Education and Culture Committee

Educational attainment gap inquiry

Role of the third and private sectors

Background

Falkland House School is an independent school located in the village of Falkland in Fife and specialises in the education and care of boys who require additional support for learning.

It provides special integrated education to boys with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Tourette’s syndrome (TS), as well as a number of other conditions which makes it difficult for them to cope in a mainstream educational environment.

The school was established over 30 years ago and has a reputation for excellence, quality and achieving positive results. Indeed, it was one of the first independent schools in Scotland to be awarded Autism Accreditation by the National Autistic Society.

Falkland House School provides residential and day places to boys from early primary age through to 18 years old, taking referrals from all regions in Scotland and the rest of the UK. The school offers day, 39 week and 52 week placements to cater for as many different circumstances as possible.

Falkland House School is the highest rated educational establishment of its type in Scotland, having achieved excellent grades in every standard it was inspected in by the Care Inspectorate.

Falkland House School was shortlisted in the Times Educational Supplement School Awards 2014 Special Needs School of the Year category, the only Scottish school shortlisted.

Consultation response

- the scale of the third and private sectors’ involvement in schools, in terms of improving attainment and achievement, and the appropriate dividing line between their role and the role of education authorities;

Since working on improving attainment and achievement should be holistic and have the child at the centre, there should be no dividing line between the third and private sectors’ involvement and the role of education authorities.

If, as was clearly defined in the very first draft of the National Framework for Residential Care and Education services, the local authority clearly defined who was responsible for each short and long term outcome, as happens in good quality Coordinated Support Plans, the roles of both education authorities and third and private sector schools would be seen as
a partnership (this was unfortunately deleted as the draft progressed). It does not seem cost
or resource effective to replicate quality provision that is already accessible.

The local authorities (not just education) should certainly have a significant role in gathering
appropriate information to assess progress in attainment and achievement (in education and
care) in individual provisions. These results should be shared with other authorities so best
practice and provisions can be identified.

- whether their approaches have been particularly successful in improving
  achievement and attainment for school pupils. If so, whether their methods
could be more embedded in the curriculum;

Our success comes not from the approach but the structure. As well as having a social
environment which ensures a 24 hour curriculum, the staff to pupil ratio and management of
resources results in these methods being embedded in the curriculum. The Curriculum for
Excellence was a major advancement in examining the totality of experiences, ensuring all
the skills for living a fulfilled life are recognised and developed.

To be able to know if approaches are successful in any provision, we need to have an
assessment process which indicates where young people are at the start and the end of any
process, thus ensuring the individual curriculum closely matches identified needs. There
are huge discrepancies in the statistics collated by the Scottish Government at the moment
which would make this process both transparent and worthwhile. The Scottish Government
published statistics in December 2013 showing an 89% increase in those identified with
additional Support Needs since 2010 (69,587 to 131,621). In a meeting with the Health &
Wellbeing Unit and Educational Analytical Services we were told there had not been an
increase and we should not use the present figures as a benchmark for future years as they
were not reliable. What is the point of gathering statistics if they have no meaning? How as
partnership can we know where we want to be if we don’t know where we are?

In Falkland House School the positive relationships within the school community are a result
of everyone (and most importantly young people) having lots of opportunities to have a
voice, get involved in the life of the school and to contribute to its development. Two of the
most recent (and ongoing) projects are outlined below:

Contract Services – Pupils have established a company that quotes for a variety of jobs in
and around the school. The process is informed by real life experiences. Pupils are (and
have been) interviewed for positions within the company, going through the normal
application and interview procedures you would expect in the job market. For certain jobs
(e.g. strimming around the grounds) industry standard courses (City & Guilds or Lantra
awards) need to be passed for pupils to be allowed to participate in the task (our current
insurers are fully informed for risk assessment purposes). The range of skills needed match
all abilities and aspirations. We are in the early stages of this project but eventually pupils
will be taxed so the company can either buy equipment or lease it from the school. If they
buy they will have to decide quality/cost over leasing the schools equipment etc. This project
can continue to be developed and improved for a number of years offering more experiences
in an ever widening job sector (e.g. catering for seminar participants, designing the school
website, painting rooms on a rotational basis, etc.).

Cabin Project – All subject areas are involved in an interdisciplinary project planning,
building and eventually using the cabin as a community resource in Falkland Estate grounds.
This project offers learning in a practical way with a real outcomes rather than sitting in a
classroom discussing ways it could be done.
• whether the full potential of the third and private sectors in helping to improve children’s attainment and achievement is being realised;

The full potential of the third and private sectors in helping to improve children’s attainment and achievement is not being realised for a number of basic reasons.

Firstly, as discussed in the first paragraph, there are very little or no stated expectations from placing local authorities on a short or long term basis for each individual placement. If no short or long term outcomes are stated, recorded and measured then it is difficult to realise the provision’s full potential. These short and long term outcomes must include the full range of experiences from the Curriculum Areas of the Curriculum for Excellence to ensure each learner is developing knowledge, skills and attributes for learning, life and work (the four capacities – successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors).

Secondly, the third and private sectors, as well as mainstream provision and education authorities, work in competition to each other rather than collaboratively. This is in direct contradiction to the working in partnership mentioned before, but given budget cuts and the number of third and private sector spaces available in comparison to the decreasing number of referrals, competition is inevitable. Most Local Authorities will only use the third and private sector as a last resort and that is usually irreconcilable to early intervention. Excellent quality practice is not shared with others in the sector (we currently have 9 ‘Excellent’ grades and 1 ‘Very Good’ grade, as well as having achieved Autism Accreditation but would not consider visits from other establishments to improve their quality of service).

• how successful schools have been in reporting on pupils’ wider achievements (i.e. not just examination results) such as those the third sector helps to deliver. Whether such achievements are valued by parents, employers and learning providers as much as formal qualifications;

As stated before, the Curriculum for Excellence has given us all a much better overview of the variety of experiences and outcomes needed to help learners develop the skills they need for learning, life and work but most, including the Scottish Government when asking for statistics, still see achievements as certifiable awards of some description. Employers are much more interested in a level gained than an experience met and this is also true for parents.

At Falkland House we have a ‘Celebrating Success’ day with pupils, staff, parents and associated professionals. This day celebrates individuals’ attainments in the wider sense. Whilst it could be gaining Higher mathematics for one pupil, travelling independently might have been as big an achievement for another.