

National Improvement Framework\(^12\)


It aims to ensure that children are being equipped with the skills they need to get on in the world; and will ensure that we are making progress in closing the gap in attainment between those in Scotland’s most and least deprived areas.

The Framework is based on the best practice which exists internationally on the use of data and intelligence to improve education and has been informed by the OECD research on Synergies for Better Learning\(^13\).

---

\(^8\) Education Endowment Foundation hold a database that relates impact and cost for a variety of interventions.
\(^9\) www.tapestrypartnership.com/
\(^10\) www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/resourcesandcpd/research/summaries/rsassessment.asp
\(^11\) School Review and Assurance visits and/or Education Scotland (Inspection) evaluations
\(^12\) www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/09/7802/downloads
The Framework identifies key ‘drivers’ of improvement – as illustrated in figure 1.

The key priorities for the National Improvement Framework are:

- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy;
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children;
- Improvement in children and young people’s health and well-being\(^\text{14}\); and
- Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations.

**Poverty and Rural Disadvantage**

The overall SIMD\(^\text{15}\) profile for Orkney offers a ‘misleadingly positive’ picture of what it is like to grow up in a remote, rural, island community. Looking at the component parts starts to give greater insight (see below). There are particular challenges in relation to housing and access to services. Both of which can account for a ‘tough reality’\(^\text{16}\) while growing up.

\(^{13}\) www.oecd.org/edu/school/synergies-for-better-learning.htm.

\(^{14}\) Also a clear focus for Orkney’s new Children’s Services Plan

\(^{15}\) Scottish Index of Multiple Representation

\(^{16}\) Columba 1400 www.columbia1400.com
Orkney has much to offer to young people. Schools and communities are inclusive and by providing a real sense of ‘connectedness’ can help overcome many of the disadvantages that exist within a rural community.

Young people themselves recognise however that for those who are or become socially excluded, or feel isolated, suffer as they are unable to access these benefits.

In addition Orkney is sometimes described as a ‘high employment, low wage’ economy which can mean that material disadvantage and poverty is ‘hidden’. For example, families with little disposable income may not qualify for free school meals and/or be able to afford the cost of school trips or benefit from community activities where the cost of membership and difficulties relating to access present insurmountable barriers to participation.

Leaders of learning in Orkney have indicated that they feel this is an area where better understanding of the issues is needed. Partners to the Children’s Services Plan have identified this as a key priority and the Schools Service will be working to support this.

SIMD remains a crude tool for successful planning in a small community such as Orkney. It is recognised that rather than ‘family focused’ knowledge and understanding might be more useful than a ‘place based’ analysis.

**Baseline Review of Attainment and Achievement**

The Attainment and Achievement Review, November 2015, explored progress in relation to a number of key performance measure relating to attainment and achievement in the period 2014-2015. It covered the following themes:

- Early Learning and Childcare
- Performance Indicators in Primary School (PIPS)
- Curriculum for Excellence
- National (SQA) Examinations
  - Key Measures of Attainment
  - Secondary School Roll
  - Staying on Rate
  - Mean Points Per Pupil (S4)
  - Mean Points Per Pupil (S5)
  - SIMD and Attainment
- Wider Achievement in Orkney
- Success After School

The review provides a helpful baseline position for planning action and activity in relation to raising attainment in Orkney.
An analysis of the baseline position indicates the following generic actions should be prioritised at both school and authority level:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review approaches and processes relating to raising attainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop 'learning community' approaches to shared development, reflection and self-evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further develop approaches to moderation and validation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and develop tracking and monitoring within schools to ensure learners needs are being met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review approaches to reporting to ensure systems are efficient and effective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specific areas of work, such as tasks and projects, should then include focusing on language development in early learning and childcare; development of initial reading skills; developing literacy, numeracy and health & well-being in primary schools; literacy and numeracy at transition (and through Broad General education); developing The Orkney Offer (see Appendix 1) and Choice and Challenge in the Senior Phase.

This analysis has both a direct and indirect link to the National Improvement Framework.

**Working with Partners, Working in Context**

Actions within ‘Clear and Connected’ of the statutory Children's Services Plan are selected and prioritised on the basis that collaboration between agencies and services is essential for success.

For the period 2016-2018, the priorities are:

**Wellbeing** – working together to ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to experience activities that will help them to be… safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included.

**Relationships** – working together to ensure that there is a consistent approach to recognising that children are rich in potential, strong, powerful, and competent; realising that the best outcomes are achieved when we pay attention to relationships and ‘how’ we work together.

**Poverty and Rural Disadvantage** – working together to ensure that Orkney’s potential (though connecting people, community, activity and services) is maximised to limit negative outcomes and ensure equality of opportunity for children and young people.
**Action on Attainment**

Schools will continue to be asked to prioritise their actions to ensure that children and young people:

- get the best start in life;
- become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens; and
- are better educated, more skilled and more successful.

Schools and Local Authority will work together to ensure that:

- ‘Our systems support changes in practice and culture so that children and young people get the right help at the right time in the right way’
- ‘Our children meet individually appropriate and relevant developmental milestones’
- ‘Our staff feel confident in meeting the needs of children and young people with a range of additional support needs’

The following actions will continue to be developed and embedded to underpin practice:

- ‘Learning community’ approaches to development, reflection and evaluation;
- Collaborative approaches to moderation and validation; and
- The use of data to improve interventions and outcomes for learners

The following projects and activities will be in progress and/or completed during 2016-2018:

**Early Learning and Childcare Focus:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title (Lead)</th>
<th>Links to Improvement Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing Early Language (Hanan) (PT Early Years)</td>
<td>This project will focus on developing <strong>practitioner</strong>(^\text{19}) <strong>professionalism</strong> by enhancing their understanding of early language development and quality interactions. It will support practitioners to understand and assess <strong>children’s progress</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Language Group (PT Early Years)</td>
<td>In collaboration with NHS Speech and Language Therapy Services, this early intervention project will focus on those children identified at the 27-30 month health visitor check. The project, involving children and parents, will use ‘playful’ approaches to support early language development. It will focus on <strong>parental engagement</strong> and assessment of <strong>children’s progress</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Early Language (Elklan) (PT Early Years)</td>
<td>This collaborative project with NHS and the early years’ service focuses on developing <strong>practitioner and teacher professionalism</strong>. It will develop understanding of language development and the use of targeted approaches to support children with language delay, as well as supporting practitioners to assess and plan for <strong>children’s progress</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

17 An issue also raised in the 2016 Workload Survey carried out by Orkney’s LNCT  
18 The Educational Psychology Service have been asked to assist with ensuring action research approaches are robust in terms of creating reliable evidence of the difference made  
19 In early learning and childcare settings, the professional staff includes SSSC registered practitioners who are not teachers.
### Primary (Early Years) Focus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning Reading</strong></td>
<td>This project will focus on data literacy and the use of relevant, contextualised, <em>performance information</em>. It will focus on <em>teacher professionalism</em> and the quality and effectiveness of approaches to learning, teaching and the assessment of <em>children’s progress</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developing Early Literacy Through Play-Based Approaches</strong></td>
<td>This project will support <em>leadership</em> and planning for <em>school improvement</em> through a focus on data literacy and the use of relevant, contextualised, <em>performance information</em>. It will focus on <em>teacher professionalism</em> and the quality and effectiveness of approaches to learning, teaching and the assessment of <em>children’s progress</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peedie talkers, thinkers and listeners</strong></td>
<td>This project will focus on <em>parental engagement</em> as well as approaches to the <em>assessment of children’s progress</em> and the use of <em>performance information</em> (data literacy). In addition the project will involve reflecting on <em>Teacher Professionalism</em> in an interdisciplinary working environment which also requires quality <em>school leadership</em> if outcomes are to be sustainable and replicable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Primary Focus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improving literacy - speaking and listening - through a Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach to learning</strong></td>
<td>The project will improve teacher pedagogy and <em>teacher professionalism</em> through developing the quality of teaching through high quality approaches to learning eg developing high quality questioning and higher order thinking skills; there is a clear focus on approaches to the <em>assessment of children’s progress</em> and the use of <em>performance information</em> (data literacy) to inform practice. Ensuring successful outcomes are sustainable and replicable on any scale will require significant high quality <em>school leadership</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Secondary/Transitions Focus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raising attainment in Numeracy and Mathematics</strong></td>
<td>This project will focus on data literacy and the use of relevant, contextualised, <em>performance information</em>. It will focus on <em>teacher professionalism</em> and the quality and effectiveness of approaches to learning, teaching and the assessment of <em>children’s progress</em>. Ensuring success will require high quality <em>school leadership</em> (project leader, senior managers – PTs &amp; HT/DHT).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Numeracy Focus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raising attainment in Numeracy</strong></td>
<td>The focus of this project is to develop a better understanding of and capacity for improvement in Numeracy through Broad General Education and on through into Senior Phase. Our key outcomes are to develop better use of our <em>performance information</em> and benchmarking data on <em>children’s progress</em> of Numeracy and confidence and success in Mathematics and other STEM subjects. This project will be led by a curriculum leader to support Kirkwall Grammar Schools and it’s the associated primary schools. The project will build on and develop <em>teacher professionalism</em> through the opportunities created by the Numeracy Hub supported by the local Numeracy Champion. This project will be extended to seek impact across all schools in the local authority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
### Moderation Focus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achieving a Level</th>
<th>The local authority is committed, through school leadership to provide continued support to schools to build confidence in the reliability and validity of teacher judgements, as they assess children’s progress, and moderation of CfE Levels. The local authority will develop capacity for staff to participate and deliver effective moderation to ensure future national CfE data sets are increasingly accurate. This should build on the work already in place in schools and allow us to demonstrate that moderation at school and local authority level is effective and performance information reliable. Our implementation plan will focus on – in a manageable collegiate manner with realistic timescales. There is an expectation that schools will set aside time for school and cluster moderation activity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(SIO)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Support and Challenge Focus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attainment Review &amp; Dialogue (Primary and Junior High Schools)</th>
<th>The school attainment review discussion (integral to the local QAI Calendar of Activity) will focus on the use of relevant, contextualised, performance information and the effectiveness of approaches to learning, teaching and the assessment of children’s progress. Ensuring that ‘schools make a difference’ (school improvement) will require high quality school leadership and improved data literacy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(SIO)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attainment Review &amp; Dialogue (Senior Secondary Schools)</td>
<td>The Dialogue Meetings at KGS and SA will focus on data literacy and the use of relevant, contextualised, performance information and the effectiveness of approaches to learning, teaching and the assessment of children’s progress. Ensuring that ‘schools make a difference’ (school improvement) will require high quality school leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Exec Director)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Review Programme</td>
<td>The school review programme will support and challenge school self-evaluation. It will focus on data literacy and performance information, how assessment of children’s progress informs school improvement planning, parental engagement and school leadership. Opportunities for enhanced teacher professionalism will be offered through the co-construction of review programme for individual schools to meet the need of children, parents and staff. In 2016-17 school reviews will begin to include staff from other local authorities, which further supports the development of school leadership and teacher professionalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SIO)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of Actions in Relation to the Improvement Framework

- Beginning Reading
- Developing Early Literacy Through Play-Based Approaches
- Peedie talkers, thinkers and listeners
- Improving literacy - speaking and listening
- Raising attainment in Numeracy and Mathematics
- Achieving a Level

- Developing Early Literacy Through Play-Based Approaches
- Peedie talkers, thinkers and listeners
- Improving literacy - speaking and listening
- Raising attainment in Numeracy and Mathematics

- Beginning Reading
- Developing Early Literacy Through Play-Based Approaches
- Peedie talkers, thinkers and listeners
- Improving literacy - speaking and listening
- Raising attainment in Numeracy and Mathematics

- Peedie talkers, thinkers and listeners

Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy; Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children.
Noticing the Difference

The following template will be used to evaluate impact and effectiveness:

An overall evaluation of impact will be achieved through use and application of How Good is Our School/Early learning and Childcare.

The template above is designed to ensure that the objectives of the National Improvement Framework and Delivery Plan are kept to the forefront of the professional dialogue associated with self-evaluation.
Appendix 1: The Orkney Offer

As learners enter the last three years of their school education (S4, 5 and 6), they are entitled to experience a Senior Phase where they can continue to develop the four capacities and also achieve qualifications.

The Senior Phase of education provides specialisation, depth and rigour; prepares learners for achieving qualifications to the highest level of which they are capable; continues to develop skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work; continues to provide a range of activities which develop the four capacities and supports young people to achieve a positive and sustained destination.

Over the past three years schools across Scotland, including here in Orkney, have been focussing on the introduction of a new programme of national examinations during the Senior Phase. This has required a number of significant changes, for example, in approaches to learning and teaching, how the timetable is constructed and how and when learners are offered the choice of which subjects they take.

The entitlement to a Senior Phase has led to, or coincided with, an increase in the number of young people staying on at school. This means that while success and achievement remains paramount, the nature of this has begun to change. Success now incorporates a wider range of achievement, extending to more than a certain number of exam passes.

New opportunities are also being created through partnership working. For example, the idea of a ‘Foundation Apprenticeship’ has been introduced. This will see young people being able to learn at school, study at college and spend time in an extended work-based placement. The young person could then leave school having completed the first year of a Modern Apprenticeship (MA) and enter a work setting to continue the MA.

So that these new opportunities can be fully explored and incorporated into the ‘offer’ for young people in the Senior Phase, a number of principles have begun to emerge. These are starting to inform the conversations between the existing partners, for example, (schools and college and could be used when discussing or planning with other partners, for example employers and third sector organisations.

The educational resources across Orkney can be regarded as one ‘learning campus’ in order to facilitate the provision of what will be available under the Orkney Offer – a blend of academic, vocational and other experiences to be combined to ensure the best outcome possible for each young person based on the following principles:

- the Senior Phase and the Orkney Offer should build on each learners prior experience and create a link to a sustained and positive destination;
- the Orkney Offer, which is the sum of the experience in S4, 5 and 6, should be based on a ‘personalised pathway’ that recognises the needs and context of the young person; and
- the Orkney Offer should capitalise on the collective resources the community has, and not be limited to ‘school’, in order to provide the skilled workforce required locally.