

Validated self-evaluation

**West Dunbartonshire Council
Educational Psychology Services**

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1. What is validated self-evaluation in Educational Psychology Services?

Validated self-evaluation (VSE) is an evaluative activity which supports and challenges the work of Educational Psychology Services (EPS) by working collaboratively. It involves a partnership between the Education Authority, EPS and HM Inspectors, Education Scotland. In EPS the VSE focuses on two key themes.

- Learning and Teaching.
- Partnership Working.

The themes reflect the Scottish Government's national priorities and relate to the contributions made by EPS to raising attainment, addressing disadvantage and supporting and implementing, *Getting it Right For Every Child* (GIRFEC). Both themes also allow EPS to evidence the impact and outcomes of early intervention and prevention across the full range of their service delivery.

In addition to the core themes, services can choose an additional one to reflect their own context. An additional area may relate to the core themes or reflect other quality indicators which impact on the service's ability to improve outcomes for its stakeholders. For example, leadership, or the delivery of the five Currie (2002)¹ functions of consultation and advice, assessment, intervention, professional development and research and development.

2. What was validated self-evaluation in West Dunbartonshire Council's Educational Psychology Service?

West Dunbartonshire Council Educational Psychology Service (WDCEPS), working closely with the Education Authority and key partners used the VSE process to deepen their existing knowledge and understanding of their strengths and areas for development in a number of key areas of service delivery. The service has closely aligned its priorities to support the Education Authority's strategic objectives of raising attainment and improving learning. They selected two themes from their self-evaluation which contributed strongly to the authority's priorities:

- the impact and outcomes on learners of reciprocal teaching approaches, specifically in relation to literacy improvement; and
- the effectiveness of specific partnership approaches including nurture, multi-agency working and parental engagement on the lives of children and families.

The service recognised the challenge of maintaining service delivery within a climate of financial constraint and were keen to use the VSE process to explore areas where they felt they were making the most impact and should prioritise in the future. For the VSE process, WDCEPS selected two areas of work at different stages in the self-evaluation cycle. Their work on reciprocal teaching approaches had undergone rigorous self-evaluation, which had fully engaged stakeholders and partners and was backed by implementation science, which is the study of methods to promote the integration of research findings and evidence into policy and practice. WDCEPS partnership theme

¹ Currie (2002) Review of Provision of Educational Psychology Services in Scotland. Scottish Executive

was at an earlier stage of development and focused on an ambitious range of evidence based approaches, including nurture, models of parental engagement, such as the Solihull programme and the impact of multi-agency working linked to GIRFEC. The service wanted to build on their strong partnership working and look more closely at the impact and outcomes which had been achieved as a result of these interventions. Across both themes, WDCEPS was keen to explore different models of capacity building and sustainability to guide the development of future service initiatives.

Each themed group comprised of relevant partners and agencies who had been jointly involved in the interventions or training. For example, senior education officers, quality improvement officers, social work managers, community learning and development partners, primary and secondary headteachers and colleagues from the Third Sector. Each group activity was jointly led by a member of the WDCEPS team and a core partner. Prior to Education Scotland joining the themed groups, the service had worked closely with their partners to look at existing evidence for each theme and generated detailed evaluative briefing papers which were used to focus discussion during the VSE week.

The service put in place a well-considered programme of activities involving a wide range of stakeholders and partners to support the VSE process. Activities included focus groups, visits to schools, and individual interviews with professionals and parents. After each activity, the theme groups met to reflect on what they had learnt, and to begin to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The service brought together the leads of the theme groups on a regular basis across the VSE process to share their findings across both themes. In this way, themed group members were able to see emerging strengths and areas for further development across and within each theme and in relation to the overall self-evaluation process. Through such joint evaluative activity, Education Scotland staff were able to assess the rigour of the EPS's self-evaluation processes and the robustness of the evidence used to evaluate performance and service delivery.

3. What did HM Inspectors learn about the quality of self-evaluation in West Dunbartonshire Council's Educational Psychology Service?

There is a strong culture of self-reflection embedded across the service which has been well developed and led by the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) and supported by the distributed leadership across the service team. During the VSE, it became clear that WDCEPS was adding significant value to the Education Authority's work in literacy and partnership working. Throughout the VSE process the service engaged in honest and challenging dialogue with their partners and with the Education Scotland team. Service team members, in their themed groups, demonstrated rigorous and objective analysis of the evidence gathered during the VSE self-evaluation activities. The Education Scotland team found that the service's overall self-evaluation, thematic reports and activities chosen for further exploration were well defined, demonstrating high quality thinking and coherence from one process to the next.

The high quality participation and engagement of partners and their ability to articulate their learning was a strength of this VSE process. The theme leads created a supportive ethos for partners who were empowered to open up and explore areas for improvement with confidence. The service benefited from the challenge provided by partners and responded positively by reflecting deeply on their practice and the implications for future engagement. Theme leads and educational psychologists asked insightful questions, listened and responded respectfully. The themed groups also benefited from Education Scotland staff building on the responses from stakeholders and partners to help clarify the exact features of their interventions which were making a positive impact.

The Education Scotland team found strong evidence of the service's impact on improving children and young people's literacy skills. The service also demonstrated a significant impact in working with multi-agency teams to improve planning, decision making and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. The service recognised that more opportunity for sampling a wider range of stakeholder views, and in particular that of parents, children and young people would have further strengthened and enhanced their self-evaluation.

The reciprocal teaching theme was a systemic piece of work which illustrated particular features of strong self-evaluation. It relied heavily on research principles and evidence based practice. Partners valued highly the research skills and knowledge that EPS brought to the roll out of reciprocal teaching. In addition, they valued the implementation framework around the approach and found the training and coaching aspect essential for supporting the roll out. Teaching staff felt that reciprocal teaching helped promote inclusion as all children were included in lessons and groups were of mixed ability. Teaching staff also noted that the EPS coverage of the core functions in relation to reciprocal teaching was of a high quality i.e. assessment, intervention, consultation, research and training.

While the partnership theme was at a more exploratory phase of development, there was a balanced and measured response which acknowledged the need for future work e.g. the recognition that the approaches in the nurture groups had to be transferred into the wider school community. The range of evidence suggests that the service's focus on health and wellbeing has been a very successful development and the VSE process reinforced the need for this learning to be more clearly integrated into the strategic vision of the Education Authority. The value added role of the PEP was clear in her contribution to staff development, monitoring and tracking, research and coordination.

The service has become more integrated into strategic developments within the authority through the PEP becoming part of the Education Authority's Senior Management Team. Senior leaders within the authority appreciated the opportunity provided by the VSE for further reflection about the wider role of WDCEPS. It was agreed, for example, that the Education Authority and WDCEPS now needed to think about how the service could be built into more strategic work and engage less in activities which other partners might be better placed to deliver.

The high-quality reflective dialogue of WDCEPS and the systematic recording of the outcomes from the VSE self-evaluation activities, was highly effective in improving the quality of their self-evaluation and capacity to triangulate evidence. As a result, the

Education Scotland team was confident that the service had very effective processes for self-evaluation to bring about continuous improvement.

4. What does the Educational Psychology Service plan to do next?

The service identified strengths and areas for development within each of the two themed areas. These can be found on the WDCEPS website: <http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools/support-for-pupils/additional-support-needs/psychological-services/>

Education Scotland and WDCEPS agreed on the following next steps to improve their self-evaluation processes further:

- continue to build capacity in others to deliver key outcomes releasing time for the service to innovate and create; and
- utilise the psychological knowledge and expertise of the service to make a strong strategic contribution to national policy initiatives, including Scotland's Attainment Challenge, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing.

5. What is West Dunbartonshire Council's Educational Psychology Service's capacity for improvement?

Education Scotland is confident that WDCEPS has a strong capacity for continuous improvement. There is close synergy between the service's work and the educational priorities of the council, with a shared vision for improvement. The service receives strong support and challenge from the Executive Director of Educational Services, and his senior leadership team. In turn, the strong leadership of the PEP and her senior leadership team has impacted positively on the quality of the service delivered to children, young people and their families. The service has made very good progress in operational management and improvement planning since their last HM Inspectorate of Education inspection. Partnership working remains a strength, and the service now articulates well across all council departments and at a national level. Distributive leadership within the service is strong, and all staff contribute with skill and confidence to improvement planning and evaluating service delivery.

Anna Boni
Lead Facilitator
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Further information about the EPS VSE reports and self-evaluation can be found on the service's website <https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools/support-for-pupils/additional-support-needs/psychological-services/>

Education Scotland

Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Almondvale Way
Livingston EH54 6GA

T +44 (0)141 282 5000

E enquiries@educationscotland.gov.uk

www.educationscotland.gov.uk