Validated self-evaluation

The Moray Council Educational Psychology Services

24 July 2015

Transforming lives through learning

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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*. 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 The Moray Council Educational Psychology Service?

Moray Educational Psychology Service's (MEPS) aim is to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people and their families. MEPS policy sets out a clear and robust process for self-evaluation and continuous improvement. This takes account of the findings from their annual needs analysis centred around an agreed theme which informs their Strategic Improvement Plan. MEPS VSE looked at the impact and outcomes of the EPS:

- in supporting literacy difficulties across the five core functions of consultation, assessment, intervention, staff development and research (Currie 2002); and
- in terms of partnerships in the early years, this work had a focus on partnership with parents, role clarity, multi-agency partnership working and transition.

The service had already undertaken an effective audit of their work in literacy and had engaged fully with stakeholders and partners. The data obtained from their stakeholder evaluations helped them to develop their 'Addressing Literacy Difficulties' guidelines for practitioners. The guidelines aimed to promote a shared understanding of how best to support literacy difficulties. It also clarified the roles of professionals in the assessment and intervention of children and young people with literacy difficulties. The service wanted to build on this work during the VSE to look more closely at the value added by MEPS to the education authority's literacy strategy from birth to adulthood.

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

The partnership theme looked at the effectiveness of MEPS in working with partners in the early years. At the time of the VSE the service wanted to undertake a needs analysis to look at:

- the impact of MEPS in working with partners to support transition;
- roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists and other early years professionals;
- strengths and areas for improvement for EPS practice;
- the impact of training in the use of Solution Orientated and Nurturing approaches, and Attachment theory; and
- the impact of MEPS in relation to local and national priorities in early years partnership working.

MEPS wanted to use the evidence from the VSE to help inform their Improvement Plan for 2015/16.

An ambitious program of activities involving a wide selection of partners was put in place to help their self-evaluation. Activities included focus groups, visits to schools, individual interviews with professionals and parents, and reviews of case files. All members of MEPS were involved in one of two themed groups which were also chaired by MEPS staff. A thematic analysis was used which is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data. This involved the themed group members recording patterns within the data gathered from each activity and the themes identified the areas of strength and areas for development for the service. This approach was illustrated by a member of MEPS at the outset to the partners from across services in Moray. The themed group members included, allied health professionals, heads of establishments and partnership nurseries, curriculum improvement officers and others. All themed group participants were provided with a proforma to help them record the information obtained from the activities consistently. In between each themed group activity, time was devoted to reflection on the evidence gathered and collaboratively exploring questions for follow up in the next activities. All themed group members were engaged in identifying emerging strengths and areas for further development within each theme and in relation to the self-evaluation process.

3. **What did HM Inspectors learn about the quality of self-evaluation in The Moray Council Educational Psychology Service?**

During the VSE it became clear that MEPS were adding significant value to the Education Authority's work in literacy and partnership working in the early years. Team members demonstrated rigorous, thorough, and objective analysis of the evidence gathered during the VSE self-evaluation activities. HM Inspectors recognised the significant contribution made by MEPS to the authority's performance by supporting and challenging staff and encouraging them to reflect and question their practice. Educational psychologist's skills across the five Currie functions were shown to be highly effective in building staff capacity in literacy and partnership working and this was highly valued by stakeholders. HM Inspectors found strong evidence of the service's impact on helping others to improve children and young people's literacy skills. MEPS also demonstrated significant impact in working with multi-agency teams to improve planning, decision making and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. This was particularly evident at transition. Throughout the week, the service

demonstrated very important strengths in the interrogation of data and as a result was able to identify gaps through their self-evaluation. The processes illustrated the embedded ethos of self-evaluation and reflection which had been ably developed and led by the principal psychologist and supported by the distributed leadership within the team. These approaches were successfully being used to bring about improvement in the areas of focus and had been grounded in the vision of both MEPS and the council. These activities were well-planned, well-structured and built on what the service already knew and drew on the hypotheses they wanted to explore further. Team members in each of the two themed groups asked probing and appropriately challenging questions. The theme leads created a supportive ethos for partners who were empowered to open up and explore areas for improvement with confidence. Both themes recognised that the VSE took place at a time of strategic change and as such was providing very good opportunities for the knowledge of the VSE process to feed into future planning and strategy. Senior leaders within the authority appreciated the opportunity provided by the VSE for reflecting and thinking about the role of the educational psychologist. It was recognised, for example, that the authority and MEPS now needed to think about how the service could be built into more strategic work and engage less in activities which other partners were better placed to deliver.

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 Moray EPS website http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_55663.html

Education Scotland and MEPS agreed that the service now need to:

- use their sophisticated and very effective skills in self-evaluation to support the Education Authority in joint self-evaluation activities; and
- continue to build capacity in others to deliver key outcomes releasing time for the service to develop their strategic role further.

5. What is The Moray Council Educational Psychology Service's capacity for improvement?

HM Inspectors have confidence in MEPS capacity for continuous improvement. The very strong leadership of the principal educational psychologist (PEP) will allow the service to make a greater and more strategic contribution to educational improvement in Moray. The PEP has nurtured and developed the self-evaluation skills of staff very effectively. There is a very strong culture of self-reflection by individual educational psychologists which is effectively informing their practice. There is a clear vision for continuous improvement which is shared by all staff.

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24 July 2015

Further information about the EPS VSE reports and self-evaluation can be found on the service's website http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_55663.html

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