

**Summary of evaluation of the
educational psychology service**

West Lothian Council

29 September 2009

Definition of terms used in this report.

HM Inspectors use published criteria when making evaluations. They are published as quality indicators which relate evaluations to six levels. HMIE began using a six-point scale to make evaluations in August 2005. The table below shows how the six-point scale relates to the four-point scale that we used previously.

Old level	New level	Description
Very good	Excellent	Outstanding, sector leading
	Very good	Major strengths
Good	Good	Important strengths with some areas for improvement
	Satisfactory	Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Fair	Weak	Important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Major weaknesses

This report also uses the following words to describe numbers and proportions:

almost all	over 90%
most	75-90%
majority	50-74%
less than half	15-49%
few	up to 15%

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1. The aims, nature and scope of the inspection

Recommendation 20 of the *Review of Provision of Educational Psychology Services in Scotland (2002)* charged HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), on behalf of the Scottish Ministers, to provide an external evaluation of the effectiveness of the educational psychology service (EPS) in improving the impact and outcomes for children, young people and families.

The inspection of West Lothian educational psychology provision was undertaken on behalf of stakeholders. The evaluation of EPS was conducted within a framework of quality indicators which embody the Government's policy on Best Value. The inspection team also included an Associate Assessor who is a principal educational psychologist (PEP) serving in another Scottish local authority.

This web-based report should be read alongside other strategic inspections of West Lothian Council which sets out the wider context in which EPS are delivered.

The Educational Psychology Service

The West Lothian EPS is based in Livingston. At the time of inspection the complement of educational psychologists (EPs) was 13.5 full-time equivalent (FTE). There was one FTE unfilled vacancy. A new EPS management team had recently been established consisting of a PEP and three deputy principal educational psychologists (DPEP). There were four senior educational psychologists (SEP). The service had established two research assistants posts to support research and development work. A new office supervisor had been recently appointed. The service was supported by 3.00 FTE administration staff.

2. What key outcomes has the service achieved?

The EPS had made significant contributions to policy development and practice across the authority which had improved services for children and young people. The service had also effectively contributed to the implementation of *The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004* through its work on collaborative planning within the authority staged intervention model the *Continuum of Support*. EPS staff at all levels were well represented on, and made valuable contributions to, a range of strategic and operational working groups across the Council. This included contributions to the development of the *Life Stages model*, a new council-wide model of service delivery as well as to multi-agency planning and resource groups at school and cluster levels. The work of the post-school psychological services had been reinvigorated through new strategic links with the *More Choices More Chances* agenda. The EPS recognised the need to become more formally involved in improving outcomes for all children and young people through developments relating to the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*. The EPS had been very successful in building schools' capacity to evaluate and improve learning and teaching through their innovative *Action Enquiry* approach to research. EPs had also been very effective in improving outcomes for specific groups of children and young people. They had successfully developed a range of initiatives to support children and young people with autism, trauma and

bereavement, speech and language needs, those in transition (*More Choices, More Chances*) and significantly looked after and accommodated children.

The EPS complied effectively with appropriate educational guidance and legislation. Statutory requirements relating to the *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004* were well embedded in individual practice and service documentation. The service was aware that further work was required regarding their wider statutory duties in collaboration with the Children's Reporter.

3. How well does the service meet the needs of its stakeholders?

The service had developed effective working relationships with children, young people and families. Children and young people had good access to a wide range of EPS. Primary and secondary-aged children with additional support needs were well supported by the EPS at times of transition. EPs were skilled at communicating with children, young people and families. Children and young people felt that they could trust the EP and most could identify impact of EP involvement. A few felt that they did not have a sufficient say in planning interventions. The service had plans in place to consider increased participation of children and young people. Foster carers were particularly positive about the service provided by the looked after and accommodated team. Overall, parents felt that EPs were approachable and that they were encouraged to take an active part in planning for their child. A few parents and families felt that the quality of service was variable, dependant on the particular EP assigned to the school. The roles, remits and functions of the EPS were not yet clear to all stakeholders. The service had made a useful start to consulting with parents on service developments. A more systematic approach now requires to be taken to identifying impact on children, young people and families.

Schools, authority staff and partner agencies were very positive about the work of the EPS. Colleagues particularly valued the responsiveness of the service to local need. Headteachers welcomed the *practice agreements* which clarified the roles and remits of the EPS. The EPS had established strong and effective partnerships with education officers and specialist support staff. Education officers welcomed EPS contributions to multidisciplinary meetings at school and cluster levels which were improving outcomes for children and young people. EPS involvement in developments to support the needs of children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural needs were effective and highly regarded. While informal communication with schools and authority staff was helpful, Heads of Service and education provision should be given more formal opportunities to shape the development of EPS.

Staff in the EPS were highly motivated, and felt well supported by PEP and DPEPs, senior education managers and their peers. Professional review and development systems were in place for most staff to ensure that the training and development needs of staff were identified and met. The service provided strong support for EPS staff and was aware of the need to further review its support and supervision system to increase challenge and ensure consistency of practice. EPs collaborated on a number of successful projects and training programmes, for example, research, post-school psychological services, video interactive guidance, early years and nurture groups.

They also made helpful contributions to the ongoing training of a wide range of professionals including colleagues from local colleges, health and social work. Staff reported positively about continuing professional development opportunities. Administrative staff enjoyed working in the EPS and felt trusted and valued. EPs were actively encouraged to be creative. They had developed a range of innovative interventions which had an effective impact beyond the service and resulted in improvements in services for stakeholders. This included the EPS developments on nurture and the valuable support pack for looked after and accommodated children adopted by a number of Scottish councils. There had been significant staff changes that although well managed had an impact on some schools and some staff within the service. Service managers should ensure that EPS developments are discussed fully with all members of the team so that priorities for improvement are understood by the all staff.

4. How good is the service's delivery of key processes?

The service delivered a broad and balanced range of services across consultation and advice, assessment, intervention, training and research. Consultation and advice was used effectively to support the needs of children and families. EPs worked collaboratively to support assessment processes in schools and with other agencies in line with the authority *Continuum of Support*. This included the Joint Assessment Forum, Jigsaw Assessment and Co-ordination of Services which supported young children and their families. The PEP was aware that a greater consistency of approach was required across the service in relation to consultation, advice and assessment approaches.

The service delivered a wide range of very effective interventions at the level of the child, school and authority. These included coaching, cognitive behaviour therapy and restorative approaches for children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural needs. Solution oriented approaches were well embedded across the service and had been adopted by a number of schools. Individual EPs delivered sensitive and effective case work to support the needs of vulnerable children and families. There was growing evidence of the positive impact delivered by the specialised team for children and young people who were looked after and accommodated by the authority.

Appropriate and relevant professional development and training had been delivered to a wide range of stakeholders across the Council including training on synthetic phonics, understanding and managing asperger's syndrome, and video interactive guidance. Training was often delivered in partnership with colleagues from health and social work. The evaluation feedback indicated a high level of satisfaction with the training provided. The service should now begin to evaluate the impact of training on practice and raise awareness of this role across stakeholders.

Research was a significant strength across the service. The EPS had a robust research strategy which effectively met service and authority priorities in improving outcomes for children and young people. The *Action Enquiry* approach to research was excellent and was making a significant impact on outcomes for children and young people across the

authority. It encouraged and supported schools in undertaking research linked to their improvement plan objectives. Research projects and findings had been published in peer reviewed journals and presented at national conferences. Significant support and encouragement to undertake research was provided by the relevant DPEP and the team of research assistants. Equality and fairness was well embedded in individual practice and across the service as a whole.

Features of good practice: Research and Development

Research and Development was very well developed across the service and work in this area was effectively embedded within schools and the authority. EPs were well supported by a research team consisting of two research assistants, and a depute principal educational psychologist. A large number of school based *Action Enquiry* projects were supported with involvement ranging from consultation and advice to project design and data analysis. Research support was provided to a wide range of authority strategic initiatives including *More Choices More Chances* and *Nurture Groups*. Research findings were widely disseminated both locally and nationally through conferences and publications.

Interventions - Improving outcomes for children and young people

The service was involved in a number of authority wide interventions which have in turn reflected national priorities including, *Getting it right for every child*, mental health and wellbeing and autism spectrum disorders. Involvement in these had been both service-driven and authority-led and was a reflection of the strength of the relationship between the service and the authority. This had resulted in the service taking forward a number of key initiatives including: *Nurture Groups*, *Promoting Alternative Thinking Skills (Pre-School)* and *Video Interactive Guidance* approaches to support children and young people and their families.

Supporting the needs of looked after and accommodated children and young people – a team approach

The service, in joint partnership with the authority and the social policy department had created the post of senior educational psychologist (SEP) for looked after and accommodated children. At the time of its inception, this post was unique within Scotland. Developments included the creation of the "LAC Pack", a detailed support package of materials for use by schools working with children who are looked after. Accompanying this publication was a substantial training programme and follow-up support network for practitioners. The SEP had a dual role as part of the multi-agency team and the EPS.

More detailed report is available at www.hmie.gov.uk.

5. How good is the service's management?

The EPS promoted the aims of the Council in an effective manner. The EPS developed and evaluated its improvement plan as a whole service. The service had made good progress in linking its work more effectively with the key priorities of the education department and the Council. Greater transparency was required in the planning process to demonstrate how improvements in performance impact on local and national priorities. Commendably, a range of stakeholders had been involved in reviewing EPS policy in line with the *Equality relevance* and *Equality Impact Assessments*. The service had developed a helpful policy framework to guide practice but it recognised the need to develop a more robust system to monitor policy compliance. Communication and active consultation at the point of service delivery, including through working groups and initiatives, was well developed.

The EPS had established good links with a number of partner agencies. Most valued the specialised knowledge and skills of the EPS. A few partners expressed concerns over accessibility to the services, consistency of practice and sought clarification regarding the roles and remits of the service. There was not as yet a well-planned and systematic programme in place to enable active participation of partners in the work of the service. The service should now implement plans to improve and develop further its relationships with all stakeholders and to more actively engage them in the future development of the service.

6. How good is leadership?

The PEP and senior education officers with responsibility for EPS showed a strong commitment to continuous improvement. Communication between the senior education managers and the EPS was effective. The PEP and her newly appointed senior management team, supported by the senior education officers had established a clear vision and direction for the service. The EPS recognised that service aims and objectives required to be more clearly focused on impact and outcomes. The highly regarded PEP made strong strategic contributions to council-wide priorities. The PEP was well supported by the DPEPs. They provided effective support to staff across the service. Senior psychologists had clear roles and responsibilities and provided helpful professional leadership in their areas of responsibility. Distributed leadership was well developed and staff at all levels were engaged in effective local and strategic groups and cluster initiatives including *Solution Orientated Schools and Circles of Resilience* and *More Choices, More Chances*.

Succession planning was well managed and the EPS had been very successful in retaining and developing staff. All EPS staff demonstrated a strong commitment to reflective practice and continuous improvement. Service managers encouraged creativity and had a clear view of what constitutes best practice. They regularly examined, researched, and adopted innovative practice being taken forward in other services. They routinely use the results of self-evaluation exercises to improve outcomes for children and young people. Approaches to challenge across the service need to be further developed and more formally embedded in daily practice.

Key strengths

The service had:

- established strong strategic links at authority level which were helping to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families;
- delivered a wide range of creative and collaborative interventions to support the needs and wellbeing of children, young people and families;
- developed an innovative research programme which was improving learning and teaching across the authority; and
- well-motivated and enthusiastic staff who sought out opportunities to be innovative.

Main points for action

The service should:

- ensure planned developments lead to clear impact and improved outcomes for service users, particularly children and young people;
- strengthen partnership working through more effective stakeholder engagement; and
- further improve outcomes for children and young people through establishing greater consistency of practice.

As a result of the high performance, and the effective leadership of this service, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. The service and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report.

Anna Boni
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Directorate 5
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Appendix 1

Quality Indicator	Evaluation
Improvements in performance	Very good
Fulfilment of statutory duties	Good
Impact on children and young people	Good
Impact on parents, carers and families	Good
Impact on staff	Very good
Impact on the local community	Very good
Impact on the wider community	Very good
Consultation and advice	Good
Assessment	Good
Intervention	Very good
Provision of professional development and training for other groups including parents, teachers and health professionals	Good
Research and strategic development	Very good
Inclusion, equality and fairness	Very good
Policy development and review	Good
Participation of stakeholders	Good
Operational planning	Good
Partnership working	Good
Leadership and direction	Very good
Leadership of change and improvement	Good

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