

LEARNING AT THE HEART OF COMMUNITIES



Background to Event

As part of promoting wider learning and supporting capacity building in the built environment A&DS initiated a forum for Public Sector Clients in 2014. The PSCF is intended to facilitate collective discussion across the public sector on issues of mutual concern, and encourage sharing of experiences, learning and good practice across sectors.

Please visit A&DS website for information about previous events. This 5th meeting aimed to bring together lessons from study trips looking at the Finnish education with examples from the Scottish context to share ideas about putting 'Learning at the Heart of Communities'.

This newsletter summarises talks and shared learning from the event, which was attended by 28 delegates from across the public sector learning estate. Further information is available online on the A&DS website: www.ads.org.uk/public-sector-client-forum.

Introduction by Chair

David McEwan, Estates Manager, Glasgow City Council Education Services

David set the scene for the afternoon, beyond discussing and learning from the example of Finland, delegates had gathered because they share an acute interest in education and educational establishments, and thinking about what can be done to improve, develop and enhance them to achieve better outcomes for children

and young people. The forum allowed delegates to hear about what Finland does *differently*, and what can be adopted or adapted to make what we're already doing - better!

Finland isn't Scotland – a direct comparison is neither fair nor helpful. However, there is a shared desire to improve outcomes for children and young people and the communities in which they live.

Scotland is experiencing a comprehensive state of change to the education sector. Some changes are transnational: the use of digital technology in education, e-learning, and improving our educational estate. At a national level, each authority is dealing with: attainment challenges / closing the attainment gap; the pupil equity fund; the education governance review; the fair funding for schools review; the National Standardised Assessment; the Inspiring Learning Spaces pilot; and challenges in relation to teacher numbers.

Each authority faces local challenges. Glasgow is facing extremely challenging social and family issues, a diverse language profile children who have English as an additional language. Throughout all this change and challenge, our *raison d'être* remains seeking the best possible educational outcomes for our children and young people.

David encouraged focus on one possible way to improve the learner journey: developing a new education infrastructure plan with more connected campuses and more effective learning environments across the education estate, integrating community services as part of the plan.

Sharing Information

The Finnish approach to education

Elaine Kerridge, Policy Manager - Participation and Engagement, Children in Scotland

The Finnish education system has been recognised internationally as exemplary in its approach and practice of learning and teaching. In 2015, Children in Scotland organised the first of several delegations to visit, observe and discuss how the Finnish approach to education had been noted through a strong position within the PISA ranking, with high levels of attainment and a focus on STEM subjects.

Practitioners throughout the educational landscape have participated on the trips, including delegates from early years, social work, youth work and estates teams.

Reflecting on these visits, delegates have noted the sense of trust evident between teacher and learner, parent and teacher and from senior management. This is something which is often lacking in Scotland and an aspect which the delegates thought underpinned the success of the learning environment. Benefits included:

- A calm environment with autonomy for learners to choose how and where to learn, often in mixed age groups.
- Health and wellbeing is seen as a primary concern with an objective not to stress children.
- No school inspections are made or standardised tests carried out. The teachers are qualified with a masters in a specialist subject in conjunction to their teaching qualification.
- During lunch, pupils are encouraged to select their own food and portions, sitting amongst teachers and parents who are welcomed into the school throughout the day.

Jedburgh lifelong learning campus - education leadership

Lesley Munro and James Darrie, Children and Young People, Scottish Borders

Jedburgh Lifelong Learning Campus is unique in putting community at the forefront of the project - the first thing you see is the community, and the school sits behind it.

A number of factors helped shape the project including feedback from parents, staff, the community and an unprecedented level of engagement from young people indicating a clear appetite for change – in addition to educational and learning benefits from collocating pupils as a result of storm damage to Howenburgh Primary School.

Learning from Finland but also from Canada, Scotland and worldwide systems were looked at. The key lesson Scottish Borders have from Finland is not just the importance of community but the importance of culture. The Council are realistic enough to know that

it would be necessary but not possible to just redesign or reinvent culture – but to capitalise on the strength of the community.

In Jedburgh, the wish is to create a completely different vision for learning and community, to bolster Jedburgh's ability to support and sustain community life by providing a new and appropriately scaled single learning campus for all the generations within Jedburgh and the surrounding rural communities.

Delivery of the new campus is scheduled for March 2020. The new campus will enable parents to build strong community based relationships and receive excellent support - shifting from a concept of single agency to multi-agency with the inclusion of community.

The campus will deliver a full service concept with intergenerational learning and wellbeing activities that include: one 'open door' for parents into their child's learning pathway, and all forms of public sector support, with fewer transitions allowing focus on supporting children as a family group; space for parental and community activities from early morning into the evening where the whole family can enjoy learning and wellbeing activities; spaces for family learning, for example a family kitchen where cooking classes can take place and families can dine together; all day long 'healthy social bite' type cafes; and spaces for physical activity and relaxation.

Jedburgh lifelong learning campus, Scottish Borders Council



Mini-panel discussion: Scotland and Finland: Learning and Comparisons

David McEwan, Elaine Kerridge, Dr Pauline Stephen, Lesley Munro and James Darrie

Pauline Stephen: Cultural change can happen within our learning environments and through design we can influence this change: cultural ethos is often lost behind busyness and a focus around practical aspects. Community integration in learning environments needs to be managed to ensure security for children while welcoming all to participate and use the facilities.

Beautiful buildings don't make a difference – it's a fluid approach, providing a variety of places to learn.

Integration vs. segregation – how is this balanced and how do we anticipate unintended consequences? When developing learning campuses for all it is important to recognise the value of existing buildings that are used be sections of the wider community.

Elaine Kerridge: The facilities visited in Finland are often very similar to those found in Scotland, we often get stuck and scared to change things; there is a risk averse culture.

New buildings are seen as an opportunity to start again and make change.

Bullying in Finland is managed by both teachers and parents, setting an example (model behaviour), interacting with the children as equals, allowing autonomy in learning and emphasising the importance of having consideration for others.

Children learn real life skills such as customer service experience and the importance of listening to others and making eye contact.

David McEwan: Provide a good environment to make good teachers better, teachers can teach anywhere given sufficient training and access to resources. There is a lack of handover and training in how to use new spaces, building technology and resources.

Lesley Munro: Consultation for Jedburgh community campus has thus far not been extended to the existing teaching staff as they might not be at the school long term. Instead a cross section of educationalists engaged in STEM were recruited from throughout the network to form a steering group. This has the effect of de-personalising the experience.

World Café Sessions

Early years and childcare

Donna Murray, Senior Early Years Team, Edinburgh Council

By 2020, the Scottish government plans to increase free early-learning and childcare provision to 1140 hours per year, up from 600.

Finnish children start school aged seven, with compulsory pre-school from six years of age. Before this, parents have to pay for nursery childcare which results in an equality issue in terms of access to early years education.

Donna put forward that the environment is the '3rd teacher'. A well designed environment including layout, construction and decoration can have a significant impact on education. With Edinburgh's new-build and refurbished nurseries, there is a move to more restrained interiors and use of natural materials. This is to not make an overly stimulating environment. Colour and texture should come from what the kids and teachers produce.

The Finnish school that Donna and her colleagues visited made very good use of glass panels partitions. They were used to break down a large open plan space. This can help create a calmer environment where smaller groups of children can work independently of supervision, while being visible to teachers in neighbouring spaces. Generally, the Finnish approach is much less risk-averse and less concerned with supervision.

Primary and Secondary Education

Sandra Banks, Resources Planning Manager, Midlothian Council

On visiting a primary and secondary school in Finland, Sandra reflected that in themselves there wasn't anything 'amazing' about the design of the buildings. They were small in general, high schools were not more than around 500 pupils, and in primary school classes had around 20 pupils. The schools are much more open, and don't seem to have the same concerns about security we do.

The key thing that struck Sandra was in the behaviour – people were calm and courteous, and staff showed visible trust in the pupils. Pupils were learning in the corridors, and moving around the schools without issue, and able to get up during class and go to the toilet. It was apparent that staff actively nurtured independence in thinking from a very early age, and encouraged freedom in how students learn.

Young pupils are nurtured as though replicating the 'home' setting at school – the teachers stay with them throughout the day, including at break and lunch. They have 'normal' sized furniture for early years, as they would have at home. The schools also actively ensure that parents are engaged in their child's education, and where problems arise there is quick involvement in social care, and quick access to support.

The ethos to learn is strong, but relaxed. There is an emphasis on art, music, play and imagination. Staff are very clear about the structure of education in Finland, and what pupils will achieve through the education system.



Lifelong Learning

Claire Renton, Strategic Lead of Physical Learning Environments at Dumfries & Galloway Council

Themes which became apparent during the study trip were Trust, Joy in learning and Wellbeing. Joy in learning is not often talked about in Scotland

Trust is evident throughout Finnish society, with a caring approach to others. Teachers are valued, well paid and work within their core hours: after school clubs are rarely run by teachers.

"Would children in Scotland learn and get on with their work if given more autonomy? No" *Head Teacher, Castlemilk*

Finland's PISA rating has gone down recently and increasing immigration has introduced challenges in supporting diversity. There are no government league tables on local authority school performance.

Will devolved powers to teachers bring an approach similar to Finland through local flexibility?

Childcare is affordable with services open from 6am. A 3-8 ratio of teachers to children is maintained in nursery. Funding is available for childcare from 10 months old and bunks are available for children to take a nap in nursery. In school there are generally 20 children per class. Catchments are flexible and change due to numbers/demand which is not an issue for parents who generally accept the next nearest school.

Children seem engaged and happy. Behaviour is mapped against a wide ranging traffic light system, empowering children as opposed to labelling behaviour as simply good or bad. Children all take their shoes off – "It's difficult to be naughty when you are in your stockings feet".

Life skills that might not take place at home are taught. Home life is important and valued beyond the school day. Me and My City provides real life scenario such as baking from ground wheat into flour, to making bread, selling it and considering what the money can be spent on (do you have enough to pay your rent)

The Finnish teachers didn't think there was a difference in teaching (to Scotland) it was more the onsite access to specialist services. The support network is very good and catches people when they're not doing so well.

Additional Support Needs (ASN) was not fully explored/witnessed; which was challenged by delegates.

Education is front loaded in early and school years. There was no evidence of lifelong learning with adults or partnerships with colleges/Universities. There was no sense of pushing facilities for community use and maximising built assets throughout the day.

Community at the heart of schools, the Angus way

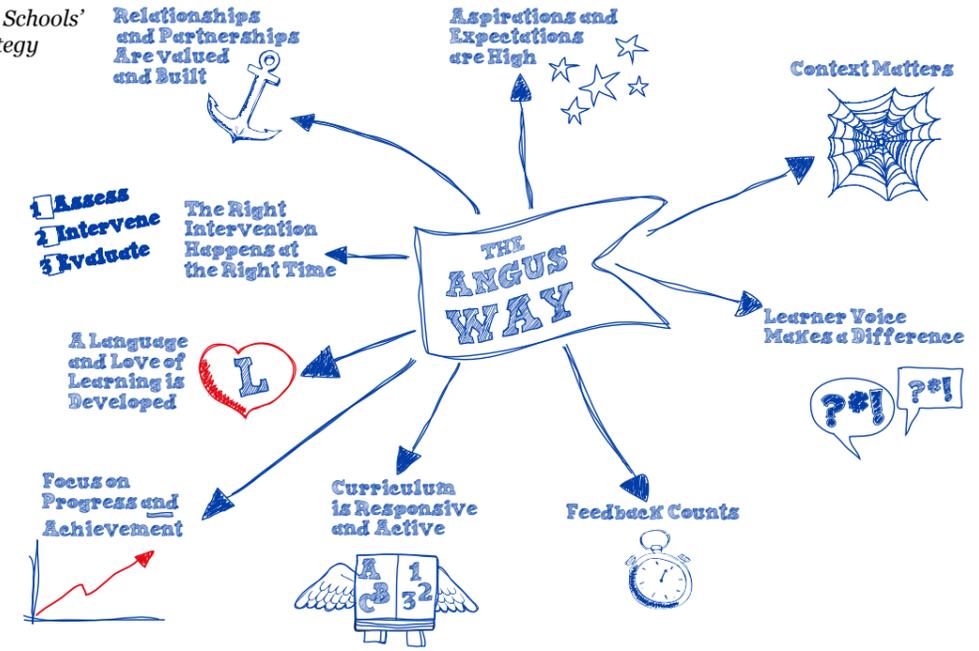
Dr Pauline Stephen, Head of Schools and Learning & Chief Education Officer, Angus Council

'The Angus Way', is a one page diagram overview of what good learning and teaching looks like for Angus Council and what they would expect to see in any of their schools.

Angus has 60 schools in total ranging in size and school roles, including new community campuses – though some of the smaller schools stand out as the best. Angus Council is keen to encourage creative approaches – one new school is built into a hill to create an amphitheatre space.

Support in the system is important as well as the school – providing support to Head teachers and giving

Angus Council Schools' Learning Strategy



parents a voice (this can be both challenging and fantastic!). Leadership is needed to help teachers see the benefits of innovation and from reverting to type. There is too much scrutiny of the education system, with classrooms and teachers being overly inspected.

The importance of community engagement and understanding context was discussed. Differences between deprived versus rural areas, challenges around security and safety, linked with how a school's place in the community is perceived. What works for one area does not necessarily work for another. Experience shows that rural schools are some of the best at engaging communities.

There can be practical difficulties in merging different community uses together (e.g. education and leisure) into one building, leading to tensions in the system. Bringing in experiences from other sectors, e.g. Health, could be beneficial in terms of exploring a service led approach and reforming the brief for a new place (a shiny new building may not necessarily be the best solution!). There is exciting potential in bringing together disciplines under one roof (though there are some agendas that don't sit together well). The Crescent (Whitfield Local Care Centre) in Dundee was suggested as a good example of a new multi-purpose facility that brings together health, community, social and leisure services – all based around a central atrium – in the heart of the Whitfield community.

What happens next?

The next event for public sector clients is scheduled to take place in spring 2018. If you haven't yet signed up for the PSCF mailing list and you are interested in taking part, either as a delegate and/or contributing as a speaker or chair, please get in touch with A&DS via steven.malone@ads.org.uk.

Conclusion

Diarmaid Lawlor, Director of Place, Architecture and Design Scotland

Starting with a clear idea of outcomes to enhance learner experiences we can make more of spaces we already have. Clarity is about the design of conversations, at the right time to shape a shared vision, agreed across administrations. Be clear on success; what is education for and for who?

Building the conditions for success matters. This is about building cultures of collaboration in practice, safety to learn, access for all, equity of opportunity, evidence. And visibility of the behaviours we seek to promote. This needs transformational leadership on the big idea, and instructional leadership on change in practice.

Changing space can be a catalyst to changing practice. This invites new ways of using spaces; spaces to build trust, spaces where there is simultaneous use between learners and communities, spaces where the structure of experiences are fluid, spaces that are welcoming.

Changing practice to improve outcomes needs safe spaces to try new things, with support. And a simplification of the policy landscape, and expectations around inspections. Designing change invites shared accountability, and creative ways to design spaces for change to adapt to changing needs.

If you have ideas for future themes and topics, good examples or challenges that you think would be helpful to discuss in a supportive peer environment - please let us know. The Public Sector Client Forum has been set up to make it easier for you to come together with colleagues from all over Scotland to discuss what is important to you.

A&DS offer these services, tailored to Public Sector clients:

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Contact:
David Fletcher
T: 0141 204 7916
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Schools Design Support Service

Schools Design Support Service is offered to Education Authorities to support the briefing and options stage of new school investment and design

Contact:
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Architecture & Design Scotland

Ailtearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

This newsletter is produced by A&DS for the Public Sector Client Forum (PSCF). More information can be found at www.ads.org.uk/public-sector-client-forum

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