

Audit scope

Improving outcomes for young people through school education



ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland
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The National Performance Framework sets out 11 long-term outcomes for wellbeing, and school education has a key role in contributing to these outcomes. In their joint agreement, the Scottish Government and COSLA have set out that 'improving the education and life chances of our children and young people is the defining mission of our Scottish education system. Our shared ambition is to close the unacceptable gap in attainment between our least and most disadvantaged children and to raise attainment for all'.¹ The Scottish Government has committed an additional £750 million to raise attainment and improve outcomes over the lifetime of this Parliament. Including

this funding, councils spend a total of around £4.6 billion on school education each year.

The audit will consider the arrangements that the Scottish Government, councils and their partners have put in place to deliver improved outcomes for young people through school education. It will consider the evidence base for key policies and initiatives and look at trends in outcomes and spending across Scotland. This audit will follow up on the findings of the Accounts Commission's *School Education*  audit in 2014. Since 2014 there has been significant change within the education sector with the implementation of education

1. Empowering schools agreement: joint statement between Scottish Government and COSLA, June 2018.

reforms, including a focus on school empowerment and development of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) and Pupil Equity Funding (PEF).

Why is this audit important?

The Scottish Government and councils recognise that improving school education outcomes is important to Scotland's children, society and economy. Good outcomes, such as exam results and gaining valuable skills and experiences, lead to improved life chances for young people and help address inequalities. A number of policies and initiatives have been developed and implemented in recent years aimed at reducing the poverty-related attainment gap and improving wider outcomes.

This audit is one of a series in Audit Scotland's work programme that will examine aspects of Scotland's education and skills system over the next two to three years. Other audits will look at Outcomes for children with additional support needs (2020/21), Skills planning and investment (2020/21) and Improving outcomes for looked after children (2021/22). We plan to do further audit work in the next Parliamentary session to assess the extent to which the education reform agenda is achieving its objectives.

What will the audit look at?

The audit will determine how effectively the Scottish Government, councils and their partners are improving outcomes through school education. We will look at school education to assess:

- whether outcomes are improving for young people
- whether the Scottish Government, councils and their partners collectively have a clear and coherent approach to improving outcomes for young people
- how public money is being used to improve outcomes for young people
- how effectively the Scottish Government, councils and their partners are evaluating performance and taking action to improve outcomes for young people.

This audit focuses on mainstream primary and secondary school education and will not consider early years.

How will we carry out the audit?

We will gather information using a range of methods including:

- analysing data on education attainment, destinations, broader outcomes, school education workforce and finance (including PEF and SAC spending)
- reviewing documents such as policies and plans, papers of governance and planning groups and committees and performance and improvement frameworks
- interviews with a range of stakeholders including the Scottish Government, local government bodies, Education Scotland, trade unions and professional bodies, other public and third sector organisations, head teachers, teachers, young people and parents
- case studies in a small number of council areas which will involve document reviews and one-to-one and group interviews involving elected members, staff, parents and pupils.

What impact will the audit have?

The audit will provide an independent assessment of how well the Scottish Government and local government are improving outcomes from school education and reducing the gap in attainment. It will provide an early assessment of the implementation of education reform and how this is being planned and evaluated to ensure it improves attainment and wider outcomes. We will make recommendations for Scottish Government, Education Scotland and councils.

Timetable and contacts

We plan to publish a report in spring 2020. Audit Scotland is carrying out the work on behalf of the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. If you have any questions, please get in touch with Beverley Oakman, Audit Manager, on 0131 625 1864 or at boakman@audit-scotland.gov.uk 



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