INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATION ADVISERS

SCOTTISH ATTAINMENT CHALLENGE – EMERGING ISSUES

PAPER BY THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Introduction

1. The Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched four years ago in February 2015. Initially launched as a four year, £100m programme, after the 2016 Holyrood elections the following year the Challenge was extended to cover the whole of the new Parliament through to 2021, with funding increased to £750m over the five years.

2. We are now almost three years through that five year commitment, with an ever growing body of evidence and experience from the various funding mechanisms to learn from. This paper summarises some of the key messages that are emerging from that evidence and seeks views on how the Challenge might develop over the coming two years, and potentially beyond, to ensure maximum impact on reducing the poverty related attainment gap.

Background

3. In 2018-19, the Scottish Attainment Challenge is comprised of four principal funding streams:

- The Challenge Authorities and Schools Programmes: Up to £50m additional funding given to nine authorities and 74 schools in other authorities with the highest concentration of pupils living in areas of multiple deprivation. Started 2015.
- Pupil Equity Funding: £120m additional funding allocated to each school on the basis of pupils in P1-S3 who are registered for free school meals. Started 2017. 97% of schools currently in receipt of funding.
- Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund: £8m provided to authorities on the basis of the number of looked after children aged 5-15. Started in 2018.
- National Programmes: Up to £6m, provided to support a range of different activities and initiatives which help deliver the aims of the Challenge, including teacher workforce, Education Scotland Attainment Advisors, Regional Improvement Collaboratives, programme evaluation and a number of third sector organisations. Started 2015.

4. The Challenge is monitored and evaluated through a range of different approaches:

- Following the publication of the interim evaluation in March 2018, the evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund, led by Scottish Government analysts, continues, with a survey of all headteachers in Scotland recently completed and due to be published in the spring.
- Education Scotland has recently completed inspections of all nine authorities involved in the Challenge programme – six of the reports have been published on Education Scotland's website, with three more to be published in the coming months.
- The mid-year and annual reports produced by each of the Challenge authorities and schools involved in the Schools programme are considered by the joint Scottish Government and Education Scotland policy and delivery team as part of the on-going monitoring process and also feed into the formal evaluation.
- Education Scotland produce an update report three times a year which summarizes evidence from a range of activities carried out by Attainment Advisors and other Education Scotland staff.
- Nationally, impact of the Challenge will be assessed through national statistics, which are drawn together annually in the National Improvement Framework evidence report, published annually each December.

Emerging strengths

5. The value and importance of investing in staff development to build sustainable capacity is evident, with this being highlighted as a particular strength in those Challenge authorities evaluated by Education Scotland as making very good progress towards improving attainment. A strategic approach to career long professional learning is helping to develop a culture of strong and reflective practitioners who are engaged in professional dialogue and research.

6. Strong leadership at all levels throughout the system helps ensure the equity agenda is embedded so there is a shared, clear understanding of the local and national agenda and empowers staff to improve outcomes for children and young people.

7. Both the interim evaluation and Education Scotland inspection reports found that in the local authorities in the Challenge programme there is now good use of evidence and data in selecting, monitoring and targeting interventions. In addition, there is improved self-evaluation and evidence that there were improvements in the usage and understanding of data amongst staff, leading to continuous improvement.

8. The interim evaluation identified that the level and nature of collaboration appears to have increased, particularly within-school collaboration and collaboration with external partners, including third sector organisations.

9. The interim evaluation reported that the role of local authorities and Attainment Advisors in supporting schools appeared pivotal to the success of the fund. Both played a significant role in helping schools to plan and develop strategies for implementation and targeting, choose interventions and use data to plan, monitor and evaluate their efforts.

Emerging areas for development

10. A significant challenge for local authorities and schools has been the recruitment of staff which puts extra pressure on schools and impacts on the success of planned interventions, leading to frustration and underspend.

11. A growing issue, as we move well into the second half of the five year funding period, relates to how well authorities and schools are building in sustainability to their activities through funding interventions which will leave a lasting legacy and developing exit and continuation strategies.

12. The Education Scotland local authority inspections, in partnership with Audit Scotland, recommend that most authorities need to strengthen the information provided to local elected members through relevant committees to enhance scrutiny and transparency.

13. The interim evaluation in particular identified concerns amongst a range of stakeholders who stressed that it was important to recognise that a number of factors, other than poverty, were likely to affect attainment. Stakeholders emphasised that education could not bring about sustainable change on its own, and that wider partnership across a range of other services was essential.

The Council is asked to consider:

- **How can schools and authorities ensure the funding achieves both the short term outcomes and long-term sustained impact in relation to closing the poverty related attainment gap?**

- **How to maintain and further strengthen the focus on equity at a time of ongoing significant system-wide change in Scottish education?**

- **How to share the learning of what works well to further influence policy and practice?**

Scottish Government
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