Core Facts
Overview

Building better schools:
Investing in Scotland's future

Contents

Introduction

This guidance complements and should be read alongside the School Estate Strategy: *Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future (2009)*[1] and supersedes any earlier documents.

Core facts on the school estate contribute to the process of measuring the success of the strategy. There are a small number of core facts, which are common to all local authorities, and these provide an evolving national picture. The purpose of this guidance is to provide an overview of the core facts outlined in the strategy.

The overview sets out:

- the background including the vision, aspirations and objectives,
- the core facts,
- the areas they cover, and
- an overview of each core fact.

Vision and aspirations

Our vision is for schools which signal the high value we place on learning; which people and communities can enjoy using and can be proud; which are well designed, maintained and managed and which encourage continuous engagement with learning; which are far more than just 'educational establishments' whose quality of environment supports an accessible range of services and opportunities and which enrich the communities they serve and the lives of learners and families.

Our aspirations for the school estate expand on the statement of vision and spell out what we, the Scottish Government and local authorities, want to achieve together, namely that:

- All children and young people will be educated in, and community users able to use, schools that are 'fit for purpose' in terms of **condition**, **suitability** and **sufficiency**;

- Schools are well-designed, accessible, inclusive learning environments that inspire and drive new thinking and change and which support the delivery of high quality educational experiences through *Curriculum for Excellence*[2];

- Schools are integral parts of the communities they serve, with pupils making use of community facilities and communities accessing school facilities;

- Schools accommodate and provide a range of services, activities and facilities that make a difference to people's health and well-being, to sustaining economic growth and to the strength and vibrancy of communities;

- A sustainable school estate whose design, construction and operation is environmentally and energy efficient; contributes directly to delivering the year-on-year reductions in greenhouse gas emissions introduced by the latest Climate Change (Scotland) Act, which is resilient to the impact of climate change and which leads by example in matters of environmental performance;

- A school estate that is efficiently run and maximises value for money;

- A school estate which is flexible and responsive – both to changes in demand for school places and to learners' and teachers' requirements and wishes, and where the beneficial impact of change is maximised by thorough consultation and engagement with users and stakeholders.

Curriculum for Excellence

Curriculum for Excellence brings a holistic approach to more effective learning and teaching. This is driving changes to the concept of the school – its purposes, functions, design and the way spaces are used. In turn, the buildings, the physical environment and facilities must themselves also be drivers of change. It is recognised they need to be more than just passive or responsive. Instead, they need to inspire and challenge both learners and teachers to think in new and imaginative ways about the surroundings within which learning takes place and more fundamentally 'how' it takes place. The buildings and the external facilities can and should be real catalysts for creativity in teaching and learning.

Purpose

The Scottish Government measures national progress in delivering the vision and aspirations of the strategy. The regular collection of a small number of core facts from local authorities contributes to this by providing a national picture and demonstrating progress over time. This is one strand of measuring the success of the strategy and is complemented by local authority level planning, monitoring and evaluation, by benchmarking and by qualitative evaluation.

Individual core facts are not intended to be viewed in isolation: rather, they are a collective basket of measures which are useful in illustrating trends and for taking a holistic overview at individual school, authority and national level.

The core facts are essential at both local and national level to:

- provide consistent data,

- assess performance and allow improvements to be focused on areas of greatest need,

- enable the provision of safe buildings,

- assess buildings on their suitability for supporting learning to deliver *Curriculum for Excellence,*

- inform spending and investment decisions,

- encourage best practice, and

- measure progress in delivering the vision and aspirations of the strategy.

They also complement local authorities' school estate management planning.

Furthermore, the core facts should be as objective, consistent and comparable as possible. It is recognised the core facts and the details will continue to evolve over time. The core facts described in this document represent the core information currently required to capture a broad strategic picture of where we are on the school estate strategy and for mapping progress over time.

As an integral part of the process local authorities collect a far wider range of data, particularly in regard to condition and suitability, than that required to be reported to Scottish Government and it is good practice for this to be used as an integral part of the school estate management plans for each school to inform maintenance and for development of the properties.

This refreshed guidance has been produced as the result of a collaborative venture between the Scottish Government, Scottish Futures Trust, Scottish Heads of Property Services (local authorities), Education Scotland, Scottish Building Standards, Architecture and Design Scotland and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland.

There is a working presumption that the data returned by local authorities for core facts will be made publicly available.

Buildings

The following is an excerpt from the Strategy describing the role of the school buildings and facilities:

'School buildings and facilities are far more than just part of the supporting cast for *Curriculum for Excellence*. They are at the heart of the whole philosophy and approach to effective learning and teaching and play the fullest part in helping to achieve change for the better. The ethos of the school as a learning community, presenting challenges and opportunities for personal achievement, development and interdisciplinary learning are all a part of, and colour, a child or young person's experience of learning and the curriculum.

The importance of buildings and facilities which are responsive, flexible, adaptable and malleable – to new ways of learning – is critical. In many instances though, flexibility of mind-set in the way places and spaces are perceived and used is as important as the physical structures themselves. It is essential too that the buildings and spaces themselves should be agents of change, inspiring both learners and teachers to new thinking about how education might happen in new and more effective ways. Creativity of design will lead to creativity of thinking and of use, inspiring and inviting exploration of the use of the environment and space in different and imaginative ways. There is a need to learn lessons from the succession of novel and sometimes unexpected ways in which spaces are already being occupied, transformed and used. That needs to feed back into improving the way we design, build in flexibility and incorporate features in future schools. The emphasis must be on innovation and personalisation rather than on standardisation, on presenting learners, teachers and schools with the continuing challenge and inspiration of flexible and sometimes non-standard spaces of different dimensions and configuration to explore.'

Life-cycle management

The school estate is a major public capital asset and the schools are built for the long term, therefore there is a need to take a long-term perspective in planning and assessing options. The prioritised repair costs, assessed under condition, will be a key issue for the local authority in deciding whether refurbishment or replacement is a more cost-effective option when carrying out whole-life cost option appraisals. Hence, although not part of the core facts for collection, consideration of life-cycle maintenance along with design and sustainability issues will form part of the whole-life cost option appraisal process for the school estate management plan.

Design

The strategy recognises that good design is one of the keys to turning the aspirations for the school estate into reality. Design quality covers many issues; architectural vision, functional efficiency, structural integrity, sustainability, lifetime costing and flexibility as well as responsiveness to the site and its setting. Moreover, creativity of design leads to creativity of thinking and use, inspiring and inviting exploration of the use of the environment and space in different and imaginative ways. While there is no core fact that focuses specifically on design, due to its nature, design issues have a significant impact across the other core facts, in particular, the suitability assessment.

Digital learning and teaching strategy

In 2016 the Scottish Government published 'Enhancing Learning and Teaching Through the Use of Digital Technology – a Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy for Scotland'[3] setting out its approach to ensuring learners experience an education enhanced by digital technology. Digital infrastructure forms part of the suitability assessment for schools and is covered under the factor[4] for 'fixed furniture and fittings'. A planned future development is to introduce an additional set of questions to collect key data on digital infrastructure for all schools, to inform the implementation of the strategy. The questionnaire will be introduced in the near future and will most likely result in further developments to both the suitability and condition core facts in recognition of the importance of this support service for delivering education.

Data collection

The data is collected annually by Scottish Government with a survey form and instructions issued to all local authorities in April and returned in May. The return is based on the school data live on the 1st April of that year.

Reporting of results

The data from the surveys is then consolidated and reported in the December statistical summary[5] along with results of the school and pupil censuses.

A sub-group has been set up by the Scottish Heads of Property Services to work with the partner organisations in order to improve the consistency and comparability of the core facts data across the local authorities.

Improvement cycle

The reporting of the results (check) is not the end of the process but a continuation of the improvement cycle. It is the trigger to move to the next stage in the cycle (act) as the information and knowledge from the report is analysed and used to inform the dialogue between Scottish Government, Scottish Futures Trust and the local authorities. The dialogue in turn informs the local authority school investment programme (plan) by focusing on the strategic objectives and the areas of greatest need.

Fig 1 – continuous improvement cycle

3 http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/09/9494/downloads

4 See section 3 for more detail on factors

5 http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/Summarystatsforschools

Core Facts:
General

The core facts dataset is well-established having been operating since 2003 and has been continually refined and developed to ensure relevance, greater robustness and consistency across the board and this will continue.

Core Fact 1:
Extent of the school estate

General data is provided on each individual school including the gross internal floor area. Once the data is consolidated it provides information on the numbers of schools by types, areas and overall totals. This is fundamental for monitoring the progress made in delivering the strategy.

The general data required for reporting on each school is:

School Name

LA code

Centre Number

School Type

School Overview Description

School Open

Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA) (m2)

School Comments

Shared Campus

Funded PPP/NPD/DBFM

Community Services

Rebuilt or Refurbished

New Build or Refurb

Date Works Completed

Total Value Works

Core Fact 2:
Condition of the school estate

A separate guidance document has been prepared for the Condition Core Facts and the latest version should be referred to for any detailed guidance.

Condition is concerned with the current state of the fabric of the school and with safety and security.

Condition has a direct impact on what goes on in the school. Appropriate forward planning and prudent, timely decisions on ongoing maintenance will best enable authorities to sustain the quality and asset value of their school buildings over the long term. Schools in good condition – irrespective of age or design – signal to all users (pupils, teachers, staff and the community) that learning is a valued activity, that the learning environment is a priority and often gives that all important 'feel-good factor'.

Experience shows the assessment of condition works best when carried out as a team exercise involving experienced building surveyors supported by maintenance, mechanical and electrical specialists along with appropriate representatives from the authority's Education service. Also, where the process is integrated into the planned and unplanned maintenance regimes along with the strategic investment planning.

The condition data required for reporting on each school is:

Gross Floor Area in Condition A (m2)

Gross Floor Area in Condition B (m2)

Gross Floor Area in Condition C (m2)

Gross Floor Area in Condition D (m2)

Overall Condition of school (A – D)

Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA) (m2)

Large Change

Date of most recent full survey

Date of most recent intermediate survey
(if after full survey)

Set of compliance data

Core Fact 3:
Sufficiency of the school estate

One of the major challenges for local authorities in managing their school estate is to match the evolving demand for space to deliver education and other services, with supply. This core fact focuses on one major aspect of sufficiency: pupil places. An assessment of sufficiency provides a means for the local authority to determine which of its schools are under or over-occupied by looking at physical space available and type of use. This, along with data on local pupil projections, should help the local authority achieve its sufficiency or occupancy objectives in the short to medium term and plan for the long term. The primary aim of a sufficiency assessment is to offer an objective and consistent method of identifying any surplus or deficit of pupil places in relation to current and projected future demand.

Local authorities determine the formulae used to calculate capacity, in line with Scottish Government guidance (Circular No. 03/2004)6. They may therefore vary between local authorities and school types.

The sufficiency data required for reporting on each school is:

Pupil Roll at Sept	
School Capacity	
Roll Capacity	
Projected pupil rolls for next 5 years	Years 1 to 5
Formula used to calculate capacity	Primary
Formula used to calculate capacity	Secondary

Core Fact 4:
Suitability of the school estate

A separate guidance document has been prepared for the Suitability Core Fact and the latest version should be referred to for any detailed guidance.

Suitability is a measure of whether a school building and its grounds are fit for the purpose of delivering the education curriculum.

This assessment will be based on advice from those that are familiar with the school and the services it delivers. Those best placed to bring the assessment together are the school management team(s) and faculty heads, along with the education core team from the authority, taking account of the views of others, principally staff and pupils.

The suitability data required for reporting on each school is:

Suitability (ratings A to D)

Plans to Change Suitability

Completion Date Change Suitability

Date of last assessment