

ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE– 22 SEPTEMBER 2015

ANGUS SCHOOLS ANNUAL SURVEY 2014/15

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ABSTRACT

This report summarises the findings of a survey conducted with children, young people, parents and staff at the end of session 2014/15. Further actions are proposed in response to the key findings.

1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Note the key findings of the Angus Schools Annual Survey 2014/15
- (ii) Approve the recommended next steps set out in section 5 of this report

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COMMUNITY PLAN/SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT/COPORATE PLAN

This report contributes to the following local outcome(s) contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement 2013-2016:

3. BACKGROUND

This report summarises the responses to a recent annual survey issued to Angus Council parents, children, young people and staff at the end of session 2014/15. Respondents had the choice to respond by a survey monkey link or in paper form. This report highlights the key findings from each group of respondents. Survey responses have been graded as follows:

- Almost all – over 90%
- Most – 75 to 90%
- Majority – 50 to 74%
- Less than half – 15 to 49%
- Few – under 15%

4. CURRENT POSITION

4.1 Children and Young People

1585 children and young people from P4 to S6 completed the survey. It is noted that one P2 also returned a survey. This represents 14.14% of the P4 to S6 school population. A small number of schools piloted the use of the survey earlier than the annual survey. Their responses have been amalgamated with the total responses meaning that over 1600 pupils completed the survey. There was at least one response from a pupil at 42 of our 61 schools. Children and young people were asked how much they agreed with a number of statements under the themes:

- My School
- My Teachers
- My Learning

4.1.1 My School

Most young people report that their school is helping to make them feel more confident and feel safe and cared for. A few young people disagree that they feel safe and cared for in school and a very small number don't know. Most young people also report that they have adults in school they can speak to if they are upset and worried. Most young people report

that school staff make sure that pupils behave well. Whilst the majority of young people state that staff are good at dealing with bullying behaviour, around a quarter don't agree with this and a few don't know. There are a range of views about how good the pupil council is at getting improvements made. Whereas the majority agree with this, less than half disagree or don't know.

Many young people took the opportunity to provide positive comments about their school. Whilst most young people are positive about the help that they get at school, some young people do not feel that they get the help that they need, with some feeling that bullying in particular is an issue. There is also a view that the role of the Pupil Council is highly variable.

4.1.2 **My Teachers**

Most young people report that teachers and other staff listen to them and pay attention to what they say. Most young people also feel that others in the school treat them fairly and with respect. In addition most young people feel school staff encourage them and set a good example. Most young people feel school staff are easy to talk to.

Comments indicated that many young people feel that their teachers are kind, supportive, friendly and fun. Some feel uncomfortable about teachers having favourites and treating some pupils differently. A small number of comments were less positive about their classroom experience.

4.1.3 **My Learning**

The majority of young people report that their teachers talk to them regularly about what they do well and how to improve. Around a quarter of young people disagree with this. Most young people state that they get help when they need it. The majority of young people are asked about how to improve how they learn in school. Approximately one in 10 young people didn't know the answer to this and 27% disagreed. Almost all young people agree that teachers expect them to take responsibility for their own work in class.

Many young people noted that they were recognised for completing good work and challenged through target setting. Young People commented that learning about SHANARRI and Growth Mind-set had helped their learning. Some secondary pupils noted a lack of active learning.

4.1.4 **General Comments**

Amongst many very positive comments about individual schools there were a number of individual or small group comments to note relating to the following themes:

- Teachers having favourite pupils
- More preparation needed for exams
- Poor behaviour in school
- Missing primary school in the move to secondary
- The quality of toilet provision
- Restrictive uniform codes
- Bullying
- Males and females being treated differently
- Schools turning a blind eye to smoking
- Litter
- Teachers over-assisting and not making learning challenging enough
- Trust of teachers
- Teachers moaning to pupils

4.2 **Parents**

There were 585 parental responses on survey monkey and an additional 42 paper parental responses meaning that a total of 627 parents responded to the annual survey. 12% of parents had a child/ren in nursery, 74% in primary school and 42% in secondary school. Parents were asked to rate how much they agreed with a number of statements related to the topics:

- School culture, ethos and relationships
- High quality learning and teaching
- Using data effectively

4.2.1 **Culture, Ethos & Relationships**

Almost all parents reported that school staff are friendly and approachable and most parents trust the school to respond appropriately to any concerns that they raise. The majority of parents feel that staff are good at dealing with bullying behaviour however around a third of parents didn't know. Almost all parents report that their child/ren feel/s happy and safe at school and most felt they are encouraged to ask questions and give their opinion when they are invited into school to learn about developments which affect their child/ren.

When bullying has happened, parental comments indicate that there is highly variable practice across schools with some parents unhappy about the way it has been dealt with and others appreciative of the sensitive approach taken. Some parents report that their children are reluctant to discuss their concerns with their teachers. Some parents commented that there were not many opportunities to be involved in school developments including a lack of flexibility of arrangements to do this. Comments reflected that the quality of communication is highly variable between and within schools. Some parents reported limited interaction with subject teachers at secondary school. Some parents took the opportunity to provide very positive comments about individual schools and considerable concern about others. Opinions of school leaders are reported to be highly variable. A small number of parents also reported a lack of follow-through on agreed actions.

4.2.2 **High Quality Learning & Teaching**

Almost all parents stated that they regularly discuss school and progress in learning with their child/ren. Most parents reported that the school has provided information explaining how they can help their child/ren at home. Almost all parents indicated that they feel confident in helping their child/ren with independent study/homework. Most parents think that their child/ren find/s school work stimulating and challenging. The majority of parents state that their child/ren set/s individual learning targets and shares these with them however about a quarter of parents disagreed with this statement or didn't know.

Some parents from small schools commented that they can find their children's transition to secondary school overwhelming. There were also some concerns expressed about the appropriateness of and amount of homework particularly for younger children. Whereas there was some concerns about the lack of homework in secondary schools. Comments showed that parents value 'how to' information to ensure that their support at home complements that taught at school. Teacher variability and high levels of variation across departments in individual secondary schools was noted as an issue for some parents. Comments indicated that parents value their children being challenged to enhance their learning. There is some uncertainty about the value and use of learning targets including some concerns about targets being entirely child generated.

4.2.3 **Using Data Effectively**

Most parents regularly receive information regarding their child/ren's progress although almost one in five parents did not feel this to be the case. Most parents thought that feedback clearly shows what their child/ren is/are expected to achieve and his/her/their next steps to get there but again around one in five parents did not agree this was the case. The majority of parents believe that their view is included in reports about their child/ren where appropriate but one in five did not agree and one in ten didn't know.

Parents commented that written reports are welcome when they are personalised, meaningful and error-free. There were some concerns about over-use of jargon and "teacher-speak". There are some specific concerns about the quality of secondary school reports. Some parents commented positively about recent changes to primary annual reports. Parents would generally welcome more feedback and representation of their views in their child's report. Some parents do not feel the report gives them enough information to know how well their child is doing. Parents do not feel there is enough regular communication between them and their child's teacher/s.

4.2.4 **General Comments**

Some parents took this opportunity to express their happiness about their child's school. A significant number of comments related to the need for schools to ensure modern, regular and effective communication. Contact with teachers at secondary school is a concern for some parents, with some feeling that the link with through the Pupil Care and Support Teacher is ineffective. Where other agency support has been agreed, this is has not always happened.

Some parents are concerned about decisions and communication around their child's move of level within the national qualifications at secondary school.

Some parents are keen to ensure that schools teach literacy and numeracy basics effectively. Parents value schools and teachers that demonstrate ambition. Where schools have an aspirational culture and challenge individual learners, parents feel that their children progress. Some parents stressed that there needed to be a careful balance between challenge and pressure at exam time in secondary schools.

Some parents are concerned that their children do not always experience meaningful learning experiences. Planning between primary and secondary was variable with some examples of excellent practice highlighted alongside some areas of concern. Some parents feel that their children have been disadvantaged by a lack of staff stability. There are also examples of parental concern about class and school size. One parent commented on the issues for some families created by regular fundraising activities in the school.

4.3 **Staff**

277 school staff responded via survey monkey with a further 17 returns made on paper so a total of 294 staff returns were analysed. School staff were asked how much they agreed with a number of statements under the themes of:

- School culture, ethos and relationships
- Relationships with pupils
- Relationships with parents
- High quality learning and teaching
- Using data effectively

4.3.1 **Culture, Ethos and Relationships**

Most staff reported that staff in their school trust each other and that they feel Ok to discuss their feelings, worries and frustrations with other staff. Most staff also agreed that they feel respected by other staff in the school.

Many staff chose to provide positive comments about the culture in their school. The role of the head teacher was key in setting the right ethos in the school with individuals commenting on where this had made a significant positive difference to the school. A few comments indicated that head teachers were not always perceived as consistent in their approach. Some staff also commented that they had a few close contacts in their school who they confided in but this was not always a member of the management team. Some staff also commented on 'pecking orders' in some schools, where longer serving staff are more likely to have their opinions heard. Some office staff feel undervalued and overworked.

4.3.2 **Relationships with Pupils**

Almost all staff reported that there is mutual trust between staff and young people in their school. Almost all staff also reported that it is Ok in their school for pupils to discuss feelings, worries and frustrations with their teachers. Again almost all staff feel that pupils are encouraged to voice their ideas and opinions and most staff report that there is mutual respect between staff and young people in their school.

Some staff took the opportunity to highlight the very positive practice in place to support effective working relationships with pupils. Some staff questioned whether pupils were always as respectful to staff as they could be. The need for clear and consistent leadership and management of behaviour issues was reinforced. A few staff also commented that unfortunately some staff did not always value the views and opinions of children.

4.3.3 **Relationships with Parents**

Most staff feel that there is mutual respect between staff and parents in their school and most report that parents are encouraged to express ideas and opinions freely. Almost all staff state that they listen and act on the concerns of parents. Most staff feel that there is mutual trust between staff and parents in their school.

Comments demonstrated that staff work hard to develop positive relationships with parents and in the majority of cases this is effective but at times this can be challenging. Some staff report that parents do not have a realistic view of the work of the school and that often the most vocal parents sway others. Some staff feel parents have too much of say in school matters whilst others feel that their colleagues do not value the views and opinions of parents.

4.3.4 **High Quality Learning & Teaching**

Most staff report that all young people are given activities which meet their learning needs and that young people are involved in setting individual learning targets. Nearly almost all staff feel that young people are provided with regular feedback on what they need to do to improve. Most staff state that young people are provided with opportunities to evaluate their own work and that of others. Most staff listen and act on young people's views on how their learning experiences could be improved and most staff feel that they have opportunities to share young people's learning with colleagues at all points of transition.

Some staff reported positive outcomes from recent professional learning about improving learning and teaching. Some secondary teachers reported concerns about the allocation of young people to course levels and movement of young people between levels throughout the year. Some staff report positive progress in transitions between primary and secondary school.

4.3.5 **Using Data Effectively**

Most staff report that they regularly discuss how to improve attainment and achievement for all pupils at stage/subject and whole-school level. Most staff report that they use benchmarking attainment data in planning and evaluating learning and teaching. The majority of staff state that professional learning opportunities are available to them to help them better understand and use benchmarking and attainment data with around two in five respondents disagreeing with this or not knowing the answer.

Comments from staff demonstrate an increasing familiarisation with attainment data and the use of Insight in secondary schools. Many comments indicate that this is a continued focus for some schools. Some staff feel there are not enough professional development opportunities for staff on offer. Some comments indicate early involvement with the Raising Attainment for All Programme and the need for this as an ongoing focus.

4.3.6 **Summary**

The majority of staff have been actively involved in developing the school's vision, values and improvement priorities. The majority have also had regular opportunities to help shape the curriculum through staff discussions and working groups. Most staff agree that leadership at all levels is effective. The majority feel that staff communicate effectively with each other however around a third of staff disagree with this or don't know.

Nearly all staff comments indicate that communication in some schools is not as effective as it could be, with promoted staff often unavailable and in some cases too much consultation leading to delayed decision making.

Some comments question the importance put on uniform and surface issues rather than learning and teaching. Some staff also question the use of paper systems which they perceive to be time consuming. Some staff are also anxious to improve the aspirations of their children and young people particularly boys. Whereas not intended to not include support staff, some support staff feel they could be better included in the work of the school. One respondent questioned what would happen to the results of this survey and if they would be skewed in the council's favour.

4.4 It is important that the key themes arising from the survey analysis are clearly understood. This will ensure that any improvement activity planned in response to the survey feedback, really meets the needs of our children, young people, staff and parents. It is also recognised that responding to a survey may not be everyone's preferred means of providing information. So early in session 2015/16 the following action was undertaken:

- Parent Councils received a summary of parental and children and young people feedback for further discussion.
- Officers from the People Directorate offered to attend a sample of parent council meetings to join this discussion
- Pupil Councils received a summary of feedback from children and young people for further discussion.
- Officers from the People Directorate offered to attend a sample of pupil council meetings to join this discussion

- School Teacher Negotiating & Consultative Committees (TNCGs) received a summary of feedback from staff, children and young people and parents for further discussion.
- Officers from the People Directorate offered to attend a sample of TNCGs to join this discussion.

5. PROPOSALS

5.1 Further feedback from the above processes will be analysed with the aim of producing a short document, The Angus Schools Deal. The 'deal' will be our shared charter which helps us to say:

- What can children expect of their school
- What can schools expect from children
- What can parents expect from our schools
- What can schools expect from parents
- What can staff expect of each other
- What can members of the community expect of their local school and how can they support it

The purpose of the 'deal' is to:

- Hold each other to account when things go wrong and move forward together
- Recognise success and congratulate each other when things go well

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of the recommendations contained in this report.

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

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