

Audit scope

Improving outcomes for young people through school education

Update following Covid-19



ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland
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Background

In 2019 and early 2020, Audit Scotland carried out performance audit work on school education. The aim of this performance audit was to answer the question: [‘How effectively are the Scottish Government, councils and their partners improving outcomes for young people through school education?’](#) 

It looked at outcomes from school education in terms of both attainment in examinations and wider achievements and outcomes such as school leaver destinations and employability skills, the poverty-related attainment gap, performance measurement and the implementation of education reforms. The audit was paused when Scotland moved into

lockdown because of Covid-19 in March 2020. Following agreement with the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission, Audit Scotland will now be carrying out further audit work reflecting the impact of Covid-19 on school education outcomes. The final report will combine the key findings from the earlier work, where still relevant, with those from this new audit work.

Why is this new audit work important?

The Scottish Government and councils recognise that improving school education outcomes is important to Scotland’s children, society and economy. We know closing schools during the pandemic has both short

and potentially long-term consequences for Scotland's young people, affecting learning outcomes, health and wellbeing, and the poverty-related attainment gap. We will provide independent analysis and commentary on the risks from the pandemic to young people's outcomes, and how the Scottish Government, local government and their partners are managing those risks.

What will the new audit work look at?

The new audit work will examine how the Covid-19 lockdown, recovery and ongoing public health measures are impacting on outcomes for young people through school education. It will also consider the effectiveness of the mitigation measures put in place by the Scottish Government, councils and their partners. We will carry out work on school education looking at:

- The effect of Covid-19 on young people's school education and the potential impact on their outcomes in the short and longer-term, including attainment, reducing the attainment gap, broader outcomes and wellbeing
- Whether the Scottish Government, councils and their partners are demonstrating clear and collective leadership in how they are mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on outcomes for young people through school education (eg, supporting the wellbeing of young people and addressing the poverty-related attainment gap and longer-term outcomes for this cohort of pupils)
- How well the Scottish Government, councils and their partners are understanding and managing the risks to young people's outcomes, and capturing, responding to and sharing their learning
- How much additional public money is being spent on school education to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on young people's education, learning and broader wellbeing and how it is being targeted.

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

How will we carry out the new audit work?

We will gather information using a range of methods including:

- interviews and focus groups with a range of stakeholders including the Scottish Government, local government bodies, Education Scotland, trade unions and professional bodies, young people's organisations, parents' organisations and other public and third sector organisations. These will be carried out remotely, in line with Scottish Government guidance.
- desk-based reviews of existing research in relation to the effects of Covid-19 on school education, in particular on the experience of young people, teachers and parents.
- analysing available data on educational outcomes and on funding available for the lockdown and recovery.

What impact will the new audit work have?

We will publish a report that will combine the relevant key findings from the earlier work with those from the new audit work. The report will set out the key risks to improving outcomes for young people through school education, including Covid-19 related risks. The report will also identify the learning and opportunities which have emerged from the sector's response to the pandemic. We will make recommendations for Scottish Government, Education Scotland and councils.

Timetable and contacts

We plan to publish a report in spring 2021 although timescales will be kept under review given the continued impact of Covid-19 and the implications it could have for school education. 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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