

**ANGUS COUNCIL  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**6 JUNE 2000**

**S1/S2 RESEARCH REPORT: "DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING AND TEACHING  
IN ANGUS SECONDARY SCHOOLS"**

**REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

**ABSTRACT**

This report draws the Committee's attention to the publication of "Developing a Framework for Effective Learning and Teaching in Angus Secondary Schools" following a research investigation of S1/S2 provision.

**1 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- a) notes the terms of this report;
- b) notes the terms of the executive summary of the research report (see Appendix);
- c) notes the very strong basis provided by the report for future curriculum and staff development activities in relation to Learning and Teaching in S1/S2;
- d) notes that a copy of the full research report is available for perusal in the Members' Lounge (a copy of the full report can readily be made available to any individual member of the Education Committee).

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 At its meeting of 8 June 1999 the Education Committee approved report number 564/99 (Article 20 refers) in which I sought authorisation to negotiate a contract with the University of Strathclyde and Northern College to carry out a research and evaluation exercise in respect of S1/S2 provision in Angus secondary schools.
- 2.2 The decision to undertake such an evaluation exercise related in part to a commitment to review aspects of Learning and Teaching in secondary schools within the overall Best Value Review of Secondary Education. That review is now almost complete and the associated Best Value report and improvement plan will be submitted to the Education Committee for consideration at its meeting in August 2000.
- 2.3 The evaluation of Learning and Teaching in S1 and S2 in Angus Secondary Schools was undertaken by Dr Brian Boyd of the University of Strathclyde and Professor Mary Simpson of the University of Edinburgh (formerly of Northern College).
- 2.4 The major activities undertaken by Dr Boyd and Professor Simpson included:
  - interviews with secondary school senior managers and with teachers of S1/S2 classes
  - shadowing S1 and S2 pupils
  - interviews with primary head teachers and P7 teachers in relation to P7/S1 continuity issues
  - observations of P7 pupils at work
  - contacts with parents, individually and in groups, to find out their views, and their expectations and aspirations for their children at the start of S1.

### 3 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE PROJECT REPORT

- 3.1 As its title implies, "Developing a Framework for Effective Learning and Teaching in Angus Secondary Schools" seeks to provide Angus secondary schools with a manageable framework for the development of practical policies which will promote effective Learning and Teaching in S1 and S2 and beyond. The report also seeks to offer teaching staff strategies to support staff development which will be likely to enhance the quality of learning and teaching within the S1/S2 curriculum.
- 3.2 Given the significant range of activities undertaken by the researchers the report is impressively comprehensive in scope. It provides a rich critique of the learning and teaching situation in S1/S2 and it provides detailed insights into the characteristics of what makes for effective learning and indeed effective teaching in the early years of secondary school.
- 3.3 The report recognises the considerable commitment and sheer hard work of teachers seeking to deliver the 5-14 Programme to S1/S2 pupils. It is acknowledged that schools are hugely complex and diverse organisations, and that teaching is an increasingly difficult and demanding job. Helpfully, the researchers highlight the commitment of the vast majority of teachers in managing daily classroom activities and believe that such commitment should be more widely recognised and commended than is often the case.
- 3.4 The key issues covered by the report are as follows:
- primary/secondary transition arrangements
  - the processes and effects of timetabling S1/S2 classes
  - the organisation of classes
  - the characteristics of learning and teaching in S1/S2
  - the design of a framework for the production of a learning and teaching policy, which takes due account of the needs of teachers, of pupils and of parents
  - the rationale for the place of Information and Communications Technology in secondary schools
  - direct pupil experiences of the school curriculum presented through detailed and insightful descriptions of "One School Day in the Life of an S1 and an S2 Pupil"
  - the application at whole school level or within subject departments of a framework to support Effective Learning and Teaching
  - the use and application of a framework to analyse and to describe the characteristics of the "learning classroom" so that teachers of **all** subjects begin to look at the generic factors associated with successful learning.

### 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Key recommendations have been made by the researchers on the basis of the detailed range of evaluation activities described in 2.4 above. A clear conclusion from their observations of learning and teaching in S1/S2 in Angus secondary schools is that, notwithstanding the commitment of teachers and indeed the high quality of many individual lessons, the traditional subject-based curriculum structures which currently exist in secondary schools make it very difficult to deliver a coherent curriculum to S1/S2 pupils. These structures also make it very difficult for secondary teachers to collaborate with each other and with primary colleagues in order to build appropriately on pupils' prior learning in primary school; the net result of this is that there is less progression in the S1 curriculum as pupils move between primary and secondary school.
- 4.2 These findings corroborate the outcomes of other research projects and evaluation exercises including a recent Angus Council exercise about the effectiveness of school clusters in supporting the implementation of the national 5-14 Programme.
- 4.3 In making their recommendations, the researchers are conscious of the significant pressures with which secondary teachers are having to contend as the result of:
- concomitant curriculum developments occurring at different stages of the secondary school
  - the expectations of the Scottish Executive in relation to pupil attainment targets
  - the expectations of parents for improved levels of pupil attainment
  - the apparently unrelenting change agenda which the education service is required to address
- 4.4 Underpinning the major recommendations of the report is a fundamental encouragement to secondary teachers to accept the need to find ways and time to develop more collaborative practices within schools in order to recognise and to share each others expertise. There is also a related encouragement that, at least in the lower stages of the secondary school, teachers should increasingly see themselves more as teachers of pupils rather than as specialist teachers within an individual academic discipline, charged above all to "transmit knowledge."

4.5 **The main recommendations detailed in the executive summary and analysed in much greater depth within the report are summarised below:**

- **secondary schools need to develop a more common understanding among teachers of how progression and continuity can be managed** and thereafter to devise learning and teaching contexts which enable the 5-14 curriculum to be “covered” without relying upon a curriculum model which is predominantly concerned with “knowledge transmission.”
- while teachers are confident in the use of diagnostic and summative assessment, there needs to be greater use made of formative assessment in order to support and inform effective learning and teaching strategies; **it is recommended that examples of effective practice are considered and introduced in all schools.**
- notwithstanding the existence of robust strategies in all Angus secondary schools for auditing and reporting on key areas of the curriculum, there was little evidence that the outcomes of such audits were used systematically to change teaching practices in order to improve learning outcomes; **it is recommended that arrangements are made to allow teachers to collaborate more closely about learning and teaching strategies and, where appropriate, to try out interesting innovations in cross-curricular or departmental groups.**
- while significant amendments to the S1/S2 curriculum structure in secondary schools are being made in light of Angus Council advice and guidelines (not least in reducing the number of teacher contacts), it will still be important to consider possibly more fundamental amendments to lower school timetabling approaches; **it is recommended that priority be given to the consideration of new approaches to the timetabling of S1 and S2, in line with SCCC guidelines in order to embed the principles of progression, continuity and coherence in pupil learning.**
- given the importance of ensuring that all pupils acquire core or key skills through the development of more coherent learning experiences in S1/S2, **it is recommended that in each school systems are developed for taking an overview of pupil learning across the curriculum so that core skills are promoted and consolidated.**
- the researchers have explored in considerable depth class organisation arrangements in Angus secondary schools; their conclusion with respect to broad banding setting arrangements is that while these had solved - in those schools where they operated - some problems, they undoubtedly had created others; **it is recommended that schools considering a move towards setting should debate the educational effects and implications across a broad forum within the school - including pupils and parents - and ensure that the debate is informed by research findings and the advice of specialist colleagues in learning support.**
- the research exercise has given proper attention to the potential of ICT for enhancing pupils’ learning and attainment; the researchers have fundamental concerns about separating out ICT as a separate subject within the curriculum in S1 and S2 and believe that this is **“not only not a quick fix, but quite simply the wrong fix”**; **it is recommended that schools think through their policy on ICT over a long timescale with a view to setting in place arrangements which allow the power and versatility of ICT to enhance and to complement activities which pupils experience across the curriculum.**
- the researchers underscore the desirability and value of schools seeking to tap into the diverse skills and talents of staff and pupils; **it is recommended that each school develops arrangements to promote the sharing of expertise and responsibilities between teacher and teacher, between teachers and other professionals (eg the school librarian), between teacher and pupil, and between pupil and pupil.**
- **a commitment to share expertise should be supported through the creation in each school of a learning and teaching policy designed to be manageable** and designed to address the needs of all within the school particularly the needs of teachers and learners. Appendix 3 of the full report offers Angus secondary schools a framework for the production of such a policy; **it is recommended that development of a workable and working policy should take place over at least two sessions. It is recognised that the approach being addressed within the proposed framework will in many instances consolidate much existing good practice observed in Angus secondary schools.**
- in taking forward into classroom practice such a policy, **it is recommended that Angus secondary teachers draw upon a framework for analysing their classroom practice entitled “Towards a Learning Classroom” provided in Appendix 4 to the full report.**

## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 This research report is a substantial and comprehensive resource which complements very significantly work carried out by Angus Council in relation to the Secondary Best Value Review and in relation to implementing local guidelines for the management of the 5-14 Programme in secondary schools.
- 5.2 The report is rich in advice, observation and insight and will provide a strong basis for the delivery of an appropriate range of staff development activities whether centre-based or school-based with a view to improving the quality of learning and teaching in S1/S2.
- 5.3 The challenges of implementing a coherent 5-14 curriculum in secondary schools is a matter of national concern. Evidence of this can be seen from the high number of general and subject-specific 5-14 reports produced by Her Majesty's Inspectors over the last two years. I believe that "Developing a Framework for Effective Learning and Teaching in Angus Secondary Schools" will have a resonance and interest beyond Angus and I am confident that the report will make a major contribution to the national debate about what makes for effective learning and teaching in S1/S2. Professor Simpson and Dr Boyd are to be congratulated for this comprehensive, challenging and yet supportive report.

## **6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising from the contents of this report.

## **7 CONSULTATION**

In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Council this report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and the Director of Law and Administration.

JIM ANDERSON  
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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

## **APPENDIX**