

Address:  
110 George Street  
Edinburgh  
EH2 4LH

Telephone:  
0845 146 1010  
Fax:  
0845 146 1009

Website:  
[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)



## Press release

Embargoed until 00.01 hours, Thursday 20 March 2008

### Time to refresh school estate strategy and improve school design

**Billions of pounds have been spent over the past decade on over 200 new schools and many school improvements. According to Audit Scotland's report, *Improving the school estate*, the Scottish Government and councils now need to draw up detailed plans to make sure that all the remaining schools are fit for 21<sup>st</sup> century education.**

Since 2000, £3.9bn has been committed by the Government and councils to improving Scotland's school estate, and this is expected to increase to over £5.2bn by April 2008. About a third of schools are reported to be still in poor condition and it is estimated that at current rates it will take another 20 years to make all schools fit for purpose.

The report, published jointly by the Accounts Commission and Auditor General, says that hundreds of schools have been built or refurbished in the past ten years. A sample study of 18 new or refurbished schools shows that, although pupils and staff are generally satisfied with design, it could be better. Many said that their schools overheat and have poor ventilation. An early problem was that environmental sustainability was not a key factor in the designs, but more recently there have been some good examples of environmental factors being considered.

John Baillie, Chair of the Accounts Commission, said: "Ten years ago many of Scotland's schools were in a state of serious disrepair. Since then 219 new schools have been built and many others refurbished. Councils are working hard to improve how they manage their school estates. They need carefully to devise their financial strategies, paying particular attention to future costs and to ensuring that they are able to adapt to changing needs such as pupil numbers, curriculum changes and community needs. Councils could also do more to share good practice and improve designs, and make environmental sustainability a key consideration."

The Scottish Executive began a programme of school building and renewal in the late 1990's, including the promise of financial support for councils which used PFI to renew their schools. A new strategy in 2003 aimed to raise the quality of the school estate over a period of at least 10-15 years, so that no schools would be in poor condition or otherwise unsuitable. However, this strategy did not have clear and consistent definitions for refurbishment, renewal or improvement and consequently it is not possible to measure exactly how many schools across Scotland have been improved.

Robert Black, Audit General for Scotland, said: "The national school estate strategy gradually evolved, with the guidance being developed after the building programmes had started. The strategy did not set out exactly what needed to be done nor how it would be achieved. The national strategy should be reviewed, using the better information that is now available to specify the performance targets of the programme. Particular attention needs to be paid to future costs and how the remaining improvements will be financed."

The report sets out a number of further recommendations for the Scottish Government and councils and will be considered at the Scottish Parliament's audit committee on 26 March 2008.

**For further information please contact Anne McCubbin on 0131 625 1653 [amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk) or Simon Ebbett on 0131 625 1652 [sebbett@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:sebbett@audit-scotland.gov.uk)**

#### Notes to Editors:

1. This report is the first national overview of progress towards meeting the national school estate strategy.
2. There are 2,720 state schools (2,167 primary, 377 secondary and 176 special schools). Over 692,000 children and young people are educated in these schools, over 95% of all school-age children and young people in Scotland.

3 The report, this press release and a podcast interview with the report authors are available on request under embargo and will be published on [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk) from 9.30am, Thursday 20 March. Further media interviews can be arranged on request.

4. For further information about the Scottish Parliament audit committee session on 26 March go to:  
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/audit/index.htm>

4. The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975 and is independent of both central and local government. The Commission considers whether local authorities, fire & rescue services and police forces spend public money properly and effectively.

5. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Government and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament.

6. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission for Scotland.

7. (The Audit Commission is an entirely separate body that operates only in England.)