

**Aberdeenshire Council Educational Psychology Service****Validated Self-Evaluation Report and Action Plan****November 2016**

Aberdeenshire Educational Psychology Service took part in a week of Validated Self-Evaluation (VSE) activities in conjunction with Education Scotland during the week beginning 3 October 2016.

Aberdeenshire Educational Psychology Service Self-Evaluation & Improvement

The service's strong culture for continuous improvement identified in the inspection of the service in 2008 has been continued and built on. The recently revised service self-evaluation framework supports a cycle of review, analysis and planning which embeds self-evaluation in day to day practice across the roles of the service. The process for prioritising and taking forward improvement activity is informed by this self-evaluation and is clearly aligned with authority priorities. Actions following the inspection in 2008 included developing more robust and systematic way of collecting data and this has been an ongoing area of improvement, most recently focusing on evaluation of our consultation and support for professional learning. We use a wide range of feedback from stakeholders to inform service planning and are working to make this process more robust and transparent. Work is also ongoing to make better use of school and authority data for service evaluation and planning.

Validated Self-Evaluation

Validated self-evaluation is a collaborative, evaluative process. It aims to build and support the capacity of the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) to evaluate their services and improve the quality of services they provide. It is led by the EPS and involves a partnership in which Education Scotland works alongside the service and applies its knowledge of education and expertise in evaluation. The purpose of the VSE process is to support, extend and challenge the service's own self-evaluation, to affirm, or otherwise, their evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement.

The process led by Aberdeenshire EPS involved all EPs and a wide range of partners and stakeholders as well as the team from Education Scotland comprising the Lead Facilitator and two Associate Assessors. We expected the week's activities to provide support and challenge from within the EPS as well as from our partners and the Education Scotland team, to deepen our learning and self-evaluation.

Themes

There are two nationally agreed themes:

Theme 1 Learning & Teaching

Theme 2 Partnership Working

Within Theme 1, our chosen focus was the service's use of an evidence-based approach to improving learning (Visible Learning). We have been gradually introducing a VL approach over the past two years and think we may be reaching a tipping point in terms of momentum within the EPS and wider Education and Children's Services (E&CS). VSE provided a good



opportunity to take stock of how well the EPS is contributing to improving learning through this work and how we can strengthen it.

For Theme 2, the focus was on the service's capacity building work and how that could be improved and built on particularly in relation to strengthening Early Years work. In response to research evidence that the poverty-related attainment gap is already large before children start school, and that it is most effective and efficient to intervene early in children's lives, we have adjusted our time allocation to provide additional time for this area of work. We wanted to use the VSE process to help us plan how to make best use of this time to build professional capacity in early learning in Aberdeenshire. Whilst it was recognised that our current model of service delivery to schools could not be directly transferred to the Early Years context, the service was keen to continue to improve current service delivery, whilst also identifying aspects of practice which could be transferred to the Early Years context.

Theme 1 Learning & Teaching

Within this theme we set out to address the following questions:

What difference are we making to learning and teaching through our work with teachers, school leaders and officers in Aberdeenshire using John Hattie's Visible Learning research and evidence based approach? How can this work be strengthened?

To address this question we sought to find out how well we support at the following levels of the system:

- school leaders – evidence informed practice, visions, professional development, robust self-evaluation
- classroom teachers – classroom practice, personal capacity, interpersonal capacity
- learners – dispositions for learning, metacognition, assessment capable learners
- authority – evidence informed practice, contribution to strategic direction

Activities included discussions with children, teachers, school leaders, QIOs, senior leaders in E&CS using a variety of approaches:

- Group activity with primary school leaders followed by interview with teachers
- Focus group with school leaders
- Discussion group with class teachers
- Interview with senior managers

Strengths

The following key strengths were highlighted during the VSE process:

- The work of EPs in collaboration with partners has developed interest and enthusiasm for evidence-based practice: teachers, school leader and QIOs are keen to engage further in the process of Visible Learning.



- The EPS's use of a practitioner enquiry approach to Career-Long Professional Learning (CLPL) is particularly valued by teachers and school leaders. Teachers appreciate opportunities for dialogue with peers and challenge from EPS.
- EPs are using psychology to shift the focus from teaching to learning and how to improve it.
- School leaders appreciate EPs' support to understand the links between evidence-based approaches, authority priorities and developments such as cooperative learning as well as HGIOS4, the National Improvement Framework and Scottish Attainment Challenge.
- The EPS's championing of evidence-based practice is valued by E&CS senior leaders.
- The EPS is well positioned to contribute to strategic planning.

Areas for Improvement

The following areas for improvement were identified through the VSE process:

- Work with partners to develop a strategy for Visible Learning in Aberdeenshire with a clear indication of what a school may expect if they enter into the process and the support they can expect from the EPS.
- Make better use of existing school and authority data
- Consider what further quantitative and qualitative data should be gathered to measure impact
- Continue to develop EPS knowledge, skills and confidence to support the implementation of a Visible Learning approach
- Work to develop the capacity of the EPS team to support a Visible Learning approach in schools across the authority, using robust prioritisation to make the necessary time available.
- Develop transition from primary to secondary by involving secondary schools in collaborative practitioner enquiry with primary colleagues.
- Work with QIOs, QIMs and school leaders to develop a single model of self-evaluation based on HGIOS4
- Consider how to share key Visible Learning messages with parents/carers and the wider community.

Theme 2 Partnership Working

Within this theme we set out to answer the question:

How can we strengthen our partnership working in the Early Years by learning from our practice in other areas?

In order to address this question, we sought to find out:

- How can we strengthen our partnership working in the Early Years at the strategic level by learning from practice in other strategic areas?



- How can we improve the ways in which the EPS supports the professional development of primary school staff, and take this learning into our work with our Early Years partners?
- What is the added value of the EPS collaborating with partners to support the professional development of others? How can we take this learning into our work with our Early Years partners?

Activities to address these questions included:

- A SWOT Analysis with Primary School Leaders, which considered the strengths and weaknesses of our current approach to CLPL work with primary schools, and the opportunities and threats associated with increasing our CLPL focus in the Early Years.
- A Focus Group with strategic partners which considered our strengths and areas for improvement when working at an authority level.
- A SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Reality) analysis with partners who also have a role in supporting the professional development of others, with a view to strengthening this collaboration.
- A PCOP (People Centred Organisational Planning) Approach to support the development of a plan for working collaboratively with Early Years Principal Teachers.
- Interview with senior managers

Strengths

The following key strengths were highlighted during the VSE process:

- The EPS is well positioned to contribute to improvements through membership of local and authority level multi-agency groups.
- The EPS has positive professional relationships with a range of partners at operational and strategic levels. The “softer” skills of EPs are recognised and appreciated by our partners, including for example, skills in facilitation, questioning, evidence-based thinking, and making conceptual links, as well as attitudinal factors such as optimism and tenacity.
- Distributive leadership is well embedded across the service, and EPs are skilled and confident in taking a leadership role in supporting improvements.
- Our Consultation Model of Service Delivery supports collaborative working. The model is well embedded in practice and valued by schools.
- Informal Consultations support the professional development of school staff.
- The EPS facilitates professional learning opportunities on a wide range of topics. Cluster level input with follow-up support tailored to the needs of individual schools was identified by School Leaders as being their preferred approach
- Collaboration with the EPS is valued by partners who also have a role in supporting the professional development of others. Such partners included those from within Education & Children's Services, as well as multi-agency partners such as Speech & Language Therapy, and Mental Health Services.
- The EPS has a strong improvement focus, as evidenced by the development of our CLPL evaluation framework.



Areas for Improvement

Better use of data

Further work is planned to ensure the service's framework for evaluating support for others' CLPL is fully embedded in practice and recorded in such a way that allows the tracking of data trends over time.

The EPS seeks to develop a better understanding of data trends within the Early Years. Work with Early Years partners at an operational and strategic level should identify what data is needed and how it can be used to inform planning and monitoring of work in the Early Years.

Informal Consultations

There should be an ongoing focus on ensuring that EP time in schools is used to best effect. School Leaders reported that a significant proportion of EP time in schools is spent in Multi-Agency Action Planning Meetings. It was felt that an increased focus on building capacity within the school through Informal Consultations with staff would be a more effective use of this time.

In increasing our focus on the Early Years, the EPS aims to develop a sustainable, capacity building model of service delivery. An Informal Consultation Model delivered to Early Years Principal Teachers who provide direct support to Early Years Practitioners would offer a manageable, paced approach to increasing EPS practice in the Early Years. A clear understanding of the purpose and process of informal consultation should be developed between the EPS and Early Years Principal Teachers, and a service wide model for delivery should then be constructed, including time implications and plans for evaluation.

Strategic CLPL Planning

An increased emphasis on multi-agency joint planning, implementation and evaluation of priority collaborative CLPL work with partners who also have a role in supporting the professional development of others would allow a more streamlined, targeted approach to such work. In instances where effective CLPL work has been developed at local level, it would be helpful to have a process through which it can be identified and up-scaled when and as appropriate in other contexts across Aberdeenshire. This will help minimise duplication and ensure consistency of key messages.

In terms of the Early Years, the EPS should work with the Early Years Principal Teacher Team to explore how they can support and enhance the existing CLPL plan for Early Years Practitioners.

At a multi-agency level, the EPS should continue to support the ongoing development of GIRFEC strategic priorities for the Early Years. On the basis of these strategic priorities and available data, the EPS should then develop an evidence-based CLPL proposal, with a commissioning offer.

Support for Early Years Forums

Some discussion took place throughout the VSE process to the potential future role of the EPS in supporting local Early Years Forums, which EPs have recently joined. Further consideration is required to ensure that EP involvement with Early Years Forums contributes to effective and sustainable working practices. Examples of the areas highlighted that EPs



may be able to support included facilitation of meetings, collaborative improvement planning, research skills and effective use of data.

Wider Stakeholder Engagement in the Early Years

The EPS should consider how best to incorporate other stakeholders' views in service planning including those of parents and carers.

Overarching Strengths & Capacity for Improvement

The following strengths demonstrated and highlighted during the VSE process transcend the two themes:

- The EPS team is committed, skilled and enthusiastic.
- There is a clear shared vision and aims, with a strong focus on building capacity.
- A strong ethos of professional learning and service improvement is evident.
- The service's strong commitment to evidence-based practice is valued by colleagues in and beyond E&CS.
- The well-developed model of distributive leadership was demonstrated in practice during the VSE week.
- The service has a strong position within the structures of E&CS to contribute to strategy development.
- The service is respected and trusted by senior leaders in E&CS.
- There are opportunities for E&CS to draw on psychologists' facilitative skills more at strategic level.
- Effective relationships with a range of partners were evident throughout the process.

Overarching areas for improvement

Some of the areas for improvement highlighted during the VSE process also transcend the two themes:

- The service needs to make better use of data at all levels (individual child, educational establishments, authority)
- A stronger communication strategy, linked with E&CS communication would increase the understanding and engagement of partners in schools and beyond
- The service could increase its impact through a more proactive role at authority level, seeking commissioning for key improvement work
- Careful prioritisation is needed to ensure effective focus on key improvement activities.

Reflections on the VSE Process

The EPS planned carefully to gain maximum benefit from the VSE process and EPs showed commitment and skill in ensuring the activities led to effective learning for the service. Partners made a very strong contribution to the process bringing support and challenge, with a range of helpful perspectives on the work of the service and valuable insights regarding possible improvements.



Through the VSE process the service found confirmation of the strengths and areas of improvement identified through its ongoing self-evaluation. The activities with partners and the Education Scotland team led to a sharper understanding of strengths and how they are recognised and valued by others. The process supported the service to clarify key areas for improvement.

Action Plan

High Level Themes & Actions

Theme 1 A Visible Learning Approach to Improving Learning & Teaching

Theme	Actions
Move from project to strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a model for delivery • Develop information & proposal to take to Extended Management Team • Contribute to development of more integrated ECS strategy for improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap
Ensuring sustainable impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a clear focus for further work, e.g. language for learning across P7-S1 transition • Work with and through partners • Work at cluster level • Continue to develop practitioner enquiry approach to CLPL
Support the development of a more streamlined approach to self-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tie in with HGIOS4 QIs • Collaborate with QIOs & QIMs
Capacity building within the EPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use service development days and CPD strategy to ensure all EPs' have knowledge & confidence in the evidence base and improvement methodology
Better use of data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with partners to identify, gather and analyse relevant existing and where necessary new data to inform next steps in developing the visible learning approach

Theme 2 A Capacity-building Approach to Early Years Work

Theme	Actions
Better use of data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed practice framework for CLPL evaluation • Work with partners to identify, gather and analyse relevant existing and where necessary new data to inform next steps in developing Early Years work
Informal consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review EPS time in schools to increase focus on informal consultations • Develop, implement and evaluate a model of informal consultation with Early Years Principal Teachers
Strategic CLPL Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan collaboratively with EYPTs to support and enhance the CLPL plan for Early Years Practitioners • Joint service level planning, implementation & evaluation of priority collaborative CLPL work (E&CS, AHPs) • Develop process through which effective local level collaborative CLPL work can be identified and upscaled as appropriate • Contribute to development of multi-agency strategic Early Years priorities, and develop an evidence-based CLPL proposal, with a commissioning offer.
Support for Early Years Forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development of a sustainable model of EPS support to facilitate development of effective working practices in Early Years Forums
Engagement with wider stakeholder community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate parental engagement into service improvement planning

Overarching Themes

Theme	Actions
Better use of data at all levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and use establishment & authority level data • Identify at the action planning stage any additional relevant data that could be gathered to evaluate service effectiveness • Consider how to make best use of newly formed GIRFEC Data Hub • Support EYFs and local GIRFEC groups with data analysis
Stronger communication strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the EPS communication strategy • Link with E&CS communication strategy • Consider best timing of communications with schools and partners to fit with their improvement cycles and other commitments
More proactive role at strategic level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take relevant proposals to Extended Management Team to seek commissioning • Offer EP facilitation skills to support self-evaluation & planning e.g. in Management Forum
Prioritisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure service plans are focused and manageable

These actions will be further developed and refined through service improvement planning processes.