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Press release

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Challenges for councils' childcare and education services

Accounts Commission performance information published today highlights a number of challenges for council education and children's services.

In the financial year 2003/04:

- 60% of 16 and 17 year olds who left care 'away from home' did not gain Standard Grades in English and Maths. In comparison, only 7% of pupils overall left school without these qualifications.
- 20% of children placed under supervision were not seen by a supervising officer within the 15 day target time.
- 33% of primary schools and 11% of secondary schools were seriously under-occupied.
- Although 58% of secondary school teachers were women, only 33% of secondary school head or deputy head teachers were women.

Accounts Commission Chairman, Alastair MacNish, says:

"The issues covered in this report are not new and they are not easy for councils to tackle. Children are leaving care with very few qualifications, and many children placed on supervision need to be seen more quickly by social workers. It is encouraging to see that many councils are improving performance and this provides examples of good practice that other councils can learn from. Under-occupied primary schools remain a challenge and the efforts of councils to address this are not yet reflected in improving figures."

Councils' care of looked after children

60% of 16 and 17 year olds who left care 'away from home' did not gain Standard Grades in English and Maths, although performance did improve in six of the ten larger councils.

Management of Supervision orders

2,372 children were made the subject of a supervision order in those councils reporting reliable information (ie excluding Argyll & Bute, East Lothian and Perth & Kinross). Overall, fewer than four out of five (78.9%) of these children were seen by a supervising officer within the national target of 15 working days to begin their programme of work – this means that around 500 children were not seen within the target period.

School occupancy levels

There were 40 fewer primary schools in 2003-04 than 5 years ago, one third still had occupancy rates of 60% or less. Five councils (Argyll & Bute, Dundee City, Eilean Siar, Glasgow City and Inverclyde) reported that at least half their primary schools were 60% occupied or less. The number of secondary schools has stayed roughly the same over the past five years but their under-occupancy rate has fallen. 11% (385) had occupancy rates of 60% or less in 2003/04.

Gender equalities

Although 58% of secondary school teachers were women, only 33% secondary school head or deputy head teachers were women. The proportion was higher in primary and special schools. In primary schools 92% of teachers were women and 83% of heads and deputy heads were women. In special schools 83% of teachers were women and 80% of heads and deputy heads were women.

The use of qualified staff in care homes

Overall, the proportion of staff holding appropriate qualifications in care homes for children remained at just over 50% but in 15 councils the proportion of qualified staff went down.

Privacy in care homes

Of the 1,644 children looked after in care homes, just over 85% (1,402) had single rooms. The proportion of children in single rooms varied from 100% in eight councils to only 47.4% in North Lanarkshire.

A separate pamphlet relating to progress within environmental & regulatory services was also published today (3 February) and is available on the Audit Scotland web-site or by contacting the press office.

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Notes to Editors

1. The phrase "care 'away from home' " refers to children living in residential or foster care placements.
2. The Accounts Commission is responsible for securing the audit of 32 Scottish councils and 34 joint boards, including police and fire services. The Commission investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Accounts Commission is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.
3. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland.
4. Since 1993/94 councils have been required by law to provide information on how well they are carrying out their activities. Under the Local Government Act 1992 the Accounts Commission has to decide what information councils provide. The information for 2003/04 is the eleventh annual comparison of council performance. It provides important benchmarks against which performance will continue to be measured in future years.
5. The pamphlets published today relate to Education & Children's services and to Environmental and Regulatory services. They are the last in a series of six pamphlets comparing the performance, over a range of services, achieved by all 32 Scottish councils, eight fire brigades and eight police forces.
6. Information considered by an authority's appointed auditor to be unreliable has been excluded from the Scotland figures.
7. Information relating to Police and Fire services was published on 10 December 2004. A pamphlet relating to cultural & community services and on corporate management was published on 13 January. Information concerning Housing and adult Social work services was published on 27 January.