Educational Attainment Gap - Role of the third and private sectors

The Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) welcomes the opportunity from the Education and Culture Committee to provide evidence on the role of the third and private sectors in improving attainment and achievement for all school pupils within Scotland. Most SCIS member schools exist as charities or not-for-profit bodies so appreciate, and have first-hand knowledge of, the central role the third sector plays in raising educational attainment. Our schools are also active in their local communities in terms of sharing facilities and staff resources, and supporting partnership work. A number of member schools also provide early learning and childcare through nursery provision as partner providers to local authorities. Our member schools recognise that activities outside the classroom are an integral part of the overall educational experience of their pupils; these include sport, voluntary work and outdoor education. These will include the use of stand-alone outdoor facilities such as those offered by the Outward Bound Trust. Many independent schools offer opportunities in these areas which make a significant contribution to the attainment of pupils. These are embedded within independent schools’ curriculum and individual child development. Additionally, through the provision of access to school buildings for sports, learning and community groups at no cost, or nominal, non-commercial rates, our member schools assist others groups in raising attainment.¹

Opportunities in outdoor education provision allow pupils to excel and feel achievement in an area outside traditional school-based assessment. SCIS provides support in this type of education provision through the provision of Continuing Professional Development Courses which cover Outdoor Learning in both primary and secondary environments.

One area where member schools have focused on pupils’ wider achievements is in sport. Our schools provide a wide range of activities to pupils, and the many parents who regularly attend sporting events their children are involved in demonstrates that they value this too. The Scottish Government promotes increasing children’s involvement in exercise through its inclusion in the Curriculum for Excellence and the Active Schools programme. The value placed on sport within the independent school sector can be seen through, for example, sustained sporting activity in later life or the representation in sport at a national level by independent school pupils.

A further area in which independent schools promote achievement in partnership with the third sector is through voluntary work; both through pupils volunteering personally in the community and through fundraising activities undertaken by whole

¹ Our schools provide assistance within their communities in a wide range of ways. For more information on the wide range of activities supported by member schools see http://www.scis.org.uk/assets/Uploads/Facts-and-Statistics/Community-List.pdf

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schools or year-groups. This work can take the form of fund-raising and providing equipment to causes overseas – including partner schools, or partnership work with local community care or additional support needs providers.

School trips are also one of the many ways in which pupils can feel achievement outside of academic exams. Whilst on trips pupils are fully supported by school staff but the experience on the trip will also increase the independence of a child and nurture their confidence and feelings of achievement. SCIS recognises that school trips play an important role in pupils’ attainment and recognises the importance of ensuring these are carried out in a safe and secure matter. SCIS therefore provides a number of Continuing Professional Development Courses which cover Schools Trips, their preparation and safeguarding.

SCIS schools welcome the opportunity to share views on the role of the third and private sectors in raising attainment and would be happy to debate any of the issues raised further, or welcome the Committee to individual schools.