

Public Document Pack



To: Councillor Greig, Convener; Councillor Mennie, Vice Convener; Councillors Allard, Blake, Brooks, Buchanan, Hazel Cameron, Clark, Fairfull, Grant, MacGregor, McLeod and Mrs Stewart; and Ms Danielle Barclay (Parent Representative - Nursery / Primary), Mr Doug Haywood (Teacher Representative - Primary Schools), Ms Jacqueline Munro (Teacher Representative - Secondary Schools), Dr Alison Murray (Parent Representative - Secondary), Mr John Murray (Roman Catholic Religious Representative), Mr Madhav Regmi (Third Religious Representative) and Mrs Hilda Smith (Church of Scotland representative).

Town House,
ABERDEEN, 9 February 2026

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

The Members of the **EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE** are requested to meet in the **Council Chamber - Town House** on **TUESDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2026 at 10.00am**. This is a hybrid meeting and Members may also attend remotely.

The meeting will be webcast and a live stream can be viewed on the Council's website. <https://aberdeen.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

JENNI LAWSON
CHIEF OFFICER - GOVERNANCE

BUSINESS

NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS

1.1 There are no items of urgent business at this time

DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT BUSINESS

2.1 There are no items of exempt business

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND TRANSPARENCY STATEMENTS

3.1 Members are requested to intimate any declarations of interest

DEPUTATIONS

4.1 There are no requests for deputation at this time

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

5.1 Minute of Meeting of 25 November 2025 - for approval (Pages 5 - 12)

COMMITTEE PLANNER

6.1 Committee Business Planner (Pages 13 - 18)

NOTICES OF MOTION

7.1 There are no Notices of Motion at this time

REFERRALS FROM COUNCIL, COMMITTEES & SUB COMMITTEES

8.1 There are no referrals

PERFORMANCE AND RISK

9.1 Performance Management Framework Report/National Improvement Framework Progress Update - CORS/26/030 (Pages 19 - 70)

9.2 Inspection Reporting - F&C/26/029 (Pages 71 - 108)

EDUCATION

10.1 Early Learning and Childcare Concession Agreements - Flexible Childcare Services Scotland - F&C/26/006 (Pages 109 - 170)

10.2 Action to Reduce Incidents in Schools - F&C/26/013 (Pages 171 - 220)

10.3 Early Intervention Support Service - The Bridge Service - F&C/26/015 (Pages 221 - 234)

Impact Assessments for this Committee can be viewed here:- [Impact Assessments | Aberdeen City Council](#)

Service Updates can be viewed here:- [Education & Children's Services Committee service updates](#)

Should you require any further information about this agenda, please contact Steph Dunsmuir, sdunsmuir@aberdeencity.gov.uk

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Education and Children's Services Committee

ABERDEEN, 25 November 2025. Minute of Meeting of the EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE. Present:- Councillor Greig, Convener; Councillor Mennie, Vice-Convener; and Councillors Allard, Blake, Brooks, Buchanan, Hazel Cameron, Clark, Fairfull, Grant, MacGregor and McLeod.

External Members: Ms Danielle Barclay (Parent Representative - Nursery / Primary), Mr Doug Haywood (Teacher Representative - Primary Schools), Ms Jacqueline Munro (Teacher Representative - Secondary Schools), Dr Alison Murray (Parent Representative - Secondary), Mr John Murray (Roman Catholic Religious Representative), Mr Madhav Regmi (Third Religious Representative and Mrs Hilda Smith (Church of Scotland representative) (External Members for articles 1 to 9 only).

The agenda and reports associated with this minute can be located [here](#).

Please note that if any changes are made to this minute at the point of approval, these will be outlined in the subsequent minute and this document will not be retrospectively altered.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND TRANSPARENCY STATEMENTS

1. The following transparency statements were intimated:-

In relation to item 9.2, Councillor Grant made a transparency statement to advise that he had children at Riverbank School; Mr Haywood advised that he worked at Gilcomstoun Primary School; Ms Barclay advised that she had children who attended Heathryburn Primary and Bucksburn Academy and the Vice Convener noted that she had a child who attended Gilcomstoun Primary School.

None of the above Members considered that these amounted to interests which required declarations to be made.

MINUTE OF MEETING OF 16 SEPTEMBER 2025

2. The Committee had before it the minute of the previous meeting of 16 September 2025, for approval.

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the minute as a correct record.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLANNER

3. The Committee had before it the committee business planner, as prepared by the Chief Officer – Governance.

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE
25 November 2025

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the reason for the delay for item 6 (Minimising Exclusion Policy); and
- (ii) to note the business planner.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK REPORT - CORS/25/274

4. The Committee had before it a report by the Executive Directors - Families & Communities and Corporate Services, which presented Committee with (a) the status of key quarterly performance and service standard measures (and recent national publications) relating to the Education and Lifelong Learning and Children's Social Work and Family Support Clusters; (b) progress update in respect of the Council's National Improvement Framework Plan and (c) early reflections against the initial release of 2025 Senior Phase attainment and achievement data through the Insight and Local Government Benchmarking tools.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee note the report and provide comments and observations on the information contained in the report appendices.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to request that the Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning, circulate information to all Members in relation to the number of placing requests submitted for S1 pupils in 2025 and how many were successful; and
- (ii) to note the report.

INSPECTION REPORTING - F&C/25/262

5. The Committee had before it a report by the Executive Director - Families & Communities, which provided details of the outcome of inspection reports published by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIe) and The Care Inspectorate since the last meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) note the content of the report; and
- (b) instruct the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to continue to support Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings and schools to implement continuous improvement in keeping with agreed Quality Improvement Frameworks.

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the recommendations.

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CLUSTER RISK REGISTERS AND ASSURANCE MAPS - F&C/25/273

6. The Committee had before it a report by the Executive Director - Families & Communities, which presented the Cluster Risk Registers and Assurance Maps in accordance with Education and Children's Services Committee Terms of Reference to provide assurance that risks were being managed effectively within the Clusters. It was also noted that when the Risk Registers were last considered by the Education and Children's Services Committee on 28th November 2024, Members asked that officers consider the use of a matrix to reflect the previous year's situation. This request was actioned within the report.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee note the Cluster Risk Registers and Assurance Maps set out in Appendices A to D.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to request that officers look at the wording of the risk and control actions on page 115 of the agenda pack, in relation to "the perception of failure to record incidents of violence and aggressive behaviour against school staff";
- (ii) to request that the Executive Director – Families and Communities, in collaboration with the Chief Officer City Development and Regeneration provide a service update to Members in relation to where there were gaps in the workforce affecting the organisation and wider economy, and how the Education Service and other Council Clusters were working to address the workforce needs;
- (iii) to note the Cluster Risk Registers and Assurance Maps set out in Appendices A to D;
- (iv) to agree to continue the positive cooperation with Trade Unions to deliver the agreed Behaviour Plan and delivery of preventative professional learning to help realise safe and peaceful learning environments for all, and receive updates on progress through the established NIF updates;
- (v) to welcome the opportunity to sustain partnership working with Trade Unions in responding to survey findings that record the views of teachers and other staff;
- (vi) to agree that the creative use of resources to develop and model improved learning spaces - including The Bridge - keeps children's rights at the centre of our work and contributes to the goal of inclusion in education settings and agrees that future expansion of similar models, based on lessons learned from the Bridge , should be progressed for secondary stage pupils; and
- (vii) to agree that the policy on mobile phone use in schools should continue to be monitored and will be considered in the report to the forthcoming Committee on "Action to Reduce Incidents in Schools".

DYCE AND BUCKSBURN - SCHOOL CATCHMENT AREAS - F&C/25/265

7. With reference to article 14 of the minute of the meeting of 24 June 2025, the Committee had before it a report by the Executive Director - Families & Communities,

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which presented the outcomes of recent discussions with officers at Aberdeenshire Council, in relation to proposals for making changes to school catchment areas for Dyce Academy and Dyce School, along with recommendations for the next steps.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) notes the outcomes of officers' recent discussions with colleagues at Aberdeenshire Council, relating to proposals for making changes to school catchment areas for Dyce Academy and Dyce School;
- (b) instructs the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to commence planning, in collaboration with Aberdeenshire Council, for a statutory public consultation to be held in Winter 2026/27, on proposals to adjust the catchment area boundaries for Dyce Academy and Dyce School, so that they align with the boundary line for the City, and with a view to these changes being implemented from August 2027;
- (c) instructs the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to review the catchment areas for all schools within the Bucksburn and Dyce Associated Schools Groups (ASGs), in light of the proposed alignment of the Dyce Academy and Dyce School catchment areas to the City boundary, and to draft proposals for any required further changes to catchment areas, to achieve an appropriate balance of pupil numbers within all schools in these ASGs in future years; and
- (d) instructs the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to report back to the Committee with details of all proposed catchment area changes and recommendations for statutory public consultation on these, as part of the annual School Estate Plan update report in Autumn 2026.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the outcomes of officers' recent discussions with colleagues at Aberdeenshire Council, relating to proposals for making changes to school catchment areas for Dyce Academy and Dyce School;
- (ii) to note that the catchment area changes for Dyce Academy were proposed to re-balance pupil numbers between Bucksburn Academy and Dyce Academy, due to the current and predicted over-capacity issues at Bucksburn;
- (iii) to instruct the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to review the catchment areas for Bucksburn Academy, Dyce Academy and all primary schools within the Bucksburn and Dyce Associated Schools Groups (ASGs), in order to achieve the re-balancing of numbers between the two academies and in light of the proposed alignment of the Dyce Academy and Dyce School catchment areas to the City boundary;
- (iv) to instruct the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to provide a holistic report to Committee with details of all proposed catchment area changes and recommended dates for statutory public consultation, as part of the annual School Estate Plan update report in September 2026; and
- (v) to instruct the Chief Officer – Education & Lifelong Learning to write to the parents of Dyce Academy, Bucksburn Academy and associated primary schools with an update on progress to date.

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REPORT ON OPTIONS TO RATIONALISE EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS - F&C/25/223

8. The Committee had before it a report by the Executive Director – Families & Communities, which presented options on rationalising Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision in order to meet demand, maximise resources and achieve best value.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee consider the options presented and approve the amended Early Learning and Childcare delivery models, set out in Appendix 3 of the report, from August 2026, based on demand.

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the recommendations.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL DECISION MAKING - F&C/25/263

9. With reference to article 3 of the minute of Council of 28 April 2025, the Committee had before it a report by the Executive Director – Families and Communities, which highlighted what the Council could do to promote the involvement of young people in expanding and strengthening youth participation in global decision making.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) note the content of the report; and
- (b) endorse plans to have young people shape global initiatives, continue to secure global opportunities and make effective use of digital to amplify voice.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) In relation to 3.13 of the report regarding Aberdeen Youth Movements emerging partnership with youth group “Yappers” in Southern Ireland, to request that officers circulate, by way of email, any social media handles for the Yappers; and
- (ii) to approve the recommendations.

At this juncture, the External Members left the meeting.

UPDATE ON THE LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM THE THEMATIC REVIEW OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES - F&C/25/271

10. With reference to article 12 of the minute of the meeting of 26 November 2024, the Committee had before it a report by the Executive Director – Families & Communities, which updated Members on progress in response to the Care Inspectorate Thematic

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Review of services for Children with Disabilities, presented in September 2024 and to inform on the updated Action Plan for 2025.

The report recommended:-
that the Committee

- (a) note the progress made against the Action Plan developed in response to the Care Inspectorate Thematic Review;
- (b) note the development of Transition Planning Guidance and protocol including the establishment of Transitions Group Meetings; and
- (c) note the intention to engage with children and young people to develop accessible material to ensure the Council is adopting a rights centric approach to transitions.

The Committee resolved:-
to approve the recommendations.

CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25 - F&C/25/264

11. The Committee had before it a report by the Executive Director – Families & Communities, which presented the Chief Social Work Officer's Annual Report for year 2024/25 (up to 31/3/25). The report was to inform Members of the role and responsibilities exercised by the Chief Social Work Officer; to provide information on the delivery of statutory social work services and decision making in the period; and to give a progress report on key areas of social work activity within Aberdeen City.

The report recommended:-
that the Committee note the content of the Annual Report.

The Committee resolved:-
to note the report.

**ABERDEEN CITY'S CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25
- F&C/25/266**

12. The Committee had before it a report by the Executive Director – Families & Communities, which shared Aberdeen City's Child Protection Committee (CPC) Annual Report 2024-25, to provide assurance that the work of the CPC was effectively helping reduce risks to children and young people.

The report recommended:-
that the Committee -

- (a) note the content of the Child Protection Committee's Annual Report 2024-25; and
- (b) instruct the Chief Social Work Officer to provide Committee with a further report in November 2026 detailing the continuing impact and effectiveness of partnership work in relation to child protection.

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The Committee resolved:-

to approve the recommendations.

- **Councillor Martin Greig, CONVENER**

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<p style="text-align: center;">EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLANNER</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Business Planner details the reports which have been instructed by the Committee as well as reports which the Functions expect to be submitting for the calendar year.</p>									
			Update	Report Author	Chief Officer	Directorate	Terms of Reference	Delayed or Recommended for removal or transfer, enter either D, R, or T	Explanation if delayed, removed or transferred
17 February 2026									
1	Early Learning and Childcare Concession Agreements	E&CS 24/01/23 - to instruct the Chief Education Officer to continue to monitor the concession contracts and report back to Committee at the end of the first 3 full years of the current concession agreement.		Louise Beaton	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.1		
2	Action to Reduce Incidents in Schools	CHPP 26/08/25 - to instruct the Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning to bring a report to Education and Children’s Services Committee as soon as possible outlining an analysis of both Council and Police Scotland data with regard to use of offensive weapons in schools and what actions our schools are taking to reduce incidents involving weapons E&CS 25/11/25 - to agree that the policy on mobile phone use in schools should continue to be monitored and will be considered in the report to the forthcoming Committee on "Action to Reduce Incidents in Schools" Council 05/02/26 - to instruct the Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning, in collaboration with the HDRC, to review national and international research on the impacts of banning mobile phones and smart watches in schools for inclusion in the report on "Action to Reduce Incidents in Schools" to the Education and Children's Services Committee as soon as possible.		Shona Milne	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.1		
3	Progress on Early Intervention Service Test of Change at Riverbank School	E&CS 29/04/2025 - (i)to instruct the Chief Officer Education & Lifelong Learning to progress with a time limited (12 months) Early Intervention Service Test of Change at Riverbank School for younger primary school pupils, operational August 2025; (ii)to instruct the Chief Officer Education & Lifelong Learning to report back on progress in 2 committee cycles from commencement of service		Emma Powell / Elaine Thomson	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.1		
4	Education and Children's Services Performance Management Framework	To present the regular performance update		Alex Paterson	Data Insights	Corporate Services	1.1.3		
5	Inspection Reporting	A standing item (if required) to report on the outcome of inspections and any changes in the approach of inspection agencies Will include the regular update on Northfield and Harlaw Academies		Shona Milne	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.6		
28 April 2026									
6	Corporate Parenting Annual Report / Progress on Promise Plan	E&CS 29/04/25 - to instruct the Chief Social Work Officer to update Committee on progress against the High Level Promise Plan within one calendar year		Graeme Simpson	Children's Social Work and Family Support	Families and Communities	2.1		
7	Child Neurodiverse Pathway Proposal	Officers have been working with ACHSCP to consider how best to support families who are keen to secure an identification or diagnosis and will present a potential model to Members for consideration.		Emma Powell	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.1		
8	Children's Services Plan - Annual Update	E&CS 21/03/23 - to instruct the Director Children's and Family Services to ensure that yearly progress reports are presented to Committee & thereafter for approval by the Community Planning Management Board over the lifetime of the Plan.		Eleanor Sheppard	Families and Communities	Families and Communities	1.1.1	D	The Children's Services Plan Annual Report 2025/26 has been moved one cycle to align with the planning and reporting of the refreshed Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2026-36. The annual report will now be presented in June.

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			Update	Report Author	Chief Officer	Directorate	Terms of Reference	Delayed or Recommended for removal or transfer, enter either D, R, or T	Explanation if delayed, removed or transferred
2	Free School Meals Annual Update	EOD Committee 19/04/18 - to instruct the Chief Officer - Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to bring a report to Committee prior to the close of each school year (a) detailing the numbers registered for and taking free school meals by school and (b) assessing the progress made by implementing the new workstreams and detailing any required adjustments for the following school year.		Andy Campbell	Corporate Landlord	Families and Communities	1.1.1		
22	Early Intervention Service Test of Change - Full Evaluation	E&CS 29/04/25 - (iii) to instruct the Chief Officer Education & Lifelong Learning to report a full evaluation of the Test of Change within 4 committee cycles from commencement of service	Possibly June 2026	Emma Powell	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.1		
23	ASN Spaces in Schools	E&CS 24/06/25 - to note current provision of spaces offered across the whole school estate and instruct the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to (a) identify any opportunities for sharing good practice in order to develop support for ASN for the benefit of pupils and school communities and (b) to bring back a report as soon as possible based on the adequacy or otherwise of spaces for Additional Support Needs within each School within the city, in order to truly understand the actual requirements for each school To report to the Committee on the adequacy of spaces for Additional Support Needs (ASN) within each school in the city	A service update was provided in the interim in October 2025	Andrew Jones / Emma Powell	Corporate Landlord / Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.1		
24	Education and Children's Services Performance Management Framework	To present the regular performance update		Alex Paterson	Data Insights	Corporate Services	1.1.3		
25	Inspection Reporting	A standing item (if required) to report on the outcome of inspections and any changes in the approach of inspection agencies		Shona Milne	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.6		
26									
27			15 September 2026						
28	School Age Childcare Policy	E&CS 17/09/24 - to approve the School Age Childcare Policy. Policy to be reviewed on an annual basis - report may not be required, should no changes be needed to policy		Louise Beaton	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.1 and 1.1.5		
29	Aberdeen City National Improvement Framework Plan (NIF)	To present the plan		Eleanor Sheppard	Families and Communities	Families and Communities	1.1.1		
30	Community Learning and Development Plan	E&CS 16/09/25 - to instruct the Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to publish the plan, evaluate progress against the first year of the CLD Plan 2025/26 and present an evaluation of progress and updated CLD Delivery Plan for 2026/27 to Committee in September 2026		Margaret Stewart	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.1		
31	Education Climate Change Annual Report	E&CS 24/06/25 - (i) to instruct the Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to support the Youth Climate Change Group to collate and share a yearly summary of the most impactful projects in our schools, through means to be determined by the group, to inspire other young people across the city; (ii) to invite representatives from the Youth Climate Change Group to present the report to Committee in subsequent years; and (iii) to instruct the Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to report back on progress by committee report within one calendar year.		Matt Reid	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.1		

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			Update	Report Author	Chief Officer	Directorate	Terms of Reference	Delayed or Recommended for removal or transfer, enter either D, R, or T	Explanation if delayed, removed or transferred
2	Music Service Update	E&CS 16/09/25 - to note that the Music Service had identified within the report, that at primary school level the service could be in some ASGs "thinly spread in terms of choice available" and to instruct the Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning to determine if there were any changed patterns in uptake across secondary as a result of being thinly spread in some areas and include the findings in future annual updates; and to instruct the Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning to report back on progress in one calendar year.		Beth Edwards	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.1		
32	School Estate Plan Annual Update	To present the annual update. Council 01/10/25 - to instruct the Chief Officer - Corporate Landlord to further develop proposals and timescales for future ASG based asset reviews, and to build these in to future updates of the School Estate Plan. E&CS 25/11/25 - to instruct the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to provide a holistic report to Committee with details of all proposed catchment area changes and recommended dates for statutory public consultation, as part of the annual School Estate Plan update report in September 2026		Andrew Jones	Corporate Landlord	Families and Communities	1.1.1, 1.1.2 and 1.1.5		
33	Accessibility Plan	E&CS 12/09/23 - to instruct the Chief Officer - Education to present an updated Accessibility Plan to the Education and Children's Services Committee within 3 calendar years.		Mhairi Shewan	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.5		
34	Education and Children's Services Performance Management Framework	To present the regular performance update		Alex Paterson	Data Insights	Corporate Services	1.1.3		
35	Inspection Reporting	A standing item (if required) to report on the outcome of inspections and any changes in the approach of inspection agencies		Shona Milne	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.6		
36									
37	17 November 2026								
38	Education and Children's Services Performance Management Framework	To present the regular performance update		Alex Paterson	Data Insights	Corporate Services	1.1.3		
39	Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report	To present the Chief Social Work Officer annual report.		Graeme Simpson	Children's Social Work and Family Support	Families and Communities	2.5		
40	Child Protection Committee Annual Report	E&CS 25/11/25 - (ii) to instruct the Chief Social Work Officer to provide Committee with a further report in November 2026 detailing the continuing impact and effectiveness of partnership work in relation to child protection		Amy Anderson	Children's Social Work and Family Support	Families and Communities	2.1		
41	Cluster Risk Registers and Assurance Maps	To report on the cluster risk registers		Graeme Simpson / Shona Milne	Families and Communities	Families and Communities	1.1.4		

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2	Inspection Reporting	A standing item (if required) to report on the outcome of inspections and any changes in the approach of inspection agencies		Shona Milne	Education and Lifelong Learning	Families and Communities	1.1.6		
42	2027								
43	REPORTING DATE TO BE CONFIRMED								
44	Children's Social Work - Workforce Development Plan	E&CS 26/11/24 - to instruct the Chief Officer - Children's Social Work and Family Services to present an evaluation of progress against the workforce plan to Committee in 2027		Ali McAlpine	Children's Social Work and Family Support	Families and Communities	2.1		
45	Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill	ODC 17/01/19 - To instruct that annual reports be submitted on the progress of implementation of the Autism Action Plan. Reported 5 March 2020 and will then be annually, however 2021 was delayed to May due to pandemic impact. Was reported to former Operational Delivery Committee on 31 August 2022, thereafter annually. E&CS 02/07/24 - to instruct the Chief Officer Children's Social Work and Family Support to provide an update on progress of the Bill as appropriate		Graeme Simpson	Children's Social Work and Family Support	Families and Communities	2.1.1		An update will be provided to Committee once the Bill has concluded Stage 2 of the Parliamentary process. Officers are unable to provide a date for reporting back at this time as it is dependent on Parliament A service update was provided in the interim in September 2025
46	The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024	E&CS 18/02/25 - to instruct the Chief Officer - Children's Social Work and Family Support to report to this committee once the plan for enactment and associated funding was made known by the Scottish Government		Graeme Simpson / Andrea McGill	Children's Social Work and Family Support	Families and Communities	2.1		
47	Grandhome / Oldmachar / Bridge of Don Secondary Provision - Outline Business Case (NA1) / Oldmachar ASG primary school provision	The feasibility study was placed on hold in last year's update to the School Estate Plan, however due to increasing pressure on pupil capacity at Bridge of Don Academy and Oldmachar Academy, there is now a requirement for the feasibility study to proceed, and officers have therefore allowed for this in the overall implementation programme. As instructed by the Committee in September 2023, the feasibility study will incorporate options for future primary school provision, as well as for secondary school provision. Council 01/10/25 - to instruct the Chief Officer - Corporate Landlord to undertake a feasibility study to investigate options for the establishment of a new primary school to serve Grandhome, including any required interim arrangements, and to report the findings of the feasibility study in an Outline Business Case, in line with the timescales outlined in the Long Term Programme		Andrew Jones	Corporate Landlord	Families and Communities	1.1.1, 1.1.5, 1.3		
48	Consultation on proposed new school at Bucksburn / Newhills	Council 01/10/25 - to instruct the Chief Officer - Corporate Landlord to carry out an options appraisal to determine any required interim arrangements for establishing the proposed new school at Bucksburn/Newhills, and to include the cost implications of any such arrangements in the budget setting process for 2026/27, with a view to the arrangements being included within the proposals for the forthcoming statutory public consultation on the new school		Andrew Jones	Corporate Landlord	Families and Communities	1.1.1, 1.1.5, 1.3		
49	SCHOOL ESTATE PROJECTS - ON HOLD/NOT YET STARTED								
50	SCHOOL ESTATE PROJECTS - ON HOLD/NOT YET STARTED								

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			Update	Report Author	Chief Officer	Directorate	Terms of Reference	Delayed or Recommended for removal or transfer, enter either D, R, or T	Explanation if delayed, removed or transferred
2									
51	City-wide Denominational Primary Schools	<p>EODC 08/09/22: Instructs the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to make arrangements to carry out a feasibility study and stakeholder engagement to identify options for ensuring appropriate and sustainable long term denominational primary school provision for the city to meet forecast demand, and report back to the Education and Children’s Services Committee with recommendations. (Recommendation RC1)</p> <p>Council, 02/10/24: To note the contents of the report, and instruct the Chief Officer - Corporate Landlord to continue to monitor forecast pupil numbers for the three denominational primary schools, and to include recommendations in next year’s annual school estate plan update report on any required actions to be taken to ensure that the city’s denominational primary school provision continued to be appropriate to meet the expected demand for pupil places</p> <p>Council 01/10/25 - Project currently on hold as per annual School Estate Plan update</p>		Andrew Jones	Corporate Landlord	Families and Communities	1.1.1, 1.1.5, 1.3		A report on the completed feasibility study was presented to the Committee in September 2024, and then referred to Full Council in October 2024, where it was agreed that officers would continue to monitor numbers at the three schools. Latest school roll forecasts indicate that there continues to be excess capacity across the schools, however officers recommend that no action is taken at this time, as school rolls may be affected by the planned refurbishment of St Peter’s School. It is recommended that this project remains on hold until the refurbishment of St Peters School is completed, and the impact of this on pupil numbers can be assessed.
52	Loirston Loch Additional Primary Provision - Outline Business Case (L1)	<p>E&CS 12/09/23 - Instructs the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to make arrangements to carry out a feasibility study and stakeholder engagement to identify options for creating the required additional school capacity to serve the planned Loirston Loch development, and report back to the Education and Children’s Services Committee with recommendations as appropriate.(Recommendation L1)</p> <p>E&CS 20/02/24 - Revised school estate timeline approved. No immediate requirement for this, revisit post 2024</p> <p>E&CS 17/09/24 - Project currently on hold (as per annual School Estate Plan update)</p> <p>Council 01/10/25 - Annual School Estate Plan update - contained progress update on Loirston Loch as per explanation column</p>		Andrew Jones	Corporate Landlord	Families and Communities	1.1.1, 1.1.3, 1.5		The latest school roll forecasts indicate that pupil numbers at Charleston School are expected to rise above the school’s capacity in future, as a result of the development at Loirston Loch, although it may be some years before a viable number of pupils is reached to justify the construction of a new school. Officers anticipate that work on a feasibility study will likely need to commence from 2028/29, to identify options for mitigating this rise in pupil numbers

COMMITTEE	Education and Children’s Services
DATE	17 February 2026
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Performance Management Framework Report/National Improvement Framework Progress Update
REPORT NUMBER	CORS/26/030
EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS	Andy MacDonald/Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICERS	Martin Murchie/Shona Milne/Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR(S)	Alex Paterson/Shona Milne
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.3

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present Committee with (a) the status of key quarterly performance and service standard measures (and recent national publications) relating to the Education and Lifelong Learning and Children’s Social Work and Family Support Clusters.(b) a progress update in respect of the Council’s National Improvement Framework Plan and (c) early reflections against the national release of 2024/25 Curriculum for Excellence outcomes in December 2025.

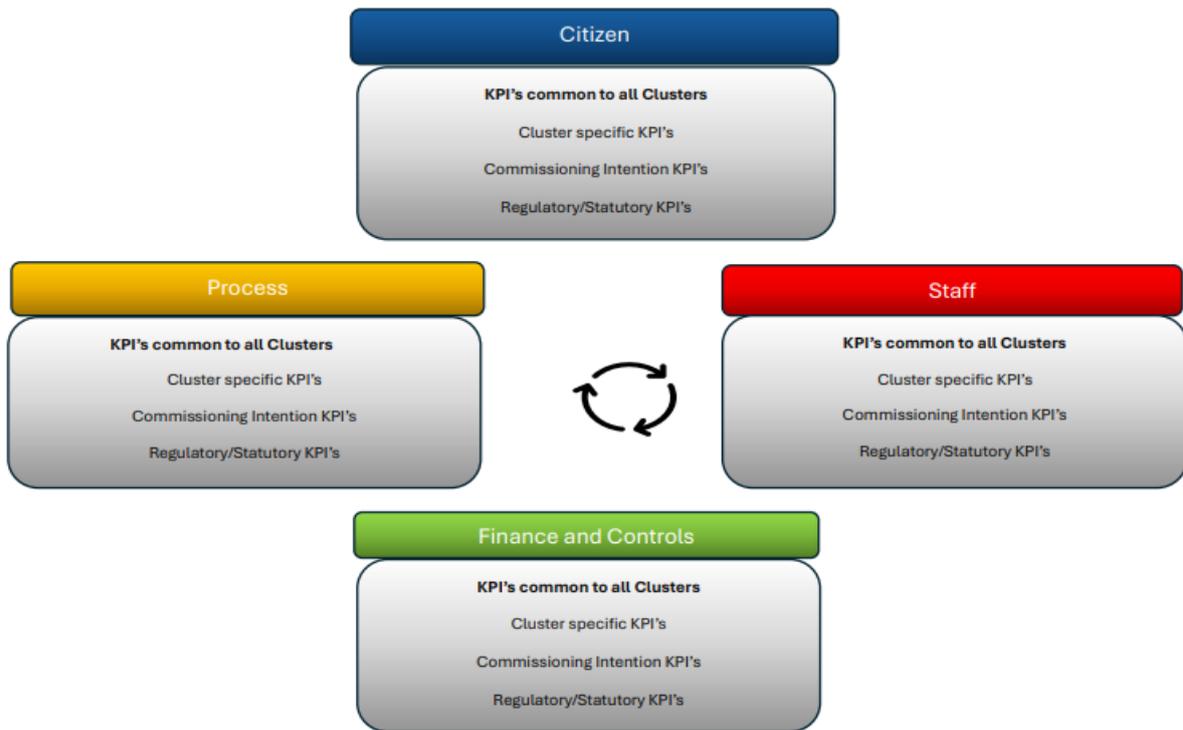
2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Committee note the report and provide comments and observations on the information contained in the report appendices.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

Report Structure

- 3.1 The Council’s refreshed Performance Management Framework for 2025/26 was approved at the meeting of Council on 20th August 2025.
- 3.2 Performance Management Framework Reporting (PMFR) against in-house delivery directly contributing to, or enabling delivery against, the City’s Local Outcome Improvement Plan, (LOIP) has informed development of successive Council Delivery Plans, including the [Council Delivery Plan 2025/26](#) (the Plan) that was agreed by Council on the 16th April 2025.
- 3.3 The Performance Management Framework provides for a consistent approach within which performance will be reported to Committees. This presents performance data and analysis within four core perspectives, as shown below, which provides for uniformity of performance reporting across Committee.



Report Content

- 3.4 Appendix A reflects current performance against the Plan, including corporate service level measures, and Service Standards for 2025/26, alongside nationally benchmarked datasets from more recent data releases.
- 3.5 Presentation and analysis of the wider range of operational and strategic level performance measures covering the work of both Clusters was contained within:
- the Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2024/25, presented to the November 2025 meeting of the Committee, and:
 - the standing Council Delivery Plan Annual Report to Council in December 2025.
- 3.6 Appendix B captures a Progress Update in regard to Aberdeen City Council's current National Improvement Framework Plan, agreed at this Committee in September 2025.
- 3.7 Appendix C contains initial reflections against primary pupil achievement across the Curriculum for Excellence for 2024/25.
- 3.8 Within the Summary Dashboard the following symbols are used:

Performance Measures

Traffic Light Icon



On target or within 5% of target or benchmarked outcome.

-  Within 5% and 20% of target or benchmarked outcome and being monitored
-  More than 20% out with target or benchmarked outcome and being actively pursued
-  Data only – target not appropriate or benchmarked outcome not available

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct environmental implications arising out of this report

7. RISK

The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council’s Risk Appetite Statement”

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic	None	NA	NA	NA
Compliance	No significant legal risks.	Publication of service performance information in the public domain ensures that the Council is meeting its legal obligations in the context of Best value reporting.	L	Yes
Operational	No significant operational risks.	Oversight by Members of core employee health and safety/attendance data supports the Council’s obligations as an employer	L	Yes

Financial	No significant financial risks.	Overview data on specific limited aspects of the cluster's financial performance is provided within this report	L	Yes
Reputational	No significant reputational risks.	Reporting of service performance to Members and in the public domain serves to enhance the Council's reputation for transparency and accountability.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	None	NA	NA	NA

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
<p><u>Aberdeen City Council Partnership Agreement</u></p> <p>Improving Educational Choices</p> <p>Creating Better Learning Environments</p> <p>Caring for Young People</p>	<p>This report supports the following key Council priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commit to realising the potential of each individual, by seeking to widen curriculum choice and implement progressive choices. - Work with the city's universities, North East Scotland College and businesses to increase educational and training options and the number of care experienced young people and young people from deprived communities, going onto positive destinations, including further and higher education, vocational training and apprenticeships. - Promote the number of apprenticeships on offer through the council. - Work to ensure that every school community provides a safe and respectful environment for young people and staff. - Ensure the Council follows best practice as a corporate parent to get the best outcomes for looked-after young people, those in kinship care and those with additional support needs such as autism, developmental disorders, or mental health problems.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with the Scottish Government to expand free early learning and childcare to one- and two-year-olds from low-income households. - Continue to seek to support young people to receive care in Aberdeen, through fostering, adoption and other services and seek to reduce “out of authority” placements - Ensure local education services identify young people with mental health problems and help them get early support and help, where appropriate, to transfer to adult services.
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Aberdeen City Local Outcomes Plan Refresh

<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes (Children and Young People)</p>	<p>The detail within Performance Management reporting to this Committee evidences how Families and Communities delivery leads, contributes to, or influences, each of the Children & Young People Stretch Outcomes in the refreshed LOIP. This includes the following Outcomes:</p> <p>3. 95% of all children will reach their expected developmental milestones by their 27–30-month review by 2026.</p> <p>4. 90% of children and young people report they feel listened to all of the time by 2026.</p> <p>5. By meeting the health and emotional wellbeing needs of our care experienced children and young people they will have the same levels of attainment in education and positive destinations as their peers by 2026.</p> <p>6. 95% of children living in our priority neighbourhoods (Quintiles 1 & 2) will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026.</p> <p>7. 83.5% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026</p> <p>8. 100% of our children with Additional Support Needs/disabilities will experience a positive destination</p>
<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes (Adults)</p>	<p>Families and Communities services, through the Improvement Project Aims below contribute to achievement of Outcome 11 - Reduce the rate of both alcohol related deaths and drug related deaths by 10% by 2026</p>

	<p><i>Reduce the average age from 14 to 12 at which children are identified as requiring preventative support to mitigate the risk of future harm in relation to drug and alcohol use by 2026 and.</i></p> <p><i>Reduce the % of 13–15-year-olds reported as using each sub group of drug by 50% and cannabis by 20% by 2026.</i></p>
Community Empowerment Stretch Outcomes	<p>The detail within Performance Management reporting to this Committee evidences how Families and Community service delivery leads, though the Improvement Project Aim; <i>100% of decisions which impact on children and young people are informed by them by 2026</i> contributes to, or influences Outcome 16:</p> <p>50% of people report they feel able to participate in decisions that help change things for the better by 2026.</p>
Regional and City Strategies	<p>The detail within Performance Management reporting to this Committee evidences how Families and Communities delivery leads, contributes to, or influences outcomes aligned to the City’s National Improvement Framework Plan.</p> <p>Data contained in the report also offers contextual evidence of Education & Lifelong Learning and Children’s Social Work Service’s contributions to the City’s Children’s Services Plan, along with both regional Economic and Skills strategies.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	It was confirmed by Chief Officer, Martin Murchie, on 16 th January 2026 that no Integrated Impact Assessment is required for this report
Data Protection Impact Assessment	A Data Protection Impact Assessment is not required for this report.
Other	No additional impact assessments have been completed for this report.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Performance Management Framework Update 2025/26 -CORS/25/189, 20th August 2025
Council Delivery Plan 2025/26 – CORS/25/038, 16th April 2025

11. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Education & Children’s Services Committee Corporate
Performance Summary Dashboard

Appendix B – Progress Update, National Improvement Framework

Appendix C – Curriculum for Excellence Summary

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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Appendix A – Corporate Performance Management Framework Report – Education and Children’s Services Committee, February 2026

Education and Lifelong Learning

1. Citizen

Table 1. Service Level Measures – 2025/26 Service Standards (Education – rolling year to January 2026)

Performance Measure	Year to Date Value	2025/26 Target	Status	Long Trend - Annual
% of all eligible requests for early learning and childcare placements met within one month of request receipt	100%	100%		
% of all mainstream requests for a primary and secondary school placement within one month of request receipt	100%	100%		
% of ACC managed/funded Early Learning and Childcare settings achieving an average evaluation score of ‘Good’ (the National Standard) in formal inspections of core Quality Indicators by the Care Inspectorate	100%	100%		
% of Primary, secondary, and special school provision achieving an average evaluation of ‘Good’ in formal inspections of core Quality Indicators by Education Scotland	90.25%	100%		
% school attendance levels (in comparison with national attendance levels)	91.8%	> 91%*		
% of requests for additional support to meet the wellbeing needs of children and young people which are processed within 40 days	100%	100%		

*Based on 2024/25 National Attendance statistics release, 12th December 2025

Service Commentary – Table 1

Care Inspectorate

There have been an additional four inspection publications against Early Learning and Childcare settings since the previous meeting of this Committee in November 2025. Of these, each ELC setting met the average evaluation score (meeting the National Standard). All four achieved at least the baseline standard of Adequate and above across each evaluation area, without any Improvement Recommendations from the inspecting agency. The averaged evaluation grade from these four inspections was 4.4 indicating that, collectively, the Service was exceeding the Standard across recent inspection activity.

Education Scotland

There has been one additional publication of Education Scotland inspection activity covering education provision within schools since that reported at the previous meeting of this Committee, which was a wholly positive evaluation. However, because of data movement within the fixed monitoring period, the rolling 12-month measure shows a marginal fall against that reported in November 2025 (93.75%) because of late 2024 data dropping from the reporting cycle.

In total, the data above captures the outcomes from three full and three short inspections, which is amongst the lowest levels of Education Scotland inspection activity in recent rolling years. On this basis, there is slightly reduced confidence that this rolling year figure can be relied on as an accurate measure of education authority level performance.

As additional inspection activity is expected in both the current and subsequent terms, it is likely that future snapshot data will better reflect the education authority's position.

Table 2. Corporate Measures – 2025/26 Cluster Level Indicators (Quarterly) – Complaint Handling

Performance Measure	Quarter 1 2025/26	Quarter 2 2025/26	Quarter 3 2025/26	2025/26 Target	Status	Long Trend - Monthly
	Value	Value	Value			
Total No. complaints received (stage 1 and 2) - Education & Lifelong Learning	40	33	30			
% of complaints resolved within timescale (stage 1 and 2) – Education & Lifelong Learning *	60.0%	66.7%	66.7%	75.0%		
% of complaints with at least one point upheld (stage 1 and 2) – Education & Lifelong Learning	0%	12.1%	16.7%			
Total No. of lessons learnt identified (stage 1 and 2) – Education & Lifelong Learning	9	5	4			

Service Commentary - Table 2.

Operationally, the proportion of Complaints that are resolved within timescale in Quarter 3 experience some impact from the effect of commencement of the festive period. In this context the outcome, matching that in Quarter 2, and exceeding that in Quarter 1, is demonstrating an improving trend although additional focus is being placed on raising the overall speed of response times. On average, delays in providing responses were limited to 2 days out with the target set for this combined measure.

The performance figures refer to responses given within the standard complaint response timescales. They do not incorporate responses delivered within an extended timeframe that has been agreed with the complainant, as permitted under the statutory Complaints Handling Procedure. The extension process allows

services extra time to investigate more complex complaints or when necessary information is not immediately available. We aim to keep the complainant informed around the extension and the reason for it as much as possible.

Table 3 - Care Inspectorate Inspection Grade Evaluation Scoring – 2023-25 Calendar Years

Publication Year	How good is our care, play and learning? - Average Grade Score	How good is our setting? – Average Grade Score	How good is our leadership? - Average Grade Score	How good is our staff team? - Average Grade Score	Average Combined Grade Score	Average Combined Grade Score (% based on National Standard)
2025	3.94	4.16	4.28	4.11	4.12	103.0%
2024	3.67	3.90	4.02	4.04	3.91	97.8%
2023	3.64	3.83	3.80	3.79	3.76	94.0%

Service Commentary – Table 3

In the context of the recently revised evaluation framework being utilised by the Care Inspectorate, the table above represents a final calendar year in which it will be practical to make direct comparisons between the previous four thematic areas of inspection, although this change will not affect the capacity to benchmark and report on averaged evaluation scoring.

As noted above, averaged evaluation scoring across each of the inspection themes has improved consistently across the three calendar years with the outcomes in all but Care, Play and Learning now exceeding a score of 4 that represents the equivalent of ‘Good’ on which meeting the National Quality Standard for Early Learning provision is based.

These data reflect the entirety of Care Inspectorate inspection activity conducted in the 12-month period, including that where more than one inspection of establishments may have been undertaken within the period.

2. Process

Table 4. Service Level Quarterly Measure - Visits in Person and Virtual Visits to Library Service Premises

Performance Measure	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3
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	2025/26	2025/26	2025/26	Long Trend - Quarterly
	Value	Value	Value	
Number of visits in person to library service premises	136,860	136,374	126,470	↓
Number of visits to Library Service provision (in-person and virtual)	414,779	423,998	424,011	↑

Service Commentary – Table 4

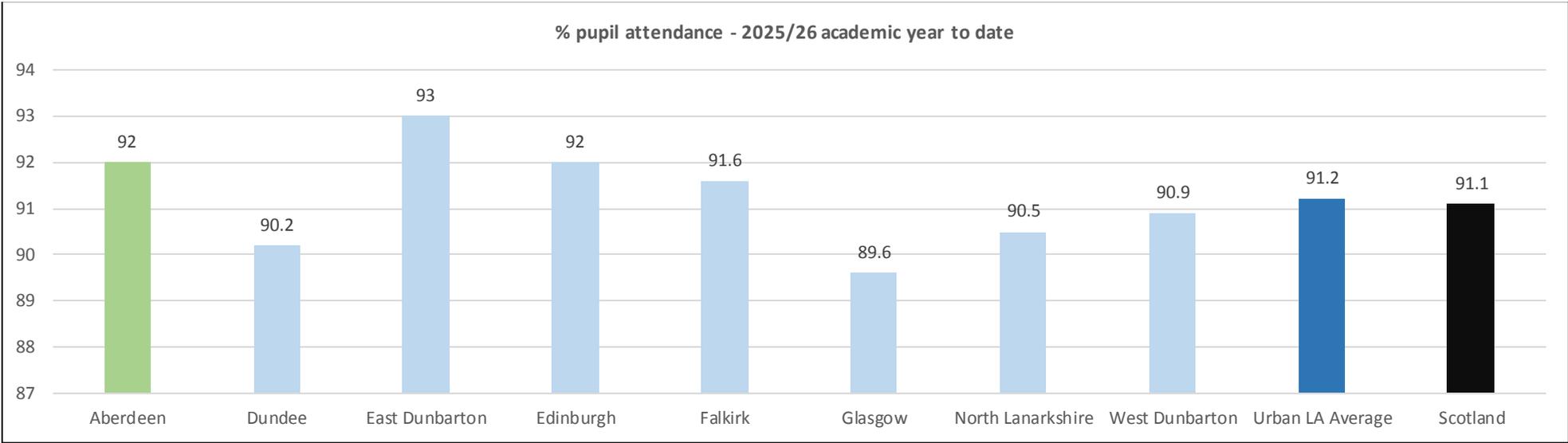
Visits in Person to Library Service

Visits in person at Quarter 3 were lower than those in the previous quarterly periods. This is consistent with seasonal patterns of engagement although the level of visits was greater than those recorded for the same periods in both 2022/23 and 2023/24 by 21.9% and 9.6%, respectively. In person visit levels in Quarter 3 of 2024/25 were 140,027 which, at the time, represented the highest level of engagement in any quarterly period in the post-pandemic period.

In Person and Virtual Visits to Library Service Provision

Quarter 3 saw a continuation of the upwards trend in visits in person and digital visits in combination, with a marginal increase in numbers in comparison with the same period in 2024/25 of just under 1,000 additional visits. Virtual Visits of 297,541 in Quarter 3 represented an increase of c. 10,000 visits on the prior quarter and c. 14,000 on the same period in 2024/25, suggesting that the end of fiscal year outcome will be similar to that in 2024/25.

Chart 1. National School Attendance Measure - Percentage of attendance (Urban Local Authorities) Academic Year to Date



Service Commentary – Chart 1

Pupil attendance across the academic year to date has sustained the pattern prevalent at each of the snapshot points previously reported to this Committee with the city performing well in comparison with its benchmarks, although this period has recorded a slight dip in attendance against the previous academic year-to-date information, (from 92.9% to 92.0%) which aligns with the experience of both each comparable education authority and at a national level.

Source: Education Analytical Services, Scottish Government, Confirmed data as of 12th December 2025

3. Staff

Corporate Measures – Service Level Indicators

Table 5. Establishment (Education and Lifelong Learning)

Performance Measure	Quarter 1 2025/26	Quarter 2 2025/26	Quarter 3 2025/26	Status	Long Trend - Quarterly
	Value	Value	Value		
Establishment actual FTE – Education and Lifelong Learning)	3,268	3,233	3,276		

Table 6. Accidents and Incidents (Education and Lifelong Learning)

Performance Measure	Quarter 1 2025/26	Quarter 2 2025/26	Quarter 3 2025/26	Status	Long Trend - Quarterly
	Value	Value	Value		
H&S Employee Reportable Accidents/Incidents by Cluster – Education and Lifelong Learning	5	2	3		
H&S Employee Non-Reportable Accidents/Incidents by Cluster – Education and Lifelong Learning	336	366	471		

Service Commentary - Table 6

The rise in recording of Non-Reportable Accidents/Incidents in Quarter 3 is consistent with seasonal patterns experienced in previous years. This is overlaid by rises in Accidents and Near Miss Incidents which are, for example, related to weather conditions.

The 'Action to Reduce Incidents in Schools' report also being considered at this meeting, outlines in detail the scope of Accident/Incident recording which contributes to the above measures and highlights the extent to which the Education Service is working, through additional data analysis, and in partnership with Trade Unions, to mitigate the levels of Accidents/Incidents connected to pupil behaviours which is a strong, but not exclusive, driver behind the levels of reporting.

The Q2 Health and Safety report recently considered at the meeting of the Staff Governance Committee on the 3rd of November 2025, outlined in detail the extent of Accident/Incident reporting recorded against the Cluster, and at school level. Data covering Quarter 3 is due to be reported in full to the April meeting.

Table 7. Absence Due to Illness (Education and Lifelong Learning) 12 month rolling average.

Performance Measure	Quarter 1 2025/26	Quarter 2 2025/26	Quarter 3 2025/26	Quarter 3 Corporate Figure	Status	Long Trend - Quarterly
	Value	Value	Value	Value		
Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE – Education and Lifelong Learning (12-month rolling figure at quarter end)	3.72	3.61	3.52	4.75		
Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE – Primary and Secondary Schools (12-month rolling figure at quarter end)	4.17	4.19	3.95	4.75		
Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE – Early Learning and Childcare (12-month rolling figure at quarter end)	4.95	5.21	5.55	4.75		

Service Commentary – Table 7

Both the Cluster and School level outcomes are showing long term, and quarter -to quarter, improvement. Although ELC is recording a minor increase in 12 month rolling absences in Quarter 3, this is consistent with seasonal patterns experienced across other ‘close physical contact’ services and in line with that at the same point in 2024.

4. Finance & Controls

Table 8. Staff Expenditure (Education and Lifelong Learning)

Performance Indicator	Quarter 1 2025/26		Quarter 2 2025/26		Quarter 3 2025/26		Quarter 4 2025/26	
	Value	Status	Value	Status	Value	Status	Value	Status
Staff Expenditure – % spend to full year budget – Education and Lifelong Learning	25.9%		51.8%		77.1%			

Service Commentary - Table 8

As described within the Council Financial Performance – Quarter 3 report to the Finance and Resources Committee on 10th February 2026. the Education Service faces a series of sustained demand pressures, alongside a level of variation in support needs amongst ELC and school pupils at each transition stage which cannot always be fully predicted, even in the context of increasingly sophisticated demand projection tools.

In this context, whilst stringent controls on staff costs are being applied, the end-of year forecast for staff expenditure, occasioned by meeting the Service's on-going statutory obligations, provides limited evidence that the pressures on staff budget lines are likely to ease within this financial year and that the full year spend will exceed budget.

Table 9. Local Government Benchmarking Framework – Cost per pupil/Pre-school place/Library Visit

Performance Indicator	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Status	2024-25 National Figure
	Value	Value	Value		
SLGBF CHN 1 Cost per Primary School Pupil	£6,980	£6,845	£7,244		£7,611
SLGBF CHN 2 - Cost per Secondary School Pupil	£8,512	£8,820	£8.954		£9,341
SLGBF CHN 3 - Cost per Early Learning Placements	£10,086	£9,258	£10,229		£12,083
SLGBF CL2 - Cost Per Library Visit	£2.66	£2.40	£2.12		£2.71

Service Commentary – Table 9

Cost of Educational Provision

In the context of the most recent Local Government Benchmarking Framework releases, which independently compares key performance indicators across all Scottish Local Authorities, Aberdeen City has sustained its relative positive standings in respect to the cost of Early Learning, Primary and Secondary education provision overall.

Respectively, both Cost per Primary School Pupil and ELC Placement measures are positioned in the first performance Quartile across all 32 Scottish Local Authorities, retaining standings that have been constant for 3 consecutive years. Costs per Secondary School pupil have moved marginally from within the first performance Quartile to just under this level and is placed 10th of 32 Local Authorities.

Whilst there have been increases in the cost of each of the three measures from 2023/24, this largely mirrors the experience across Scottish Local education authorities, although the extent of year-to-year change is more pronounced for the city than has been experienced at the national level and in comparison with

our benchmarks. This reflected some of the challenges around evaluating and offering adequate Additional Support Need supports for our children, alongside the pressure on resources that rising in-year school year placements had placed on the Cluster.

Cost per Library Visit

The Cost per Library Visit (based on aggregation of all engagement with the Service which is expressed within the Statutory Performance Measure) has remained just under first Quartile of local authority performance for a fourth consecutive year, being ranked 9th in 2024/25, with a small improvement against both Cost value and ranking on 2023/24.

In each of these four years, the Service has delivered lower Cost Per Visit outcomes than both the GBF Family Group average (£3.16) which consists of our material benchmark local authorities, and the Scotland figure above.

Source: Local Government Benchmarking Framework

Children's Social Work and Family Support

Corporate Measures – Cluster Level Indicators (Quarterly)

5. Citizen

Table 10. Corporate Measures – 2025/26 Cluster Level Indicators (Quarterly) – Complaint Handling

Performance Measure	Quarter 1 2025/26	Quarter 2 2025/26	Quarter 3 2025/26	Status	2025/26 Target	Long Trend Quarterly
	Value	Value	Value			
Total No. of Complaints received (stage 1 and 2) - Children's Social Work	15	11	11			
% of Complaints resolved within timescale (stage 1 and 2) - Children's Social Work *	80.0%	63.6%	36.4%		75%	
% of complaints with at least one point upheld (stage 1 and 2) - Children's Social Work	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%			
Total No. of lessons learnt identified (stage 1 and 2) - Children's Social Work	0	0	0			

Service Commentary – Table 10

In the context of Children’s Social Work, there were a disproportionate number of Stage 2 complaints received in the single month of November which materially skewed the quarterly outcome. This unusual pattern of complaints submission posed challenges on staff resource in terms of providing responses within timescale, although the average delay in response times of those exceeding the target was limited to three days.

N.B. The performance figures refer to responses given within the standard complaint response timescales. They do not incorporate responses delivered within an extended timeframe that has been agreed with the complainant, as permitted under the statutory Complaints Handling Procedure. The extension process allows services extra time to investigate more complex complaints or when necessary information is not immediately available.

Table 11. Service Level Standards 2025/26 (Children’s Social Work)

Performance Measure	Quarter 1 2025/26	Quarter 2 2025/26	Quarter 3 2025/26	Status	2025/26 Target	Long Trend Quarterly
	Value	Value	Value			
% of care provided in Council children's homes, fostering and adoption services achieve a care standard of Good or better	100%	100%	100%		100%	
We will ensure care provided by the Council’s fostering service achieves a care standard of good or better through regulatory inspections.	100%	100%	100%		100%	
We will ensure care provided by the Council’s adoption service achieves a care standard of good or better through regulatory inspections.	100%	100%	100%		100%	

6. Process

Table 12. Service Level Standards 2024/25 (Children’s Social Work)

Performance Measure	Quarter 1 2025/26	Quarter 2 2025/26	Quarter 3 2025/26	Status	2025/26 Target	Long Trend Quarterly
	Value	Value	Value			
% of children open to Children’s Social Work supported to live at home, where safe to do so	76%	76%	76%		80%	
% of initial screenings undertaken, and action decided, on new referrals within 7 days.	99%	99%	98%		100%	
% Initial Child Protection Planning Meetings held within timescale	68%	64%	60%		80%	
% of Care experienced children and young people with three or more placements in 12 months	4.2%	4.4%	5.1%		5%	

Service Commentary - Table 12.

Child Protection Planning Meetings

There were 15 ICPP meetings over the course of October to December. Of these, 9 were held within timescale, with those that fell out with the timescale as a consequence of officer availability being completed within an average of just over 2 days beyond the preferred timescale. The availability of other stakeholders, including parents/guardians, has also been an influence in this outcome.

Chart 2. Service Level Measures – Number of Looked After Children and Young People by Placement Type/ In Continuing Care

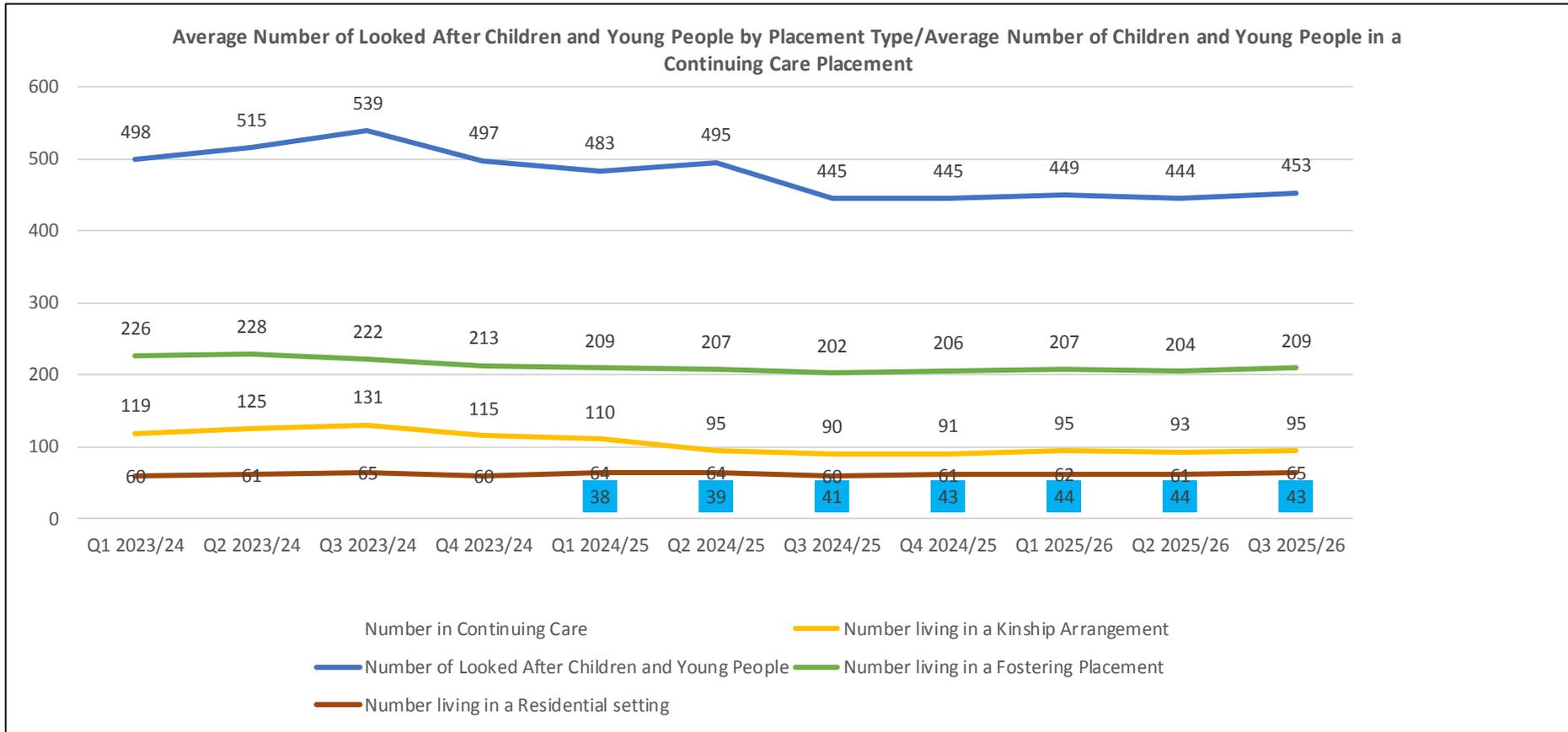


Table 13. Balance of Care -% of Looked After Children by Placement Type – Quarterly Comparisons (Quarter 3)

Period	% Looked After living in a Kinship Arrangement	% Looked After living in a Fostering Placement	% Looked After living in a Residential setting
2023/24	24.1%	44.3%	11.9%
2024/25	21.6%	43.4%	12.6%
2025/26	20.8%	45.6%	13.8%

Service Commentary.**Chart 2 – Looked After Children and Young People and those in Continuing Care**

The number of Looked After Children and Young People overall, and in Kinship settings showed a continuation of the long trend of reducing the number of children and young people being Looked After. This is in line with the strategic objectives of the Children's Social Work service and the themes of the Promise.

The number of those living in Foster care and Residential settings, along with those requiring support in Continuing Care are materially unchanged from Quarter 2 and are stable in comparison with prior quarterly data from the commencement of 2024/25 onwards.

The marginal uplifts in numbers from Quarter 2 reflect both anecdotal and empirical evidence from across CSW services within Scotland that the period leading up to, and within the festive period, can place additional pressures on family relationships which may be expressed in terms of a rise in necessary interventions by these services.

Table 13 – Looked After Children by Placement Type

As noted in the Service Commentary offered against these metrics to the November meeting of this Committee, the number of Looked After Children and Young People in total (the denominator) is changing at a rapid pace between quarterly snapshot points in each comparable year and may no longer offer the capacity for natural interpretation in a publicly available document.

On this basis, officers within both Children's Social Work and Data and Insights are proposing that this data, moving forwards, be collated and presented in a revised data format. This exercise is currently being 'audience tested' within Data and Insights to ensure that this proposal will meet the information needs of Committee, the public and management teams which are reliant on this data.

Corporate Measures – 2025/26 Service Level Indicators

Table 14. Establishment (Children’s Social Work)

Performance Measure	Quarter 1 2025/26	Quarter 2 2025/26	Quarter 3 2025/26	Status	Long Trend - Quarterly
	Value	Value	Value		
Establishment actual FTE – Children’s Social Work	348.6	351.4	352.8		

Table 15. Accidents and Incidents

Performance Measure	Quarter 1 2025/26	Quarter 2 2025/26	Quarter 3 2025/26	Status	Long Trend Quarterly
	Value	Value	Value		
Reportable Accidents/Incidents - Employees (No in Quarter – Children’s Social Work	0	0	0		
Non-Reportable Accidents/Incidents - Employees (No in Quarter - Children’s Social Work	1	0	0		

Table 16. Absence Due to Illness (Children’s Social Work) 12 month rolling average.

Performance Measure	Quarter 1 2025/26	Quarter 2 2025/26	Quarter 3 2025/26	Quarter 3 2025/26 Corporate Figure	Status	Long Trend - Quarterly
	Value	Value	Value			
Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE – Children’s Social Work	3.02	2.98	2.97	4.75		

8. Finance & Controls

Table 17. Staff Expenditure (Children' Social Work)

Performance Indicator	Quarter 1 2025/26		Quarter 2 2025/26		Quarter 3 2025/26		Quarter 4 2025/26	
	Value	Status	Value	Status	Value	Status	Value	Status
Staff Expenditure – % spend to YTD budget profile – Children's Social Work	27.1%		56.8%		82.8%			

Service Commentary - Table 17

As with the Education and Lifelong Cluster, the report to the Finance and Resources Committee on 10th February 2026 noted that the Children's Social Work Service has, throughout the fiscal year, experienced a series of sustained demand pressures, including high and complex caseloads arising from the support generated by recent net migration factors, alongside evidence of resident families experiencing, and presenting with additional requirements for support.

Net inwards migration is currently the predominant factor in population growth for the city, (and demands on the Service), and is less capable of advance prediction or modelling. This is a challenge facing both a series of other local authorities and at a national level.

Although there have been recent improvements in the robustness of Office for National Statistics / National Records of Scotland population projections this does not /cannot extend to identifying the likely support needs of future population growth, particularly that related to that migration where no or limited records of historical need may be available to the Service.

These demand pressures will continue to exert an influence on staff resource, and expenditure levels, to conclusion of the fiscal year with the potential of a spend to full year budget that exceeds the nominal journal lines.

Appendix Data Notes

- Target Setting: Where no target is applied against Service Standards, the 'Business-as-Usual' objective is that these services will be delivered on a consistent basis within the available resource.
- Data Trend Directions: Unless stated to the contrary, Long-Term Data Trends are based against the average of 3 monthly, quarterly, and annual consecutive periods, respectively.
- Staff Costs: Staffing costs referred to throughout this Appendix exclude adjustments for the corporate vacancy factor.



Long Term Data Trends	
	Improving/Increasing
	No or Limited Change/Stable
	Getting Worse/Decreasing

PI Status	
	Alert (figure more than 20% below target and being actively pursued)
	Warning (figure between 5% and 20% out with target and being monitored)
	OK (figure within target or better)
	Data Only

Appendix B – National Improvement Framework, February 2026 Progress Update

Improve Leadership of Change in Schools		
Build leadership and capacity through:	Progress	RAG
A coordinated professional learning programme focussing on strategic leadership responsibilities	Our professional learning programme is in line with our priorities and has a clear focus on supporting young people with additional support needs. Improvements in Learning, Teaching and Assessment are being supported through the continued roll out of the Learning, Teaching, and assessment toolkit. An experienced head teacher leads on delivery of a comprehensive professional learning offer for existing middle leaders and those aspiring to be leaders of the future.	
Involving all middle leaders in Quality Improvement Visits to other establishments	Schools' quality improvement arrangements ensure middle leaders are part of improvement visits within their own school and at least one of the visits to schools in their trio. All staff are encouraged to reflect on this experience to support their own professional learning and development.	
Issuing and analysing surveys of staff, parents, and learners to inform Quality Improvement Activity	<p>Surveys were sent electronically to parents/carers of 8 Primary Schools deemed to be in Category 3, i.e. requiring the highest level of support to secure school improvement. 222 responses were received (around 18% response rate for all settings).</p> <p>Most parents/carers responded positively about their school environment: 84% agreed or strongly agreed that their child liked attending their school and 86% of respondents believed their child was treated fairly and with respect by school staff. Most parents surveyed (80%) felt that their child is safe in school.</p> <p>Parents/carers were less sure about how the school promotes their role in their child's learning, the life of the school or in school improvement: 46% either disagreed or did not know whether the school took their views into account when making changes. 54% responded positively that their school organises activities where parents and children can learn together. 39% of parents/carers who responded felt encouraged to be involved in the Parent Council.</p> <p>Overall, the results from parents/carers who responded highlight satisfaction with the school environment, learning and relationships. The survey results suggest a few schools would benefit from increased engagement with parents to support school improvement.</p> <p>The low response rate across all schools suggests "survey fatigue" and therefore a review of how parental views are gathered by the Central Team to inform Quality Improvement activity will be considered.</p>	

Increased professional learning and networking opportunities for all staff	Quality improvement activities within school trios have resulted in schools joining together to look at shared improvement activity. In secondary, networks have been established for Maths, Literacy and Learning Teaching and Assessment and this is providing staff from across the city with high quality professional learning and opportunities for moderation of standards. Plans are in place to increase the number of official networks in place over this session and into next.	
Targeted programme of staff development for schools sitting in Category 3	A professional learning suite of resources has been shared with schools citywide for use on in-service days, staff development time or by individuals/groups of teachers. Key themes covered are Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion and Moderation.	
Delivery of a middle leaders' programme which necessitates the application of strategic leadership skills in participant settings.	<p><i>Aberdeen City Council Guide to School Inspections – Secondary</i> has been developed and is now being used in schools with senior and middle leaders. This document makes explicit the key features of school improvement across the core Quality Indicators. Bespoke sessions with Faculty Principal Teachers (PTs) have taken place, where the features of highly effective learning and teaching have been worked through using His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE) approaches to evaluating the learning experience. Examples include work completed with PTs at Harlaw Academy and Oldmachar Academy as part of preparation for inspection.</p> <p>Literacy and Numeracy Networks for middle leaders have been established. The current focus for these groups is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approaches to raising staff awareness of the progress with the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) • Approaches to evaluating the learning experience and identifying next steps <p>All English and Maths teachers will benefit from a range of workshops with a focus on a shared understanding of standards in the Broad General Education (BGE) and Senior Phase on the 10th of February 2026. The training for English teachers will run at Cults Academy. The training for Maths teachers will run at Aberdeen Grammar School.</p> <p>A Learning and Teaching Network has been established for secondary school learning, teaching, and assessment strategic leads. Training has taken place on approaches to evaluate learning and teaching. The theory will be applied in school settings through these staff supporting Quality Improvement Visits and using the learning gained when evaluating the learning experience within their own schools.</p>	

Use of the Northern Alliance Toolkit to link with wider professional learning opportunities	Head Teachers completed an evaluation in October to identify what professional learning is needed to support their engagement with the Northern Alliance toolkit. Two sessions will be delivered in January and one in March. These sessions will support leadership development and strengthen key areas of practice aligned with school improvement priorities.	
Deliver newly appointed HT programme and review implementation whilst engaging with national partners to help address recruitment	All newly appointed Head Teachers are provided with a comprehensive induction programme prior to taking up post. A review and evaluation will take place at the end of Session 2025-26. Anecdotal feedback to date has been exceptionally positive.	
Review of the Quality Improvement Framework	At the face-to-face Head Teacher meeting in November 2025, Primary Head Teachers carried out an evaluation and review of current Trio arrangements and categories of support. Head Teachers are overwhelmingly supportive of the Trio processes and recognise the added value in working with settings out with their Associated Schools Groups (ASGs). ASG working is also acknowledged as being invaluable to school improvement. On the whole, Primary Head Teachers felt that arrangements for support within the 3 categories were appropriate. Feedback provided some ideas for change/introduction, and these will be progressed by the Central Team before further dialogue with school leaders later this session.	

Improve the Quality of Learning Teaching and Assessment		
Continue to improve the quality of learning, teaching, and assessment (pace and challenge) by:	Progress	RAG
Continuing to develop and use the Learning and Teaching Toolkit to support school and individual self-evaluation	<p>Schools have shared that they will engage with the toolkit to support staff development and professional learning and to plan Career-Long Professional Learning (CLPL) activities at school and Associated School Group (ASG) level.</p> <p>They will use data to identify gaps and guide actions; continue to use self-evaluation tools and surveys and repeat data collection to measure progress and inform planning. Schools are beginning to use the new pupil self-evaluation questions. Several schools plan to run professional learning group sessions in their own school in a book-group style, and provide training linked to improvement priorities. This will build a shared understanding of Learning, Teaching and Assessment and schools will collate this to create a shared expectation of what high quality teaching looks like. Pace, Challenge and Differentiation continues to be the most sought-after area for development and the professional learning session which will be delivered in late January will support school leaders to make impact in this area.</p>	
The phased deployment of additional digital tools and a new digital identity.	<p>Migration of all schools to the new identity has been completed. Several improvements are necessary to ensure that the services delivered are as good as or better than previous provision. IT colleagues are reviewing technical requirements to deliver these improvements.</p> <p>Central Education team staff were migrated to the new identity in December 2025, however, have now been reverted due to access to several key authority systems not yet being aligned with the new digital identity. This will be reviewed as these systems are transformed.</p>	
Expand the P4 Writing programme to all schools	<p>Cohort 6 schools have completed the writing programme and Spread and Scale training was offered to Cohort 1 - 6 schools again. 123 teachers and managers attended this training, making these the most popular sessions we have delivered. Evaluations have been overwhelmingly positive. Our final cohort of schools will embark on their training in January and February and a final Spread and Scale training will be offered to all schools that have taken part in the programme. Data for P4 writing suggests that</p>	

	stretch aims being set for P4 cohorts of pupils are ambitious, with the biggest gains predicted to be a 30% rise in children attaining the first level outcomes.	
Continuing to offer data training for all staff to ensure accountability throughout the system	Data sessions are offered as part of our professional learning offer and there is evidence that this, alongside the robust data discussions held termly, is leading to improved data literacy and accountability.	
City-wide moderation programme in Literacy and Numeracy starting with schools in the lower SIMD quintiles	A professional learning suite of resources was shared with schools citywide, for use on in-service days, during staff development time or by individuals/groups of teachers. Key themes covered are: Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion and Moderation. The ACC Moderation programme provides school leaders with a presentation, discussion points and learning, teaching, and assessment activities to be carried out by classroom practitioners. The moderation programme includes an evaluation to be submitted by schools on completion. Feedback will inform future professional learning offers. Through quality improvement visits and data discussions, senior leaders are supported by Quality Improvement Officers and Quality Improvement Managers to ensure all staff have an understanding of the moderation cycle.	
Ongoing evaluation of the Numeracy portal through Maths network meetings	The Maths Network has been re-established. The feedback from the Network is that the resources on the Portal are supporting Faculty Principal Teachers to provide quality resources to support young people in settings where staff vacancies are an issue. The booklets support young people with clear instructions and model answers provided to support independent learning. Materials produced to support improved pedagogy in Maths will also be placed on the Portal. This is a resource which is sustainable and can be updated regularly.	
Launch of the Literacy Framework to support children, young people and adult learners and ongoing evaluation through the English Language networks	The writing and reading progressions to support Literacy have been made available to all schools and Early Learning and Childcare settings. The talking and listening progressions will follow quickly and be in place by February 2026. Evaluations of the reading progressions will be analysed and any adaptations made prior to the launch of the entire suite of Literacy progressions. This will then support the launch of a Literacy Framework alongside the Library Service and other partners who provide support Literacy to our ACC residents.	
Link standards to the ELC framework to increase pedagogical understanding	A new set of standards, linked to the Early Learning and Childcare Framework, has been developed and shared with staff. Initial feedback from staff has been very positive.	

Ensure a robust application of the new tracking system and use of digital data tools	All 11 secondary schools are now using the new Pupil tracking system in Year 2. Meetings have been held with colleagues in other authorities (Angus and Edinburgh) to discuss how data can be exported and analysed to monitor and track the progress of young people. Spreadsheets have been developed to allow schools to use data exported from Pupil Tracking and identify areas for action. We now have the ability to compare tracking data for all secondary schools. Work is ongoing to include other fields from SEEMIS to support more detailed analysis of young peoples' progress.	
Implement and evaluate tracker for care experienced children and young people	The overview provided by our pupil tracking system assists with the monitoring of care experienced young people by central staff. There is still a need for schools to maintain detailed records to ensure individual needs are met. Continued refinements to the tracking system are being undertaken as part of the ongoing evaluation which in term 3 will include the ability to consider both current and previously looked after children and young people separately.	

Deliver a broader range of senior phase pathways aligned to growth areas		
Deliver a broader range of learning pathways through:	Progress	RAG
Delivery of Phase 3 ABZ Campus	ABZ Campus courses during Phase 3 (Session 2025-26) are mid-way through delivery. There are currently nearly 800 participants on 80 courses delivered by 18 different providers. Tracking has been completed and shared with parents and carers.	
Continuing to develop pathways to support those with a range of additional support needs	The ABZ ASN Pathways Programme, currently at Bucksburn Wing, is in its second successful year. The Pathway provides learners in the senior phase opportunities to experience work in a real environment, helping them develop practical skills and confidence for future employment. The pathway emphasizes sustained engagement in real work settings, which is crucial for building transferable skills and independence. We have found the pathway bridges the gap between education and employment for learners with additional support needs. It aligns with inclusive practices and employability frameworks, promoting equity and opportunity with the structured preparation phase ensuring learners are ready for workplace expectations and equipped for success.	
Increased pathways to meet needs of all learners, particularly in the context of Excelebrate withdrawal	Led by one of our Associate Assessors, a new Learning & Teaching Strategic Group is meeting regularly for Secondary Sector, taking the best practice from across	

	<p>our schools, including those who have had <i>Excelebrate</i> investment.</p> <p>Schools who have been part of <i>Excelebrate</i> will maintain connections with schools with which they have previously partnered.</p>	
<p>Increased opportunities for CLPL for Computing Science Secondary Staff and staff across BGE</p>	<p>Arrangements are in place to offer subject specific CLPL for Secondary Computing Science Staff.</p> <p>Aberdeen City is one of four pilot local authorities making the Digital Education Award Scotland available to staff. This award is a partnership with Intel, Education Scotland and the Digital Schools Awards team and utilises the Intel Skills for Innovation framework.</p> <p>A three-month training package, supported by Hewlett Packard and the Digital School Awards team, was delivered successfully. This training was recorded and provides bespoke Aberdeen City focused training on new digital tools. This has been made available, on demand, via ACC Learn.</p>	

Improve the quality of environments/supports for those with additional support needs		
Improve the quality of environments and supports by:	Progress	RAG
<p>Continuing to implement the accessibility plan</p>	<p>Work continues on developing the parent information website. Parents of children with additional support needs/disabilities have provided feedback and the information is now being checked by a multi-agency group. Information from Aberdeen City Voluntary Organisations (ACVO) is being used to ensure accuracy of local knowledge. The site is due to go live in late January 2026.</p>	
<p>Ongoing roll out of the implementation of the Child Inclusion Research into Curriculum Learning Education (CIRCLE) framework</p>	<p>The CIRCLE Framework remains a cornerstone of our commitment to inclusive education across Aberdeen City schools. We continue to drive improvements in access to learning for all learners, particularly those with additional support needs. Embedded within every Standards and Quality Improvement Plan (SQIP), CIRCLE plays a vital role in strategic planning with focus on; enhancing curriculum participation for all learners; adapting physical environments and routines to meet diverse needs and strengthening communication and collaboration with families. To sustain this impact, professional learning opportunities and refresher sessions will continue to be offered regularly. These sessions have equipped staff with the knowledge and strategies needed to make effective</p>	

	environmental and social adaptations, reducing risk and fostering inclusion for learners in our city.
Implement the Bridge and evaluate to support creation of Secondary Provision	The Bridge evaluation is underway, and we are exploring a keep, change, discard model following exploratory meetings with stakeholders. Lessons learned from the Bridge will be used to support the plans for a secondary provision. A pilot project for P7 to S3 mainstream learners with a range of additional support needs is proposed. The pilot cohort will be learners from Northfield Academy, and the proposal would offer an alternative curriculum for up to 50% of the week.
Ongoing delivery of the behaviour plan	The safeguarding group continues to work on the local and national relationships and behaviour plan. All staff know how to report incidents, and the e-module is part of mandatory training for all staff. Incident reporting procedures are kept under review. Induction sessions for support staff have been well received by staff. The group use the incident data gathered to identify schools where there requires to be further investigation, or those where there is need to share good practice.
Review the provision for supporting learner's needs	There is a planned review of learners needs following the Child's Planning Support Forum. This will highlight need across the city, where there are gaps and where we need to be more agile and proactive. Work has begun on the audit of spaces used to support learners with additional needs and this will be reported to Committee in June.
Continue to shape and deliver a whole system approach to healthy weight of children and young people	<p>Healthy Weight Aberdeen has now completed all groundwork stages of its Whole System Approach, including establishing governance, mapping the local system, analysing data, and prioritising actions (2024–2025). Year 1 (2026) marks the start of implementation, where baseline measures will be established, early actions piloted, and learning consolidated. A full evaluation and refinement of actions will begin in 2027. Draft actions which will be internally consulted upon are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing Physical Activity for Children & Young People • Strengthening Planning to Enable Active, Healthy Environments • Creating Healthier Food Environments Around Schools • Reducing Children's Exposure to High Fat, Sugar & Salt (HFSS) Marketing • Improving Access and Uptake of Healthy School Meals • Strengthening Breastfeeding & Early Years Nutrition Support

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing Food Knowledge & Cooking Skills 	
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Close the poverty related attainment gap		
Help address the gap and gradient by:	Progress	RAG
Working with HTs to monitor the impact of Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) interventions and offer schools the opportunity to participate in the Leadership in Equity programme pilot supported by Education Scotland	<p>Central officers continue to work with head teachers to review the impact of PEF funded interventions through data discussions, QI visits and a review of the Equity Trackers completed by all schools. Head teachers and depute head teachers from 6 schools, a QIO and QIM have participated in the first 2 sessions of the Education Scotland led Equity programme pilot. This professional learning includes action planning to mitigate the effects of poverty and supports both facilitators and participants to know and measure the impact their practice is having. Ultimately, the overall aim is to plan for equity, and to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty. An equitable approach to learning and teaching has been proven to benefit all learners.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the benefits will be measurable or quantifiable improvements in wellbeing, engagement, attendance, achievement and/or attainment in children and young people known to be experiencing poverty.</p> <p>The aims are for facilitators and participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> know and understand the theory, data, and evidence base around poverty both locally and across Scotland know and understand the impact of poverty on learning, achievement and attainment both locally and nationally reflect on and critically examine personal leadership attitudes, values and beliefs within a social justice and equity context know and understand the practice and approaches that can improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty develop and apply knowledge and skills to effectively plan for equity and ensure measurable impact. <p>Feedback following the first two sessions has been extremely positive with almost all participants reporting that the group sessions provide highly effective support for their learning on the Equity programme.</p>	
Reviewing Cost of the School Day statements with the school community	There are no curricular costs passed on to parents/families in any Aberdeen city schools. School staff continue to be mindful of other costs associated with	

	<p>school e.g. uniform, additional trips and outings, costs of resources to support completion of homework and themed days e.g. charity fundraisers and seek ways to minimise these and mitigate any negative impact on learners and their families. Throughout the course of this session all schools will review their Cost of the School Day statements with the school community to ensure everything possible is being done to address this. This consultation may include surveys and focus groups to establish how effective what is in place is and identify any areas still to be addressed.</p>	
<p>Maintaining our focus on attendance levels and termly communication to parents and carers working with the Educational Psychology Service to address EBSNA (Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance)</p>	<p>The Educational Psychology Service continue to offer universal training to all schools on Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) and have also delivered training to the family learning team and the Education Support Officer who supports families in this area. A new Stronger Families session for families on EBSNA is planned for next term. 7 Schools are currently being supported with implementing the EBSNA Universal Training offer from the Educational Psychology service.</p> <p>As an education service we have strengthened the use of attendance data to support learners by ensuring that termly discussions between the Head Teacher and the Quality Improvement Officer consistently focus on patterns, concerns, and targeted interventions. These discussions include a review of the distribution and impact of attendance letters ATT 1, 2, 3, and 4, ensuring that actions are timely, appropriate, and aligned with the school's staged approach to improving attendance.</p>	
<p>Sharing clear expectations around standards across all quality indicators</p>	<p>Face to face headteacher meetings are used to support the sharing of national standards and local best practice to support improvement across quality indicators. Our local standards were developed by headteachers and central officers and are updated regularly to provide schools with links to current national guidance and support materials for professional learning.</p>	
<p>Targeting families most in need of our help by sharing data</p>	<p>We are making use of the Low-Income Family Tracker through financial advisors, ensuring we target those families most in need.</p>	
<p>The provision of Money Advisors, working with the third sector to support foodbanks and uniform swaps and targeting families in need of assistance</p>	<p>Scottish Equity Funding has been used to fund Money Advisors to improve access to financial inclusion services in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve outcomes for children, young people and families impacted by poverty • Improve understanding of entitlement, uptake of benefits and management of problem debt • Create sustainability and lasting impact through developing capacity and improving resilience in families 	

	<p>Feedback from families indicates how valuable this resource is to them and the difference the support of the team has made to families in need.</p> <p>Schools continue to work in partnership with partners including the third sector to provide resources and support to families in need of assistance. Provision of winter clothing and of Christmas boxes/presents for families in need are examples of the most recent initiatives through which schools and local organisations have worked in partnership to ensure assistance is provided to those who need it.</p>	
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Addressing inequality		
Continue to address inequality by:	Progress	RAG
<p>Ensuring all secondary schools are employing Equally Safe at School strategies and all key staff have completed the e-module</p>	<p>In line with national guidance, all secondary schools have registered on the Equally Safe in School (ESAS) website and identified a lead person for this remit. Bucksburn Academy continue to work with ESAS as part of the pilot programme and 76 of their staff have signed up to complete the Equally Safe e-learning module. 5 other secondary schools are engaging with support from ESAS outreach workers to support implementation of approaches to preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV).</p> <p>Incidents of gender-based violence will continue to be tracked and reviewed as part of the ongoing audits into bullying incidents over session 2025/26. This will support the collection, monitoring, and review of the data. There was 1 incident related to GBV recorded between September and December 2025. Schools are currently reviewing their Relationships and Sexual Health and Parenthood curriculum to ensure this includes learning about equalities and gender-based violence.</p> <p>The United Nations Women (For All Women and Girls) resource has been shared with all Schools to ensure that conversations around gender equality take place at an early stage, so stereotypes and gender attitudes are challenged and changed.</p>	
<p>Using the Schools Health and Wellbeing Improvement research Network (SHINE) data to identify areas of vulnerability and targeting support from the Educational</p>	<p>Areas from the SHINE data continue to be supported by the Educational Psychology Service through targeted and universal approaches. After the first two terms of this academic year, 304 Early Intervention Consultations have taken place between the service and schools. The top 3 most discussed areas of support were around emotional</p>	

<p>Psychology service to ensure improved outcomes</p>	<p>regulation, regulation of behaviour, and trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). The most discussed systemic support was Emotion Coaching training which is a universal programme for a whole school approach to address all 3 of these areas. It does this by changing the relationships within schools and helping learners understand their emotions and change their responses to their experiences. 7 Schools within the South Locality are currently engaging in the Emotion Coaching training and implementation with the Service, 1 in the North Locality. A session for families, as part of the Stronger Families Series, on Supporting Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing was carried out this term.</p>
<p>Secondary schools having agility in their Personal and Social Education (PSE) and Relationships Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) curriculum to be able to respond to local issues as they arise</p>	<p>Schools continue to have the agility to respond to the specific needs of their local contexts by adapting the curriculum in targeted and responsive ways, adjusting practice to ensure education remains relevant, needs-led, and reflective of their communities.</p> <p>A review of the PSE curriculum in October 2025 identified targeted delivery across areas such as Prevent, suicide prevention, violence against women and girls (VAWG), and substance use, evidencing that schools tailor their approaches by strengthening partnerships, selecting appropriate external inputs, and deploying staff training aligned with their own contextual gaps and priorities. This flexibility is further reflected in actions such as extending SAMH support where suicide prevention provision is required, tailoring digital-violence interventions for identified cohorts, and co-creating substance-use campaigns with pupils to reflect local realities. Further support from the central team has been put in place as requested by schools to address any gaps.</p>
<p>Maintain the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) training to ensure all secondary schools have trained staff and implement the primary version when available</p>	<p>A further 10 secondary staff will be undertaking Mentors in Violence Prevention training on 27th January 2026 from a range of academies. ACC also now has 4 qualified in-house trainers for Mentors in Violence Prevention at Secondary level. Education Scotland are providing training for the primary version of Mentors in Violence Prevention - Early Intervention- in term 4. Three primary staff members have been identified to attend the TTT (Train the Trainer) event. Once completed this would bring our ACC trainers to 7; we plan to roll out the Early Intervention programme in session 2026-27.</p>
<p>Continue to amplify the voice of children and young people across the organisation</p>	<p>All our schools continue to support a range of participatory opportunities to inform the life and work of the school. These include the "traditional" pupil council structures such as 'Pupil Council(s)' but also extend to cover a range of themes and areas, including community action groups,</p>

	<p>health, eco, LGBTQ+ groups and more. These groups directly influence and lead change and support the identification of current and future school improvement priorities.</p> <p>Aberdeen City Council remains firmly committed to embedding the rights of children and young people, in line with The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. Work continues under the Aberdeen City Council 'UNCRC Plan' to explore and embed opportunities for meaningful engagement of children and young people in strategic planning and with respect to appropriate information sharing across all council services. Work has been undertaken to revise and develop policy guidance and templates to ensure that all future council policies consider and reflect children's rights. In addition, a range of Artificial Intelligence (AI) prompts have been developed to support the creation of accessible future policies.</p> <p>Work has been undertaken in collaboration with partners to produce a 'Joint Interview' supporting document, which incorporates a link to a feedback form. This form is to be completed by the learner, with the assistance of a trusted adult, following their participation in the process.</p>	
<p>Delivery of the promise through:</p>		
<p>Reviewing data trends and interventions as part of the Promise Board.</p>	<p>The Good Practice Guide for Care Experienced Children has been refreshed to include enhanced guidance and resources for schools. This updated version introduces a new planning and review framework, which has been formally approved by the Board. The initial evaluation of its implementation and impact will take place in Term 4.</p> <p>A Power BI dashboard has been developed to enable the Board to monitor trends and identify areas for targeted intervention.</p> <p>The mandatory Corporate Parenting module is scheduled for review, and ongoing professional development opportunities will continue to be offered to strengthen practice in this area.</p>	
<p>Continuing to review arrangements for those who are cared for out of authority.</p>	<p>The Virtual School Head Teacher (VSHT) meets with each residential school twice per academic year to review education plans and progress for all children and young people. These discussions include consideration and development of a Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP) for all. School reports are requested between meetings to enable timely follow-up.</p> <p>This academic year, the VSHT is visiting all residential schools to strengthen quality assurance and support</p>	

	<p>social work in identifying suitable placements based on individual needs once it has been identified that a child or young person will require residential provision.</p> <p>Data sharing agreements are being developed to enhance the data available from host local authorities.</p>	
<p>Evaluating the impact of the expansion of Edge of Care pilots.</p>	<p>The pilot continues to demonstrate evidence of positive impact, with young people benefiting from the support provided. From initial referral, over half have improved or remained stable, which reflects effective planning, purposeful support, and strong partnership working. While some children, young people and families continue to experience challenges, these are being addressed through responsive and proportionate actions, ensuring that risk is managed and improvement remains a priority. The majority of children, young people and families are continuing with their current level of support to build on the progress made, while a considerable proportion have successfully transitioned to universal provision. Only a small number required increased support, highlighting effective early identification and escalation where appropriate.</p>	

RAG Status

On track to complete	
Started not likely to complete on time	
Not yet started	

Appendix C - 2024/25 Curriculum for Excellence Briefing

Strategic Data Context

Throughout this briefing document, the datasets reported relate directly to the Key National Measures outlined within the Scottish Government's [National Improvement Framework Evidence Report](#), supporting Outcomes 1, 3 and 4 of the current Plan for Scotland.

Summary - Primary, 1,4 and 7 Combined

Key Data Trends and Interpretation

Overall, year-to-year movements against each of the organiser values and trends in 2024/25 for P1,4 and 7 combined are generally in line with the national patterns, although there are marginal differences in the literacy organiser suite from 2023/24.

These changes generally have limited statistical significance and should not, in isolation, be considered to be representative of a material change in pupil performance from 2023/24. Contextually, it is also useful to consider that the combined outcomes for 2023/24 represented the highest values to date for Aberdeen City across the lifetime of this published national dataset.

Trend directions take this into account by highlighting changes of greater +/1 as having the potential to be consequential in the context of pupil attainment rather than as a consequence of natural variances in pupil profiles between years.

Officers within the Service, with the assistance of colleagues within Data Insights are in the process of further analysing data streams provided by the updating of the Scottish Government's Broad General Education Tool which was published in mid-December 2025.

Key Insights– P1,4 and 7 combined

Underlying granular data reflecting against Early, First and Second Level outcomes indicates that performance within P1 is generally weaker in both Literacy and Numeracy than in either P4 and P7, and is a deflationary influence within the P1,4,7 Combined figures, whilst the wider overview of combined outcomes from 2024/25 are broadly similar to those in 2023/34.

On-going monitoring of 2025/26 tracking data is conducted to (a) check that effective targeted interventions are in place, with a particular focus on current P2, given that the P1 data from 2024/25 showed some weakness, and (b) from the data analysis, gain additional deeper granular understanding of where the Service can further enhance pupil support against the particular areas of challenge that those with relative vulnerability (developmental, social and language barriers) in both these specific cohorts and across each primary phase.

This understanding will offer the capacity for further futureproofing against ‘learning deficits’ identified in a particular year or cohort being carried forwards to subsequent phases and in the core CfE evaluations at P4 and P7.

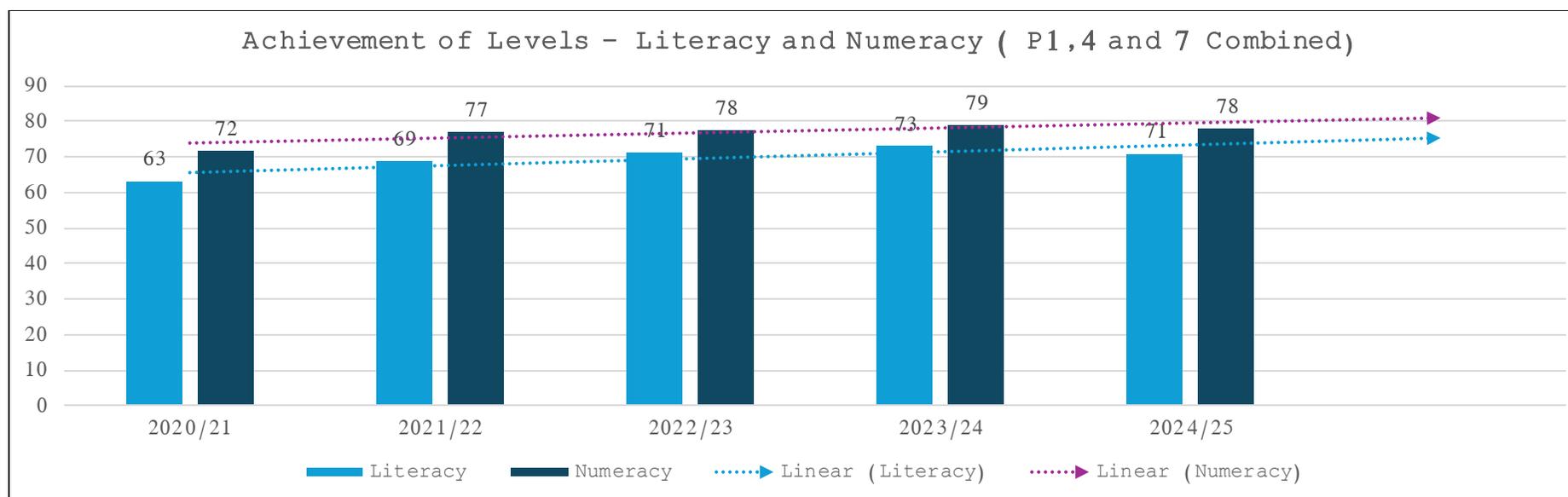
The data from 2024/25 at Early Level also suggests that there could be improvements made to early literacy and numeracy skill development across our ELC provisions to enhance the preparedness, and receptiveness, of P1 pupils to maximise the educational added value gained from the first year of the Broad General Education journey.

Improvement streams related to both of these observations are reflected in the current NIF in recognition of the 2024/25 outcomes but with a keen awareness that the NIF needs to have the capacity to flex, and re-focus resources, in the context of ‘real-time’ pupil evaluation within the current academic year

Table 1 – P1,4 and 7 Combined (Three-year trends and Averages)

Cohort	Organiser	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	3-year average	Long trend - Annual
P1, P4 and P7 combined	Reading	78	79	78	78	
P1, P4 and P7 combined	Writing	74	76	74	75	
P1, P4 and P7 combined	Listening & Talking	86	87	87	87	
P1, P4 and P7 combined	Literacy	71	73	71	72	
P1, P4 and P7 combined	Numeracy	78	79	78	78	

Chart 1. Achievement of Levels in Literacy and Numeracy – Primary 1, 4 and 7 Combined (Five Year Timeseries)



Key Insights – P1 (Early Level)

Achievement at Primary 1 continues to show levels of variability between years, although it should be noted that 2023/24 represented outcomes which were above those in the majority of prior years, and that the results are consistent with those of the 2022/23 baseline year.

The Long Trend for Literacy related measures, based on performance against the 3 - year average, show some weakening of outcomes which are just beyond the parameters that can be wholly explained by natural variations in cohort profiles but do not necessarily represent material differences in educational achievement.

This latter aspect, and whether this necessitates additional mitigation within the 2025/26 National Improvement Framework Plan is currently being reviewed at both Service level, and more particularly, by Headteachers/staff at establishment level in the context of data made available through the Broad General Education Benchmarking Tool.

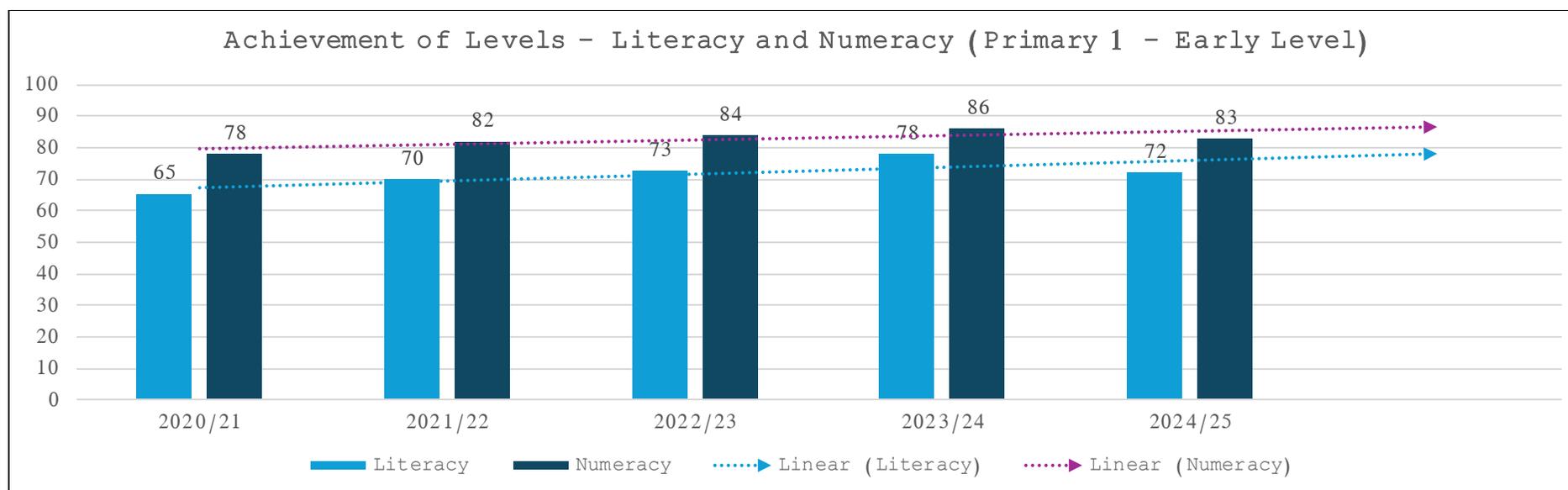
Officers are also working in collaboration with Early Learning teams, internal and external to the Council to gain further appreciation of how the continued challenges around child developmental issues amongst our younger children, at both entry to pre-school provision and at the transition to Primary 1 are influencing Early Level achievement.

In this respect, there are early indications that, in the 2025 calendar year, the proportion of children recording developmental concerns was receding from the peaks noted in 2024 which may suggest that intake profiles at ELC and Primary 1 in 2026/2027 may better position children to gain greater added value from engagement with formal education delivery.

Table 2 – Primary 1 (Three-year trends and Averages)

Cohort	Organiser	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	3-year average	Long trend - Annual
P1 Early Level	Reading	78	81	77	79	↓
P1 Early Level	Writing	76	81	75	77	↓
P1 Early Level	Listening & Talking	86	87	85	86	—
P1 Early Level	Literacy	73	78	72	74	↓
P1 Early Level	Numeracy	84	86	83	84	—

Chart 2 – Achievement of Levels in Literacy and Numeracy Primary 1 (Five-year timeseries)



Key Insights – P4 (First Level)

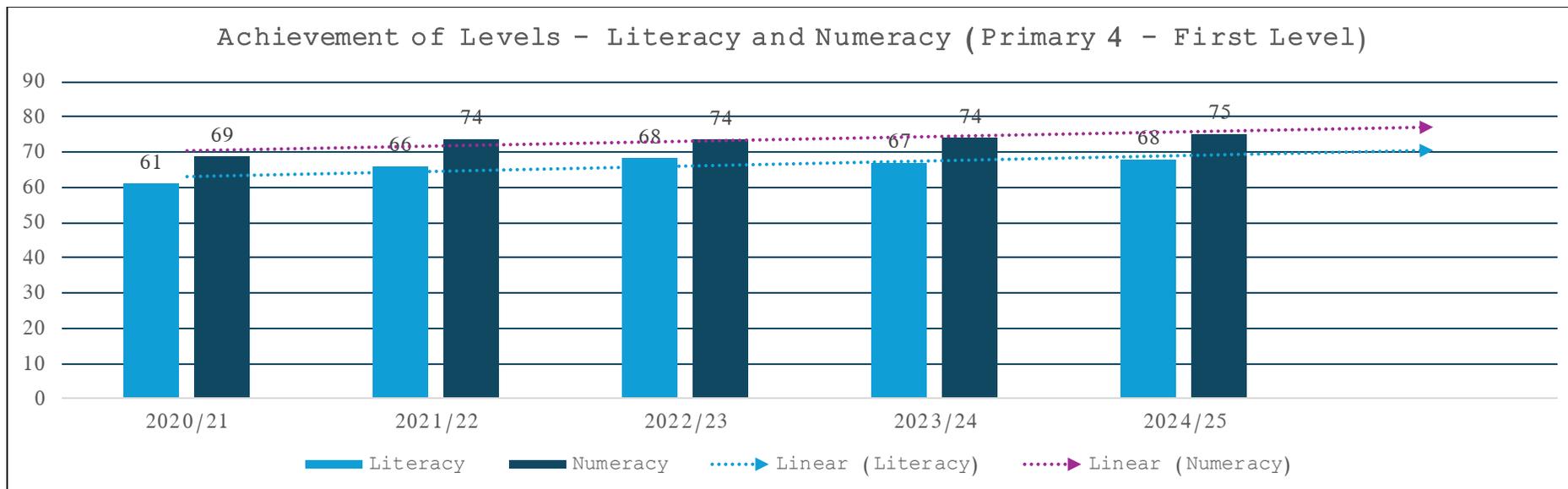
Primary 4 achievement is demonstrating a pattern consistent with that in the previous year, and both the 2022/23 baseline year and 3 - year average. This, after a period of substantive variations between years immediately subsequent to the COVID-19 pandemic, offers a sound foundation for improvement in 2025/26, and progression towards meeting the Stretch aims for these measures.

Table 3 – Primary 4 (Three-year trends and Averages)

Cohort	Organiser	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	3-year average	Long trend - Annual
P4 First Level	Reading	75	76	75	76	■
P4 First Level	Writing	72	71	71	71	■
P4 First Level	Listening & Talking	86	87	87	87	■

P4 First Level	Literacy	68	67	68	68	
P4 First Level	Numeracy	74	74	75	74	

Chart 3 – Achievement of Levels in Literacy and Numeracy Primary 4 (Five-year timeseries)



Key Insights – P7 (Second Level)

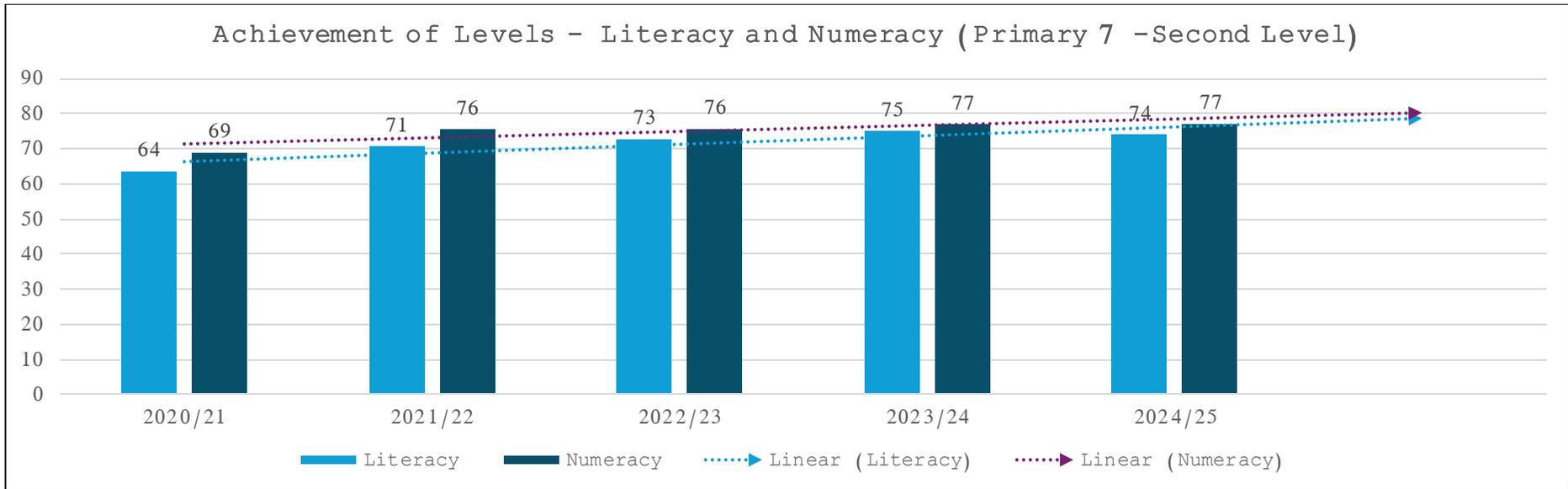
As with the outcomes of our P4 pupils, achievement at P7 represents a stable position in comparison with 2023/24 and the three-year average, with marginal uplifts in both Literacy and Numeracy measures against the 2022/23 baseline year.

Table 4 – Primary 7 (Three-year trends and Averages)

Cohort	Organiser	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	3-year average	Long trend – Annual
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P7 Second Level	Reading	80	81	81	81	
P7 Second Level	Writing	75	77	76	76	
P7 Second Level	Listening & Talking	87	88	89	88	
P7 Second Level	Literacy	73	75	74	74	
P7 Second Level	Numeracy	76	77	77	77	

Chart 4 – Achievement of Levels in Literacy and Numeracy Primary 7 (Five-year timeseries)



Key Insights – P1.4 and 7 Combined (Achievement in the Context of Deprivation – SIMD Quintiles)

Outcomes across the five SIMD Quintiles for Numeracy demonstrate a stable year-on-year position with performance at SIMD 1 and 2 being similar to that in 2023/24, with an improving long trend. There has been a marginal fall in achievement at SIMD 3 and 4, from the prior year, although this reflects a reversion to levels experienced in 2022/23 and needs to be considered against the background of what were relatively high single year outcomes in 2023/24.

Literacy achievement offers a more complex data landscape with SIMD Quintiles 1-3 and 5 showing marginal retreats from the 2023/24 levels, closely matching those in 2022/23. Again this, in part, reflects what were materially positive movements in outcomes in the previous year, along with minimal long trend changes in values (less than 1 percentage point) across the three-year period for each Quintile. Achievement at Quintile 4 represents a continuation of the long-term upwards trend established in 2023/24 with similar outcomes to that in the previous year.

Table 5 – SIMD Quintile Achievement (Three-year trends)

Year	Stage	SIMD	English Reading	English Writing	English Listening & Talking	English Literacy	Numeracy
2024/25	P1, P4 and P7 combined	SIMD Quintile 1 - most deprived	67	61	78	57	68
		SIMD Quintile 2	70	65	83	62	72
		SIMD Quintile 3	76	74	85	70	76
		SIMD Quintile 4	82	79	90	77	81
		SIMD Quintile 5 - least deprived	86	83	93	80	86
2023/24	P1, P4 and P7 combined	SIMD Quintile 1 - most deprived	69	65	81	60	68
		SIMD Quintile 2	72	69	83	65	72
		SIMD Quintile 3	80	74	88	72	78
		SIMD Quintile 4	83	79	90	77	83
		SIMD Quintile 5 - least deprived	87	85	93	83	87
2022/23	P1, P4 and P7 combined	SIMD Quintile 1 - most deprived	67	63	79	57	65
		SIMD Quintile 2	71	66	82	63	71
		SIMD Quintile 3	76	73	86	69	76
		SIMD Quintile 4	82	79	89	76	81
		SIMD Quintile 5 - least deprived	86	83	92	81	86

Chart 5 Primary 1, 4 and 7 Combined – Literacy Achievement by All SIMD Quintiles (5-year timeseries)

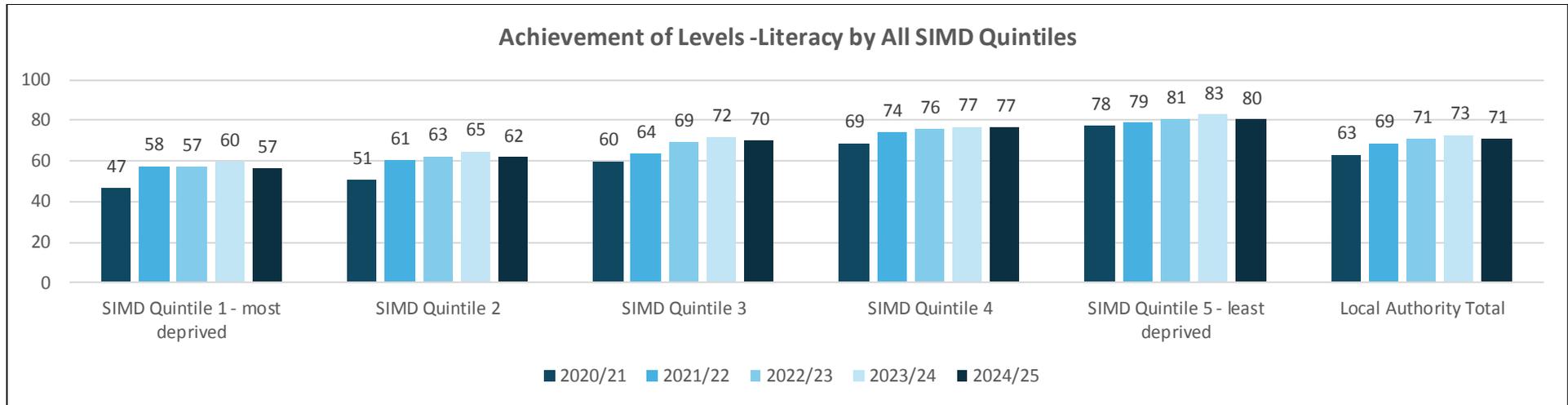


Chart 6. Primary 1,4 and 7 Combined – Data Focus, Literacy Achievement by Most and Least Deprived Quintiles (5-year timeseries)

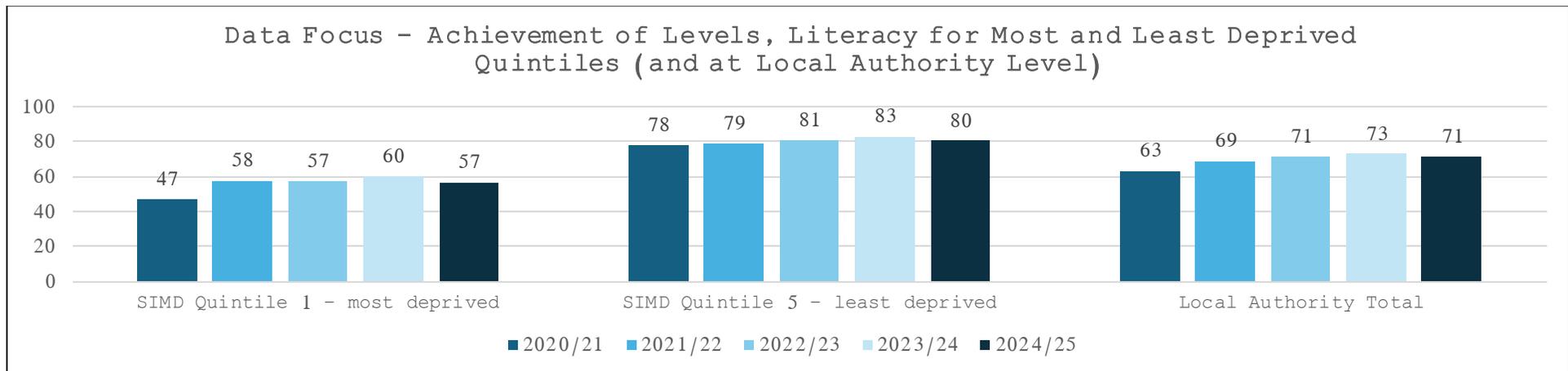


Chart 7. Primary 1,4 and 7 Combined – Numeracy by All SIMD Deciles (5-year timeseries)

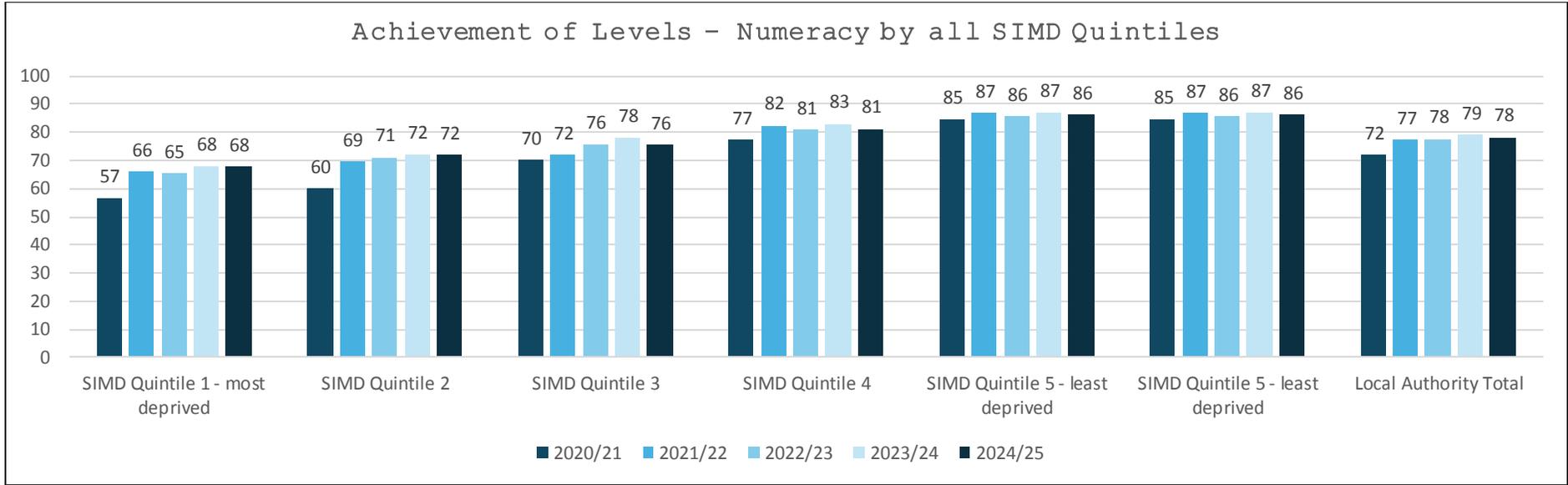
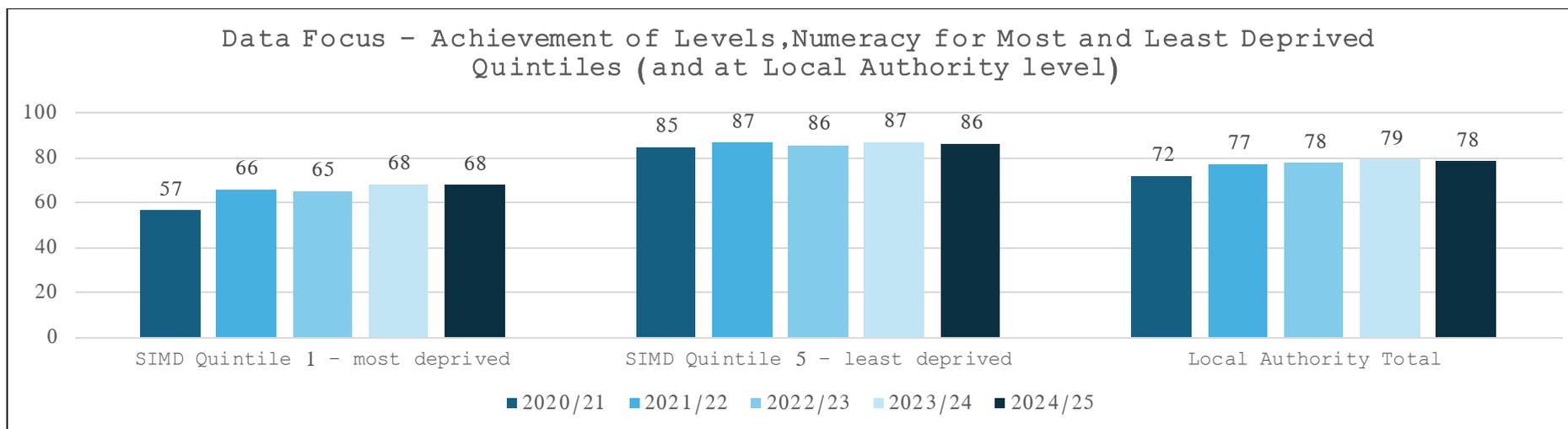


Chart 8. Data Focus Numeracy by Most and Least Deprived Quintiles (5-year timeseries)



Key Insights – Deprivation Related Attainment Gap Primary 1.4 and 7 Combined

The deprivation related distances between SIMD Quintiles in 2024/25 are largely unchanged from those recorded in the previous year, with limited material change in the gaps between those in the Lower Quintiles (SIMD 1 and 2), although the long trend in Numeracy achievement for these pupils is improved.

Reflecting on those areas where movement might not be wholly explained by statistical variance (± 1 percentage point) between cohorts in 2024/25 and 2023/24, the Literacy Gap from SIMD 4 to the Least Deprived has closed year-on-year, whilst the position for Quintile 3 in Numeracy shows a growing distance. Both of these 2024/25 levels are, however, closely aligned with 2022/23 figures.

With the exception of the Quintile 3 Numeracy measure noted above, the long trends and comparisons with 3-year averages are either stable or marginally positive for each Quintile across both of the main Literacy and Numeracy organisers.

Table 6 – Deprivation related Achievement Gap by SIMD Quintile, Primary 1,4 and 7 Combined

Year	Stage	SIMD	Reading Gap	Writing Gap	Listening and Talking Gap	Literacy Gap	Numeracy Gap
2024/25	P1, P4 and P7 combined	SIMD Quintile 1 - most deprived	-19	-21	-14	-24	-18
		SIMD Quintile 2	-16	-17	-10	-18	-14
		SIMD Quintile 3	-10	-9	-7	-10	-11
		SIMD Quintile 4	-4	-4	-3	-4	-5
		SIMD Quintile 5 - least deprived					
2023/24	P1, P4 and P7 combined	SIMD Quintile 1 - most deprived	-18	-20	-12	-23	-19
		SIMD Quintile 2	-15	-16	-10	-18	-15
		SIMD Quintile 3	-7	-11	-5	-11	-9
		SIMD Quintile 4	-4	-6	-3	-6	-4
		SIMD Quintile 5 - least deprived					
2022/23	P1, P4 and P7 combined	SIMD Quintile 1 - most deprived	-18	-20	-12	-23	-20
		SIMD Quintile 2	-15	-17	-9	-18	-15
		SIMD Quintile 3	-10	-10	-6	-11	-10
		SIMD Quintile 4	-4	-5	-3	-5	-5
		SIMD Quintile 5 - least deprived					

Chart 9 Primary 1.4 and 7 Combined Deprivation Related Gap to Least Deprived Quintile (5-year timeseries) - Literacy

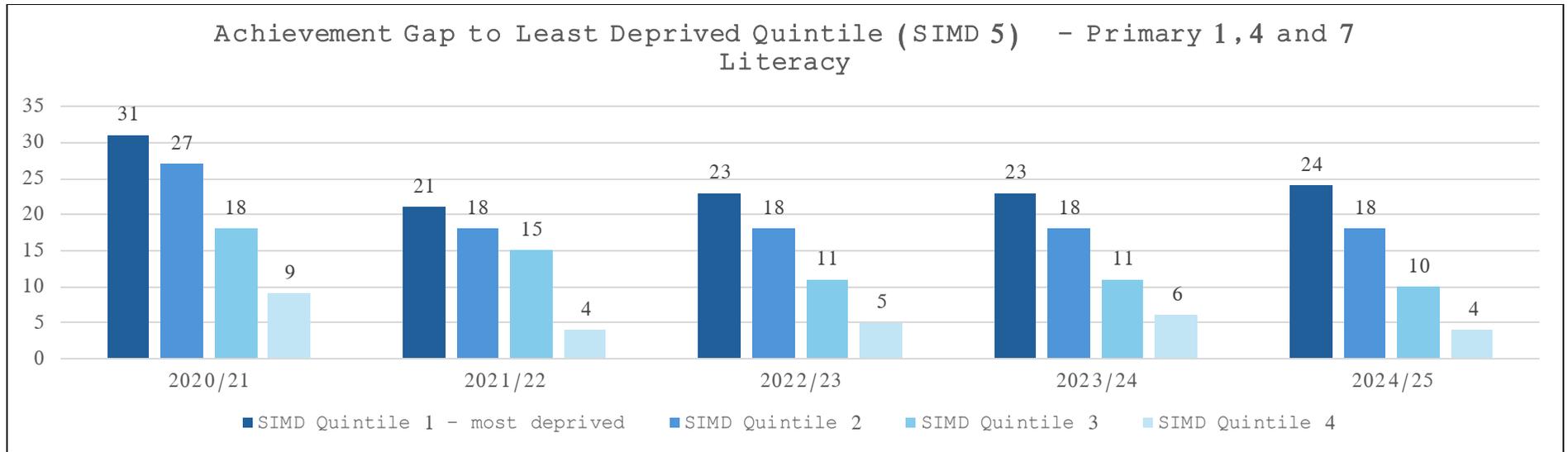
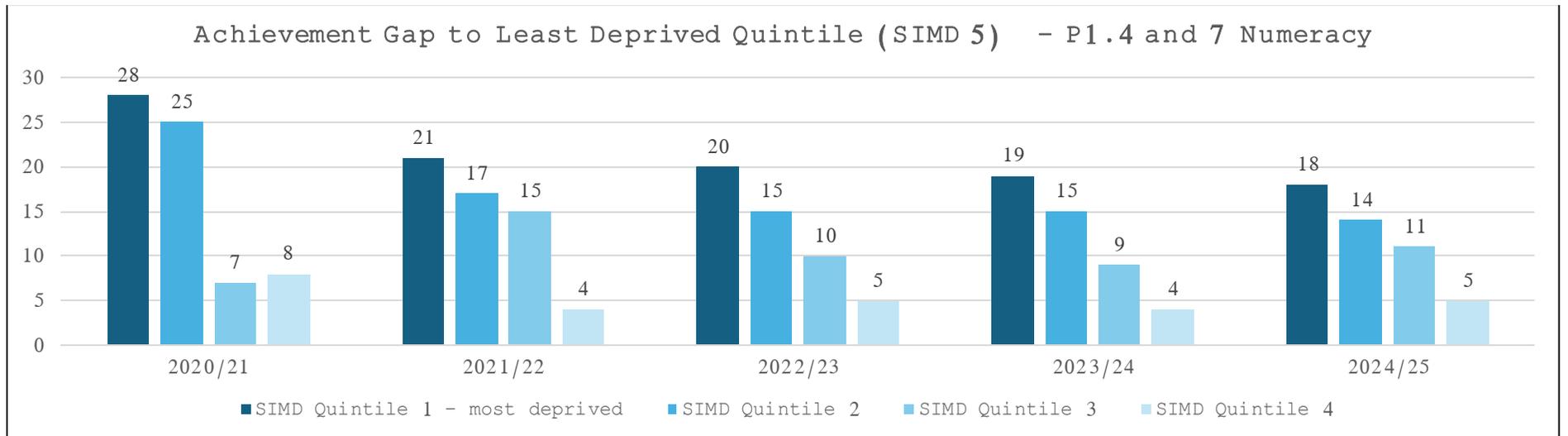


Chart 10. Primary 1.4 and 7 Combined Deprivation Related Gap to Least Deprived Quintile (5-year timeseries) - Numeracy



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ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	17 February 2026
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Inspection Reporting
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/26/029
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne/Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Shona Milne/Graeme Simpson
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.6

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report details the outcome of inspection reports published by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) and The Care Inspectorate since the last meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee. The report also contains an update on progress towards inspection recommendations at Northfield and Harlaw Academies.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

- 2.1 Notes the content of this report; and
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to continue to support Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings and schools to implement continuous improvement in keeping with agreed Quality Improvement Frameworks.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Education Service utilises a Quality Improvement Framework (QIF) to support schools and ELC settings to achieve the standards expected by external inspection agencies. The QIF categorises schools/ELC settings as needing different levels of support based on internal self-evaluation and external scrutiny from the central team:
- Category 1/Universal includes schools/settings who have self and external evaluation identifying all core Quality Indicators (QIs) as good or better.
 - Category 2 /Targeted includes schools/settings with external and or self-evaluation which has identified one or more of the core QIs as *satisfactory* or *below*.

- Category 3/Intensive includes schools/settings with external and or self-evaluation which has identified one or more of the core Quality Indicators as *weak* or *unsatisfactory*.

3.3 HMle INSPECTIONS

3.3.1 Northfield Academy Update

A set of five priorities were identified by HMle in January 2023 to help the school secure improvement.

3.3.2 **Area for improvement 1: Senior and middle leaders should work to improve the strategic leadership of all areas of the school. Review and update the school's vision and values. There should be a clear and shared understanding of the expectations, direction and identity of Northfield Academy. Ensure plans for improvement are agreed with young people, teachers and parents.**

Having made strong progress in this area, Northfield Academy has commenced the new session with the values of nurture, flourish and achieve now well embedded as part of school life. School priorities have been created with young people, teachers and parents.

3.3.3 **Area for Improvement 2: Develop a calm, safe and purposeful learning environment. Build positive relationships across the school. Young people should be central to discussions about behaviour expectations and feeling safe in school.**

Following on from the progress noted in this area by inspectors, the school has continued to embed policies, such as the mobile phone 'out of sight or in the box' policy to support a calm, purposeful learning environment. Relationships and behaviour continue to improve, with fewer duty (support) calls to classrooms noted by senior and middle leaders. To further support this, the school have worked alongside Community Justice Scotland to begin the universal and targeted roll-out of restorative practices. There is now consistent evidence that more young people feel safe in school.

3.3.4 **Area for Improvement 3: Agree with staff a shared understanding of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment. Develop effective processes to plan, track and monitor young people's progress.**

The school has entered the second year of the new tracking and reporting process, supporting teachers to have a better understanding of the progress of young people, and informing the implementation of timely interventions where progress is less positive. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework continues to be embedded as part of classroom practice.

3.3.5 **Area for improvement 4: Ensure the wellbeing needs of all young people are a key part of all school activities. Clarify procedures relating to pupil attendance and time keeping.**

Wellbeing continues to be a significant focus across the school. The Crew model has now rolled into S3 with all young people across the broad general education accessing a key adult via their Crew Teacher. To compliment this, Mentors in Violence Prevention is being rolled out to S1, initially, by trained senior young people. Personal and Social Education continues to play an

important role for all young people, S1 – S6, and PTs Guidance continue to revise and revisit curriculum content to ensure its relevance.

Attendance continues to be a significant focus for Northfield Academy. The school's processes are now consistently in-keeping with Aberdeen City Council's policy and national expectations. Having reviewed previous sessions' data, the school restructured their day configuration in order to increase consistency and maximise learning time. One of the areas of focus across the authority has been the attendance of S4. As at the end of Term 2, there had been an improvement of 2.9% for this year group compared to the same point in 2024-25. Northfield Academy continue to be supported by an Education Scotland Attainment Advisor and the Local Authority's Educational Psychology Service in respect of continuously improving attendance and associated interventions.

3.3.6 Area for improvement 5: Urgently improve attainment from S1 to S6. Review the number of young people who leave school in S4 and S5, and those who do not go to a positive destination. Make plans to support broader achievements for all young people. The school should demonstrate how young people on reduced timetables are included, educated and safe.

In June 2025, the % of S3 young people achieving Level 3 and Level 4 Literacy rose by 21% and 23% respectively. In Numeracy, the % of S3 young people achieving Level 3 rose by 1.8%, bringing the figure broadly in line with the national average. At Level 4, a 7% increase also saw this fall in line with the national average.

Northfield Academy has seen signs of attainment gains from the SQA results achieved in 2025, including:

- 68% of young people in S4 achieved an SCQF Level 4 award in both Literacy and Numeracy, an increase of nearly 25% on the previous year.
- 37% of young people in S4 achieved an SCQF Level 5 award in both Literacy and Numeracy, an increase of 17.4% on the previous year.
- By S6, 79% young people achieved an SCQF Level 5 award in both Literacy and Numeracy, a 22% increase on the previous year and the highest % recorded in five years.
- 69% of young people in S4 achieved at least one pass at SCQF Level 5, an increase of over 22% on the previous year.
- 54% of young people in S4 achieved at least five passes at SCQF 4, an increase of over 15% on the previous year.
- By S6, 79% young people achieved at least one pass at SCQF 6, and increase of 6% on the previous year. The % S6 achieving at least five passes at SCQF 6 rose to 41%, a 21% increase on the previous year.

Supported by positive partnerships with organisations such as Skills Development Scotland and *WorkingRite*, the school's positive destination figure rose by 1.6% in 2025. Provisional figures on the percentages of young people who leave Northfield Academy to a positive destination anticipate a further increase of 2.5% in 2026, representing the highest overall total in four years.

Young people continue to experience a wide range of lunchtime and after-school activities as part of the wider curriculum. Notably, Northfield Academy has expanded its range of competitive sports teams to include football, rugby and running, which complements the school's partnership with Aberdeen Community Football Club Trust and participation in Scottish Rugby Union's/Cashback's 'School of Rugby'. In addition, the school is now routinely hosting performing arts concerts as a platform for young people to showcase their talent in this area. For the first time, the role of 'Prefect' was offered out to all young people across the school (as opposed to limiting this to seniors). Similarly, the opportunity to become a House or School captain was broadened.

In-line with national guidance, Northfield Academy continue to use reduced (bespoke) timetables as a last resort option with regular review cycles in place. The total number of young people on a reduced timetable has decreased since the January 2023 inspection with improved systems in place to track and monitor the effectiveness of this intervention.

3.3.7 The school recognise that these are only the first signs of improved attainment and there remains much to be done in S4, and particularly in S5 and S6. **Appendix A** contains the Action Plan designed to continue to develop these priority areas.

3.3.8 The school remains committed to continued improvement across the priority areas identified by HMIE, and looks forward to a further HMIE visit towards the end of 2026.

3.3.9 Northfield will remain in **Category 3** of the Quality Improvement Framework

3.3.10 Harlaw Academy Update

Three key priorities have been consistently scrutinised by HMIE colleagues during visits to Harlaw Academy. After being Acting Head Teacher from June 2024, Stuart Craig secured the Head Teacher position permanently in October 2025 allowing the school to continue its current trajectory of improvement.

3.3.11 Area for Improvement 1: Streamline approaches to improvement so that self-evaluation activities clearly identify priorities which will make the biggest difference to outcomes for young people.

Staff continue to lead change through their involvement in improvement groups. Recent key developments led by staff include: the launch of the school's updated mobile phone policy; the creation of the 'Courtesy Charter' launched in January 2026 and ongoing work to produce an updated relationships framework for session 2026-27. Processes and systems within the school have been strengthened and this is leading to more accurate self-evaluation and identification of actions required to improve the school.

3.3.12 Area for Improvement 2: Continue to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment so that young people's experiences engage them and meet their needs. Develop more fully an ethos for learning with high expectations and mutual respect.

Staff continue to engage in professional learning to support improvements in learning and teaching across the school and observations of teaching practice suggest that questioning techniques are being better embedded with clear

progress evident. The professional learning culture continues to be supported by regular lunch and learn sessions led by the Principal Teacher of Learning & Teaching. There have also been two full staff meetings which focused on feedback; as well as a session during the in-service day in November to maintain a focus on this area. The whole school approach to feedback is successfully raising expectations within the classroom. A staff working group has been looking at Courtesy across the school with the Courtesy Charter launching across the school in January, this will support the further development of mutual respect within the learning culture of the school.

3.3.13 Area for Improvement 3: Strengthen approaches to monitoring young people's progress across all subject areas so that staff at all levels have a clear overview of learners' progress. Continue to raise attainment of young people at all stages.

The new local authority tracking system has been embedded within the junior and senior phase of the school with parents/carers receiving more regular updates on the progress of their child. School staff can now gather a 'live' overview of any young person's attainment enabling the school to identify interventions to support a young person where necessary. The school is continuing to widen the curriculum in the senior phase to give learners more options to be successful. The curriculum offer being made to young people in S4-S6 for session 2026-27 will be the broadest yet.

3.3.14 The school will remain in **Category 3** of the Quality Improvement Framework to ensure the HT and the senior leadership team SLT have the support required to continue to realise improvement.

3.3.15 Members will be pleased to note that the strategy of change in the senior phase curriculum has realised improvements in the quality of A-C passes at key stages of SQA attainment. Harlaw Academy saw signs of attainment gains from the SQA results achieved in 2025. For example:

- 77% of young people in S4 presented for National 5 qualifications achieved an A-C pass in 2025, an increase of 5% on the previous year.
- 91% of young people in S4 presented for National 5 qualifications achieved an A-D award in 2025, an increase of 6% on the previous year.
- 70% of young people presented for Higher qualifications achieved an A-C pass in 2025, an increase of 5% on the previous year.
- 82% of young people presented for Higher qualifications achieved an A-D award in 2025, an increase of 4% on the previous year.
- 61% of young people in S5 achieved at least one Higher qualification in 2025, an increase of 9% on the previous year.

3.3.16 The Harlaw Academy Action Plan can be found at **Appendix B**.

3.3.17 Oldmachar Academy

In November 2025, a team of HMIE inspectors visited Oldmachar Academy to undertake a full-model inspection. During the visit they visited classes, talked with parents/carers, staff, partners and young people, and worked closely with

the headteacher and senior leaders. The inspection team found the following strengths in the school's work.

- Young people are engaged, articulate, and welcoming. They are proud to be members of the Oldmachar Academy community. They demonstrate the school values well in their everyday contributions to the life of the school.
- The highly regarded headteacher, ably supported by senior and middle leaders, provides effective leadership to the school. This is leading to improvements in young people's wellbeing and learning experiences.
- Staff support young people's wellbeing very effectively through a range of carefully considered approaches. A strong and embedded approach to wellbeing is supporting improvements for outcomes, including achievements, for young people.
- Staff know young people very well as learners and have built highly respectful and supportive relationships with them. As a result, young people engage very well in classes and are clear about their next steps in learning.

3.3.18 The following areas for improvement were identified and discussed with the headteacher and a representative from Aberdeen City Council.

- Staff should continue to focus on improving the quality of National Qualification passes, especially for young people in S6.
- Senior leaders should continue to develop the role of all stakeholders, especially young people, in taking forward change across the school. This should involve stakeholders in identifying improvement priorities and evaluating their impact.

Secondary School Quality Indicators	Evaluation
Leadership of Change	Good (4)
Learning, teaching and assessment	Very Good (5)
Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion	Very Good (5)
Raising attainment and achievement	Good (4)

3.3.19 The school are pleased that HMIE colleagues recognised the qualities evident in the young people at Oldmachar Academy and the priority placed by school staff on knowing their young people well and fostering positive relationships. Further they are pleased that, through the leadership of the Headteacher, Senior Leaders and Middle Leaders, wellbeing and learning are strong and will continue to realise improvements in attainment.

A copy of the letter to parents/carers can be found [here](#).

3.4 CARE INSPECTORATE INSPECTIONS

Where a setting has been subject to a return visit from the Care Inspectorate, we have included the date of their previous visit and the gradings for reference. The Care Inspectorate are now using the new Quality Improvement Framework for Early Learning and Childcare. During inspections they will no longer evaluate 'How good is our setting?' unless in previous inspection the setting did not meet the National Standard in this area (Good 4).

3.4.1 Woodside ELC, a local Authority setting in Woodside, received an unannounced Inspection which took place on 10 and 11 November 2025. The two inspectors inspecting the setting spoke to staff, children and parents as well as undertaking observations and reviewing documentation. As this is the new framework we can only compare on the 3 gradings received.

Aspect being inspected	Previous evaluation (Dec '23)
How good is our care, play and learning?	Adequate (3)
How good is our leadership?	Adequate (3)

Aspect being inspected	Current evaluation (Nov '25)
Leadership	Very Good (5)
Children Play and Learn	Good (4)
Children are Supported to Achieve	Good (4)

Inspectors noted staff across the setting were kind and caring providing nurture and support to families using their knowledge of individual needs. Robust quality improvement processes were in place and this was supporting all staff to contribute to continuous improvement. Engagement with parents had been enhanced and families now feel their views are heard and actioned. Children enjoyed being in the ELC and were observed leading their own learning. Literacy and numeracy were embedded in the setting with staff optimising opportunities to develop this further both in the playroom and the outdoor areas. Although almost all areas for improvement were met there is still a need for the setting to review transitions and ensure children's needs are met consistently throughout the day.

The setting was in category 3 prior to the inspection and had been receiving intensive support from the locality lead. Following the inspection the setting will move to Category 1.

The full report can be read [here](#).

3.4.2 Rocking Horse Nursery, a funded provider setting based in the grounds of University of Aberdeen, received an unannounced inspection which took place on 6 and 7 October 2025. The two inspectors inspecting the setting spoke to staff, children and parents as well as undertaking observations and reviewing documentation. As the setting was below the national standard for all four areas in the previous inspection, the inspectors evaluated the quality indicator 'Children thrive and develop in quality spaces' during this inspection.

Aspect being inspected	Previous evaluation (Oct '24)
How good is our care, play and learning?	Adequate (3)
How good is our setting?	Adequate (3)
How good is our leadership?	Adequate (3)
How good is our staff team?	Adequate (3)

Aspect being inspected	Current evaluation (Oct '25)
Leadership	Very Good (5)
Children Thrive and Develop in Quality Spaces	Very Good (5)
Children Play and Learn	Very Good (5)
Children are Supported to Achieve	Good (4)

Inspectors noted that strong leadership, a motivated staff team and high levels of engagement from families had supported continuous improvement which led to high quality play and learning outcomes for the children.

Diversity and inclusion were well promoted through multicultural resources, family representation, and cultural celebrations, supporting a welcoming and inclusive environment. Children enjoyed a variety of stimulating and exciting play and learning experiences supported by skilled staff and a rich learning environment both indoors and outdoors.

The setting was a category 2 level of support prior to this inspection and will now move to category 1.

The full report can be read [here](#)

3.4.3 Midsocket Playgroup, a funded provider setting based in Rosemount Learning Centre, received an unannounced inspection which took place on 30 September 2025 and 01 October 2025. The inspector inspecting the setting spoke to staff, children and parents as well as undertaking observations and reviewing documentation. As the setting was below the national standard for "How good is our setting?" in the previous inspection, the inspectors evaluated the quality indicator 'Children thrive and develop in quality spaces' as an extra QI during this inspection.

Aspect being inspected	Previous evaluation (May '24)
How good is our care, play and learning?	Good (4)
How good is our setting?	Adequate (3)
How good is our leadership?	Good (4)
How good is our staff team?	Good (4)

Aspect being inspected	Current evaluation (Oct '25)
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Leadership	Good (4)
Children Thrive and Develop in Quality Spaces	Good (4)
Children Play and Learn	Very Good (5)
Children are Supported to Achieve	Very Good (5)

Inspectors noted that children were happy, confident and settled. Children were leaders of their own play and learning and could select and use resources to meet their interests. The staff team worked well together to meet children's needs. It was noted that improvements had been made to the indoor and outdoor environments, although there was a feeling there was still room for further improvement. Partnership working with parents was a key strength in the service delivery. Moving forward, as part of the quality assurance process, management should ensure everyone is fully involved in the self evaluation process and development.

The setting was a category 2 level of support prior to this inspection and will now move to category 1.

The full report can be read [here](#)

3.4.4 Sunnybank ELC, a Local Authority setting in Sunnybank, received an unannounced inspection which took place on 18 and 19 November 2025. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. There is no comparison evaluation for this setting as the previous inspection took place in 2019. The setting were therefore evaluated on the three areas only.

In making their evaluations of the service inspectors spent time with children using the service, spoke with eight of their parents/carers, assessed core assurances, including the physical environment, spoke with staff and management, observed practice and children's experiences and reviewed documents.

Aspect being inspected	Evaluation Nov 25
Leadership	Very Good (5)
Children Play and Learn	Good (4)
Children are Supported to Achieve	Very Good (5)

Inspectors noted that children were very happy, confident and settled. The staff team worked very well together to meet children's needs. They used their skills and knowledge to ensure good quality outcomes for children.

They found that partnership working with parents was a key strength in the service delivery. Quality assurance processes were robust and well embedded, however outcomes could also be made more measurable to strengthen evaluation. They felt the setting should also review their free flow system to ensure children have greater daily access to outdoor play, supporting their health, wellbeing, and learning experiences.

The setting was category 1 prior to inspection and will remain in category 1.
The full report can be read [here](#)

3.4.4 Muirfield ELC, a Local Authority setting within Muirfield School, received an unannounced inspection which took place on 5 and 6 November 2025. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

In making their evaluations of the service inspectors spent time with children using the service, spoke with eight of their parents/carers, assessed core assurances, including the physical environment, spoke with staff and management, observed practice and children's experiences and reviewed documents.

The setting was evaluated on 3 areas during this inspection as they were meeting the standard already in the "How Good is our Setting?"

Aspect being inspected	Previous evaluation (June '24)
How good is our care, play and learning?	Adequate (3)
How good is our setting?	Good (4)
How good is our leadership?	Good (4)
How good is our staff team?	Good (4)

Aspect being inspected	Current Evaluation (Nov '25)
Leadership	Very Good (5)
Children Play and Learn	Very Good (5)
Children are Supported to Achieve	Very Good (5)

Inspectors reported that children were cared for in a well-led service where effective quality assurance practices resulted in sustained improvements for children and families. Children enjoyed high quality play experiences and experienced consistently kind, supportive interactions. Staff had developed their skills and knowledge in planning for children's learning and assessing their progress. They were knowledgeable about children's individual needs and responded appropriately to meet these.

Muirfield were previously in category 2 of the Quality Improvement Framework and will now move to category 1.

The full report can be read [here](#)

3.4.5 Kittybrewster ELC, a Local Authority setting in Kittybrewster School, received an unannounced inspection which took place on 18 and 19 November. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. The lead inspector's team manager was also present in a quality assurance role. In making their evaluations of the service inspectors spent time with children using the service, spoke with parents/carers, assessed core assurances,

including the physical environment, spoke with staff and management, observed practice and children's experiences and reviewed documents.

The setting was evaluated on 3 areas during this inspection as they were meeting the standard already in the "How Good is our Setting?"

Aspect being inspected	Previous evaluation (Jan '25)
How good is our care, play and learning?	Adequate (3)
How good is our setting?	Good (4)
How good is our leadership?	Good (4)
How good is our staff team?	Good (4))

Aspect being inspected	Current Evaluation (Nov '25)
Leadership	Good (4)
Children Play and Learn	Good (4)
Children are Supported to Achieve	Satisfactory /Adequate(3)

Inspectors reported that the team had worked in partnership with children, parents and carers to refresh the nursery's vision, values and aims and had been embedding these into daily practice. Children had fun and benefitted from a good range of indoor play and learning opportunities. The outdoor space, however, should be further developed to provide more interesting and stimulating opportunities for children. Improvements to planning for children's learning had led to more positive experiences for children. They were cared for by nurturing and caring staff, which supported them to feel secure and valued. Some changes to practice in supporting children at snack and mealtimes was now needed to ensure that children's health and safety needs are fully supported. Improvements to some documentation, including accident and incident reports was required to ensure all key information is captured. To ensure that children are unable to gain entry to spaces that are not supervised or risk assessed for their use, a more robust risk assessment of the outdoor environment was needed.

Kittybrewster will remain in category 2 of the Quality Improvement Framework. The full report can be read [here](#) (Appendix C) Action plan

3.4.6 Greyhope ELC, a Local Authority setting in Greyhope School, received an unannounced inspection which took place on 8th, 9th and 10 December 2025. This inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

In making their evaluations of the service inspectors spent time with children using the service, spoke with parents/carers, assessed core assurances including the physical environment, spoke with staff and management, observed practice and children's experiences and reviewed documents.

As the setting was below the national standard for "How good is our setting?" in the previous inspection, the inspectors evaluated the quality indicator

'Children thrive and develop in quality spaces' as an extra QI during this inspection.

Aspect being inspected	Previous evaluation (Oct 24)
How good is our care, play and learning?	Adequate (3)
How good is our setting?	Adequate (3)
How good is our leadership?	Adequate (3)
How good is our staff team?	Adequate (3)

Aspect being inspected	Current evaluation (Dec '25)
Leadership	Good (4)
Children Thrive and Develop in Quality Spaces	Good (4)
Children Play and Learn	Satisfactory /Adequate(3)
Children are Supported to Achieve	satisfactory /Adequate(3)

Inspectors noted that Children were well settled, happy and having fun during their time at nursery. They were confident in their environment independently accessing resources and spaces to support their play. Strong leadership within the service promoted a culture of continuous improvement. Staff were committed to developing their skills and knowledge. Play and learning opportunities should now continue to be developed to promote children with challenge and develop their skills. The action plan to address the adequate areas can be found at Appendix D.

Greyhope were previously in category 2 of the Quality Improvement Framework and will remain in category 2.

The full report can be read [here](#)

3.4.7 St Margarets Nursery, a funded provider setting in St Margarets Independent School, received an unannounced inspection which took place on 26 November 2025 and 27 November 2025. The inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate.

In making their evaluations of the service inspectors spent time with children using the service, spoke with eight of their parents/carers, assessed core assurances, including the physical environment, spoke with staff and management, observed practice and children's experiences and reviewed documents. There is no comparison evaluation for this setting as the previous inspection took place in 2017. The setting were therefore evaluated on the three areas only.

Aspect being inspected	Evaluation Nov 25
Leadership	Good (4)
Children Play and Learn	Good (4)
Children are Supported to Achieve	Very Good (5)

Inspectors noted that children experienced kind and nurturing interactions from staff who knew them well. Positive relationships had been developed with families who felt welcomed into the service. Children benefitted from carefully planned experiences, both within and beyond the setting. Staff were flexible and worked together to meet children's individual needs. Self-evaluation was beginning to inform developments within the service. Strong connections to the school and wider community promoted children's sense of belonging.

The setting was in category 1 prior to inspection and will remain in category 1. The full report can be read [here](#)

3.5 School Age Childcare Inspections

3.5.1 None in this cycle.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 No negative environmental impacts have been identified.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve. Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*Taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Risk of not improving outcomes for learners	Positive engagement with Inspection agencies and sharing learning across the system where appropriate.	L	Yes

Compliance	Risk of not complying with national guidance	Positive engagement with Inspection agencies and sharing learning across the system where appropriate.	L	Yes
Operational	Risk that schools/ELC settings do not accurately identify the areas for improvement that will make the greatest difference to learners	Quality assurance arrangements in place to validate self-evaluation gradings	L	Yes
Financial	No risks identified			
Reputational	Risk that poor quality of provision will present a reputational risk to the Council	High levels of assurance are taken Quality Improvement and Inspection visits	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No risks identified			

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p>Commit to realising the potential of each individual, by seeking to widen curriculum choice and implement progressive choices.</p> <p>Commit to closing the attainment gap in education while working with partners across the city.</p>	<p>External scrutiny provides helpful assurance that there is sufficient focus on helping young people recover from the pandemic and that the school self-evaluation and improvement plan is well positioned to support a closing of the poverty related attainment gap.</p>
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
<p>Prosperous People - 95% of all our children, including those living in our priority neighbourhoods, will sustain a</p>	<p>Engagement with inspectors provides an opportunity to learn from national best practice and validate self-evaluation evidence available. The support and challenge received by Inspectors</p>

positive destination upon leaving school by 2026.	helps to shape improvement plans for the coming sessions in keeping with the LOIP stretch aims.
Regional and City Strategies	
Regional Cultural Strategy	Engagement with the Inspectorate is fully aligned to the city prevention strategy. Work to address poverty and improvement in the Children’s services plan, the Child Poverty Action Plan and the National Improvement Framework Plan is also supported through external scrutiny.
Prevention Strategy	
Children’s Services Plan	
National Improvement Framework Plan	

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	No assessment required. I confirm this Shona Milne , Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning
Data Protection Impact Assessment	No DPIA is required.
Other	

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

11. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Northfield action plan
Appendix B – Harlaw action plan
Appendix C – Kittybrewster action plan
Appendix D – Greyhope action plan

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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Northfield Academy
Action Plan following HMIe Further Inspection

Further Inspection Date 28/01/25 – 30/01/25
Letter Publication Date 3 June 2025
QI Grading (at March '23)
 1.3 - Unsatisfactory
 2.3 - Unsatisfactory
 3.1 - Unsatisfactory
 3.2 - Unsatisfactory

Areas for Improvement (as identified in March '23)

- 1: Senior and middle leaders should work to improve the strategic leadership of all areas of the school. Review and update the school's vision and values. There should be a clear and shared understanding of the expectations, direction and identity of Northfield Academy. Ensure plans for improvement are agreed with young people, teachers and parents.
- 2: Develop a calm, safe and purposeful learning environment. Build positive relationships across the school. Young people should be central to discussions about behaviour expectations and feeling safe in school.
- 3: Agree with staff a shared understanding of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment. Develop effective processes to plan, track and monitor young people's progress.
- 4: Ensure the wellbeing needs of all young people are a key part of all school activities. Clarify procedures relating to pupil attendance and time keeping.
- 5: Urgently improve attainment from S1 to S6. Review the number of young people who leave school in S4 and S5, and those who do not go to a positive destination. Make plans to support broader achievements for all young people. The school should demonstrate how young people on reduced timetables are included, educated and safe.

QIs 2.1 (Safeguarding & Child Protection) and 3.1 (Wellbeing, Equality & Inclusion))

Areas for Improvement 2 & 4

Areas for Improvement (taken from SIF)	Desired Outcomes for Learners	Actions Required	Measures of Success (evidence – how will we know?)	Resources (who, what, by when)	RAG	Next Steps
Build positive relationships across the school.	Young people experience a nurturing environment,	Building on work and CLPL undertaken in 24/25, increase the use of restorative	Reduce BGE exclusions by 10%.	C. McDermott (HT) All staff		

Northfield Academy
Action Plan following HMIe Further Inspection

	<p>relational practice, and can increasingly take accountability for their actions.</p>	<p>practices, both universally and targeted. Utilise the skill/expertise developing in the 'targeted group' to continuously review relational approaches across the school.</p> <p>Roll Crew into S3, thus further-embedding underpinning principles (such as Appreciations, Apologies and Stands) throughout the BGE. At the same time, plan 'Senior Crew' ahead of session 26/27.</p> <p>Implement refreshed <i>Positive Relationships Policy</i>, which encapsulates all of the above.</p>	<p>Reduce exclusions for verbal abuse by 7.5%.</p> <p>LT&A Trios and Faculty QA (see QI 2.3 below) will evidence nurturing relationships are present in almost all learning spaces.</p>	<p>Specifically trained staff (x 16)</p> <p>Community Justice Scotland</p> <p>SACRO Resources</p>		
<p>Young people should be central to discussions about behaviour expectations and feeling safe in school.</p> <p>Ensure the wellbeing needs of</p>	<p>Improved culture, and sense of expectation and ambition.</p>	<p>Further-embed the use of the Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing Profile (GW) by extending implementation (from P7) to S3.</p> <p>Use GWP data, combined with local</p>	<p>GWP 'key questions' will evidence improving views and attitudes amongst young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work Hard: ≥ 7.8 ▪ Understanding expectations (school rules): ≥ 8.0 	<p>S. Angus (DHT)</p> <p>House Teams</p> <p>Crew Team</p> <p>School Partners</p>		

Northfield Academy
Action Plan following HMIe Further Inspection

<p>all young people are a key part of all school activities.</p>		<p>intelligence, to ensure House Assemblies and Community Meetings target directly relevant and current issues.</p> <p>Use the same data to inform the Personal and Social Education (PSE) and Crew Curricula.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Safety in school: ≥ 6.8 ▪ I like school: ≥ 7.0 			
<p>Develop a calm, safe and purposeful learning environment.</p>	<p>Improved attitudes towards gender-based bullying.</p>	<p>Further-extend Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) training to groups and cohorts across the school.</p>	<p>Reduce exclusions for physical assault/fighting by 10%.</p>	<p>F. Adair (DHT)</p> <p>MVP Implementation Group</p>		
<p>Attendance and time keeping.</p> <p>Ensure the wellbeing needs of all young people are a key part of all school activities.</p>	<p>Improved attendance.</p>	<p>Activate new school day configuration from 2 June 2025, including the removal of traditional 'Registration'.</p> <p>Implement ASG-wide approach to tracking attendance and 'every day counts'.</p> <p>Review approaches to targeted support to ensure they are directed towards the needs of young people, including those for whom</p>	<p>Increase cohort attendance by:</p> <p>S1 – 2%</p> <p>S2 – 4.5%</p> <p>S3 – 3%</p> <p>S4 – 3%</p> <p>S5/6 – 4%</p>	<p>C. McDermott (HT)</p> <p>F. Adair (DHT)</p> <p>House Teams</p> <p>Targeted/Pupil Support</p> <p>ASG Primary Schools</p> <p>ASG HSLO</p>		

Northfield Academy
Action Plan following HMIe Further Inspection

		attendance is a barrier to learning.			
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QI 2.3 (Learning, Teaching & Assessment)

Area for Improvement 3

Areas for Improvement (taken from SIF)	Desired Outcomes for Learners	Actions Required	Measures of Success (evidence – how will we know?)	Resources (who, what, by when)	RAG	Next Steps
Learning and engagement, and quality of teaching.	Improved engagement and understanding of next steps in learning	Continue the implementation of 'Feedback Fundamentals' (carried forward from 24/25), introducing a new fundamental on a monthly basis.	LTA Trio and Faculty Classroom Visit data will evidence improved engagement across the majority classrooms.	M. Guthrie (DHT) Teaching staff Learning & Teaching/Excelerate Working Group INSET/CT etc.		
Learning and engagement, and quality of teaching.	Improved engagement and ability to articulate learning	Further-embed oracy principles in classroom practice.	Majority of learners' voice will evidence increasing opportunities to participate in engaging and relevant learning.	M. Guthrie (DHT) Teaching staff Learning & Teaching/Excelerate Working Group INSET/CT etc.		
Learning and engagement, and quality of teaching.	Improved consistency in young people's experience across classrooms	Implement consistent whole-school (LT&A Trios) and faculty level approaches to quality improvement of learning, teaching and assessment.	Most staff will report and increased sense of autonomy and ownership of quality improvement of LT&A.	M. Guthrie (DHT) Extended Leadership Team Teaching staff		

Northfield Academy
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<p>Planning, tracking and monitoring.</p>	<p>Improved access to support, challenge and appropriate intervention.</p>	<p>Dedicate professional learning towards upskilling staff in the analysis and use of tracking data.</p> <p>Utilise the Working Time Agreement (WTA) to ensure staff have time to plan for using data to inform interventions.</p> <p>Improve young people and parent/carer understanding of tracking information.</p>		<p>M. Guthrie (DHT)</p> <p>Extended Leadership Team</p> <p>Teaching staff</p> <p>INSET/CT etc.</p> <p>City-wide DHT Group</p> <p>pupiltracking.com</p>		
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QI 3.2 (Raising Attainment & Achievement)

Area for Improvement 5

Areas for Improvement (taken from SIF)	Desired Outcomes for Learners	Actions Required	Measures of Success (evidence – how will we know?)	Resources (who, what, by when)	RAG	Next Steps
<p>Raise attainment.</p>	<p>Improved attainment in Numeracy, BGE ACEL and Senior Phase</p>	<p>Continue the implementation of 'BGE Mathematics' (carried over from 24/25) through joint working between Crew and Maths & Numeracy Faculty Staff.</p>	<p>Level 3 achieved (S3) – Maintain or exceed national average (90%).</p> <p>Level 4 achieved (S3) – Maintain or exceed national average (64%).</p> <p>SCQF 4 (S4) – increase by 15%.</p>	<p>C. McDermott (HT)</p> <p>M. Guthrie (DHT)</p> <p>M. McGhee (PT)</p> <p>R. Nicol (PT)</p> <p>Teaching staff</p>		

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		Extend Literacy/Numeracy Pitstops to include S2 and S5 to ensure coherence, progression, and to support robustness of teacher judgement.	SCQF 5 (S4) – increase by 25%. SCQF 6 (S5) – increase by 5%.			
Raise attainment.	Improved attainment in Literacy, BGE ACEL and Senior Phase	Continue the implementation of 'BGE English' (carried over from 24/25) through joint working between Crew and Maths & Numeracy Faculty Staff. Extend Literacy/Numeracy Pitstops to include S2 and S5 to ensure coherence, progression, and to support robustness of teacher judgement.	Level 3 achieved (S3) – Increase by 10% (average across Reading, Writing and Listening/Talking). Level 4 achieved (S3) – Increase by 15% (average across Reading, Writing and Listening/Talking). SCQF 4 (S4) – increase by 10%. SCQF 5 (S4) – increase by 10%. SCQF 6 (S5) – increase by 15%.	C. McDermott (HT) L. Gray (DHT) C. Bain (PT) R. Nicol (PT) Teaching staff		
Raise attainment.	Improved attainment for the 'Middle 60%' (S4 based on S4)	Curriculum Reviews Planning for Choices & Change Evaluate the effectiveness of the 'Meaningful May' pilot (May '25) and build on this to further-	Maintain or exceed an average of 3 SCQF 5 qualifications per young person in S4. Increase National 5 A-D pass rate by 2%. Increase S4 Breadth & Depth measures:	C. McDermott (HT) L. Gray (DHT) A. Dean (PT) Extended Leadership Team House Teams		

Northfield Academy
Action Plan following HMIe Further Inspection

		maximise SCQF 4 and 5 presentations for identified groups in May '26).	5@3 – 10% 5@4 – 10% 1@5 – 13%	Teaching staff		
Improve positive destinations.	Increased % school leavers entering a positive, sustained destination	<p>Introduce 'pathway evenings' in conjunction with 'traditional 'parents' evenings, starting with a pilot in S2.</p> <p>Build on work undertaken in 24/25 to further develop partnership work with Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Station House Media Unit (SHMU), WorkingRite, Growing2Gether.</p> <p>In conjunction with all stakeholders, in conjunction with business partners, gather information to support the development of a Northfield School Leaver Profile (skills framework).</p>	<p>Most young people will report increased confidence and understanding of their individualised pathway.</p> <p>Tracking and course choice data will evidence increased relevance and coherence in respect of young people's pathways.</p> <p>Increase positive destinations by 2.5% (matching increase achieved in 24/25).</p>	<p>L. Gray (DHT) L. Ritchie (DHT)</p> <p>House Teams</p> <p>School Partners</p> <p>All Faculties</p>		

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Inspection Date	18/03/25 – Revisit (original HMIE visit 2019)
Report Publication Date	28/06/25
QI Grading (from 2019)	1.3 - Weak 2.3 - Satisfactory 3.1 - Satisfactory 3.2 - Weak

Areas for Improvement identified by HMIE (all):

1. Streamline approaches to improvement so that self-evaluation activities clearly identify priorities which will make the biggest difference to outcomes for young people.
2. Continue to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment so that young people's experiences engage them and meet their needs. Develop more fully an ethos for learning with high expectations and mutual respect.
3. Strengthen approaches to monitoring young people's progress across all subject areas so that staff at all levels have a clear overview of learners' progress. Continue to raise the attainment of young people at all stages.

Priority 1 (QI 1.3)

Streamline approaches to improvement so that self-evaluation activities clearly identify priorities which will make the biggest difference to outcomes for young people.

Areas for Improvement (taken from SIF)	Desired Outcomes for Learners	Actions Required	Measures of Success (evidence – how will we know?)	Resources (who, what, by when)	RAG	Next Steps
	Learners experience a more coherent and consistent learning environment underpinned by strong collaboration and trust.	Continue building trust through consistency and visibility of leadership. Further embed working groups to support distributed leadership.	Staff surveys to show sustained improvement in perceptions of leadership and change. Increase the percentage of staff reporting positive or strongly positive perceptions of leadership and change in staff surveys by 13%. Increased engagement in working groups and the understanding of the improvement cycle.	SLT lead oversight of working groups (termly). Link DHTs to specific leadership outcomes. PTs and working group leads to report in term 2 and term 4 of session 25-26.		Review leadership roles to ensure clarity and equity. Continue with the positive practice and moves that have been made within the school during session 24-25.



Harlaw Academy
 Action Plan following HMIe Inspection 18th March 2025



	<p>Young people are able to articulate their role in school improvement and feel valued in shaping their learning environment</p>	<p>Enhance clarity of leadership roles for young people in the school.</p> <p>Expand pupil and parent/carer involvement in school evaluation and planning.</p>	<p>Regular feedback from young people and families shapes planning.</p> <p>Clear, tracked improvement outcomes linked to working groups and pupil group actions.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of positive responses from young people feeling their views are listened to by 16%.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of positive responses from parents/carers in surveys regarding school leadership and direction by 11%.</p>	<p>Pupil Leadership Forum revised (by September 2025).</p> <p>Parent Forum feedback included in Term 1 SQUIP.</p>		<p>Audit effectiveness of current working groups.</p> <p>Conduct learner and parent focus groups in Term 1.</p>
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Priority 2 (QI 2.3)

Continue to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment so that young people's experiences engage them and meet their needs. Develop more fully an ethos for learning with high expectations and mutual respect.

Areas for Improvement (taken from SIF)	Desired Outcomes for Learners	Actions Required	Measures of Success (evidence – how will we know?)	Resources (who, what, by when)	RAG	Next Steps
	Learners experience consistently high-quality, differentiated, and engaging learning.	<p>Continue embedding Learning and Teaching Framework.</p> <p>Reintroduce planned peer and SLT-led learning visits.</p> <p>Strengthen questioning and oracy.</p>	<p>Increased staff confidence in delivering differentiated lessons.</p> <p>More evidence of higher-order questioning in learning visits.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of staff reporting young people being engaged in their learning by 9%.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of young people reporting that their work in school is hard enough by 8%.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of lessons evaluated as 'good' or better during formal class observations by 10%.</p>	<p>L&T Working Group coordinate training and toolkit updates.</p> <p>SLT/Faculty Leads carry out observations (Terms 2 & 4 of session 25-26).</p> <p>Oracy development team lead CPD on questioning strategies.</p>		<p>June 2025 Whole School observations continued as planned.</p> <p>Delivered May INSET on BGE pace/challenge.</p> <p>Pilot YP feedback tools in at least two faculties in Term 2 of Session 25-26.</p> <p>Expand confident use of oracy strategies across BGE curriculum.</p>
	Young people are more confident, challenged, and able to describe how they are progressing.	<p>Develop whole-school student feedback process.</p> <p>Use BGE as key focus for improved differentiation and pace.</p>	<p>Learner surveys and focus groups show improved understanding of their progress.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of young people who report understanding how they are progressing in learning</p>	YP Feedback model piloted in May–June.		



Harlaw Academy
Action Plan following HMIe Inspection 18th March 2025



			<p>(via learner surveys) by 9%.</p> <p>Increased BGE attainment and engagement.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of young people achieving expected levels within the Broad General Education (BGE) curriculum by 15%.</p>			
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Priority 3 (QI 3.2)

Strengthen approaches to monitoring young people's progress across all subject areas so that staff at all levels have a clear overview of learners' progress. Continue to raise the attainment of young people at all stages

Areas for Improvement (taken from SIF)	Desired Outcomes for Learners	Actions Required	Measures of Success (evidence – how will we know?)	Resources (who, what, by when)	RAG	Next Steps
	Learners feel safe, supported and have access to appropriate support and pathways.	Fully embed whole-school tracking and monitoring system in all year groups. Strengthen staff confidence in data use and response.	Attainment improves, especially in S4 and for learners in the highest 20%. Increase the percentage of S4 pupils achieving 5 or more qualifications at SCQF Level 5 or better by 5%. Increase the average complimentary tariff points of learners identified as being in the highest 20% so that this is above the virtual comparator. Increase the percentage of S5 pupils achieving 1 or more qualifications at SCQF Level 6 or better by 5%. Increase the percentage of S5 pupils achieving 3 or more qualifications at SCQF Level 6 or better by 5%. Increase the percentage of young people achieving Literacy and Numeracy at	SLT/Guidance/PTs to track and analyse attainment and wellbeing data (termly).		Improve faculty access to and understanding of ACEL/SNSA data. Continue to update presentation policy and link to responsive planning.



Harlaw Academy
Action Plan following HMIe Inspection 18th March 2025



			Level 5 and above by S4 roll by 12%.			
	Young people are to demonstrate improved confidence and attainment especially in Level 5 and Level 6 courses.	Review support systems: part-time timetables, referrals, and behaviour strategies.	Reduction in part-time timetables and N5 No Awards.	PEF-supported interventions targeted via data analysis.		Clarity of interventions linked to tracking. Continue to build on a wider range of subject and curricular options in Level 5 and Level 6 courses for young people.

Additional Priority Area (QI 3.1)

Living Our Motto: A Renewed Focus on Courtesy

We are embedding courtesy into our daily practice, leadership and learning.

Areas for Improvement (taken from SIF)	Desired Outcomes for Learners	Actions Required	Measures of Success (evidence – how will we know?)	Resources (who, what, by when)	RAG	Next Steps
	Learners experience a respectful, inclusive and safe environment.	<p>After consultation with all stakeholders in Term 1 of session 25-26 launch school-wide Courtesy Charter.</p> <p>Maintain progress on safeguarding and support plan rollout.</p>	<p>Increased positive referrals linked to values.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of young people staying on at school in S5 by 5% and in S6 by 10%.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of school leavers entering a positive, sustained destination by 6%.</p> <p>Surveys from stakeholders report greater levels of satisfaction and safety.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of parents/carers reporting satisfaction and feeling their young people are safe at school (via parent/carer surveys) by 14%.</p> <p>A significant decrease in the number of reports of anti-social behaviour in the wider community as evidenced in complaints and compliments records.</p>	<p>SLT and PTG Teams coordinate charter and awards (by October 2025).</p> <p>Continue PTG moderation of Child Plans (ongoing).</p> <p>DHT Inclusion to audit support systems by June 2025.</p>		<p>Launch Courtesy Charter by October 2025.</p> <p>Link values into Positive Relationships policy refresh.</p>



Harlaw Academy
Action Plan following HMIe Inspection 18th March 2025



			<p>More robust evidence in planning folders and child plans and planning around each child.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of student well-being surveys reporting they have an adult they can speak to by 11%.</p>			
	<p>Young people demonstrate increased responsibility, empathy and engagement with school values.</p>	<p>Integrate courtesy expectations into assemblies, charters and displays. Reward respectful behaviour visibly and regularly.</p>	<p>Reduced incidents of disrespect or relational low-level disruption.</p> <p>Positive pupil survey responses on ethos.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of young people reporting that staff encourage them to do the best they can by 6%.</p>	<p>Pupil groups co-develop visuals and charters.</p> <p>Termly review of reward system.</p>		<p>Build courtesy tracking into school improvement review. Plan stakeholder feedback on anti-bullying, safety, and support.</p>

Appendix C - Name of Setting - Kittybrewster

Areas for improvement	Action required	Stakeholders & timescale/checkpoints	Desired outcomes for children and families	Evidence and review/confirmed completion	RAG Rating
Leadership QI					
Children Thrive and Develop in Quality spaces QI					
Children Play and Learn QI					
Children are Supported to Achieve QI					
Share person centred risk assessments promptly with parents and staff to ensure consistent care.	Staff to ensure when a PCRA is completed that it is printed immediately and signed and dated by parents.	ELC Staff, Parents Ongoing – Monthly reviews by manager	PCRA’s are shared promptly with families.	All PCRA are printed and shared with staff. ELC manager to review monthly.	
Consistently follow best practice during snack and mealtimes	Staff to inspect lunch and snack components when they are delivered from the school kitchen and be	ELC Staff Catering staff Ongoing	Children’s safety is a top priority for all staff.	Senior staff to inform kitchen if food consistently comes through unsuitable via email	

to minimise choking risks.	prepared to cut into smaller pieces should this be required.			and include catering manager and ELC manager.	
Improve medication storage and documentation for safe medication administration.	Medication to be transferred into sealable plastic tubs which have children's photograph, name and date of birth clearly displayed. These will be secured on the top shelf of the locked cabinet which is easily accessible for staff. All medication forms to be completed online so that there is ample space for important information to be included and then printed and signed and dated by parent and staff.	ELC Staff, Parents Ongoing	Medication is stored more clearly and forms are more detailed with required information.	Medication is now stored as described and reviewed monthly by ELC manager.	
Further develop outdoor risk assessments to ensure they are robust in ensuring a secure environment.	Update staff and children's outdoor risk assessment to include gate locks and fencing.	ELC Staff Children	Outdoor area is more secure	New risk assessment includes Wild Garden gate being locked and is reviewed monthly by ELC manager or seniors.	
Improve accident and incident records to capture all key information and confirm timely communication with parents.	New Accident and Incident forms created with specific areas to include specific details to be captured. Space for staff and parents to date and sign.	ELC Staff Parents	Accident and incident forms are more detailed for parents/carers.	New accident and incident forms are in place and are reviewed monthly by ELC manager.	

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Appendix D - Greyhope School Nursery – ELC Action Plan

Areas for Improvement	Action Required	Stakeholders & Timescale / Checkpoints	Desired Outcomes for Children and Families	Evidence and Review / Confirmed Completion	RAG Rating
Children Play and Learn QI					
To ensure children experience high quality learning and development, the provider and manager should ensure that observation and assessment of children's individual learning supports and identifies progress.	Practitioners will engage in professional learning including visits to other settings to improve the quality of interactions experienced by learners.	Ongoing in 2026	The quality of practitioner observations during interactions with children will continue to improve. Increasingly, practitioner interactions will focus on children's learning to support their progress.	Evidence of staff professional learning Records of 1-1 meetings and professional learning Scheduled setting and staff observations Support visits and input from locality lead officers	
	The quality of practitioners interactions will be a focus of staff and setting observations. Practitioners will receive feedback on their interactions following monitoring and during scheduled 1-1 meetings.	Ongoing in 2026			
	Practitioners will improve their use of progression framework statements to identify appropriate next steps within learner observations.	Ongoing in 2026	High quality learner observations will be regularly recorded for all learners. Next steps will reflect the progression statements in curricular pathways.	Intentional planning documentation Children's observations in online platform Tracking and audits of children's observations Records of staff 1-1 meetings Support visits and input from locality lead officers	
	Practitioners observations will be monitored by SEYP and ELC manager to ensure they are regular, relevant, high quality and include appropriate next steps.	February 2026 then ongoing			

Areas for Improvement	Action Required	Stakeholders & Timescale / Checkpoints	Desired Outcomes for Children and Families	Evidence and Review / Confirmed Completion	RAG Rating
Children are Supported to Achieve Q1					
To meet the needs of children throughout the routine of the day, the provider and manager should ensure that children receive the support they need during transitions.	Before the start of the session to children and staff transition into a group activity, the practitioners will organise the required resources to remove any unnecessary wait time.	February 2026 then ongoing	During transitions in each session, pupils will be supported to develop their ideas, to engage in purposeful play and learning and to understand safety expectations. Children who require additional support during transition times will receive this.	Day-to-day SEYP monitoring Scheduled setting and staff observations Setting eBook	Green
	Clearer staff roles and more effective routines will be established to ensure smooth and successful transitions for children after lunch back to play.	February 2026 then ongoing		Records of staff 1-1 meetings Support visits and input from locality lead officers	
	Support for children with additional support needs at the beginning of sessions will be further improved. This will be informed by staff professional learning including visits to other settings. Specific strategies will be detailed in children's individual documents.	February 2026 then ongoing		Children's personal plans and supports and strategies documents Parent feedback at personal planning meetings Scheduled setting and staff observations Setting eBook Records of staff 1-1 meetings and professional learning	Yellow

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	17 February 2026
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Early Learning and Childcare Concession Agreements – Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (FCSS)
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/26/006
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
REPORT AUTHOR	Louise Beaton
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Committee on the operations of the concession agreements at Cummings Park and Tillydrone Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) / Nursery settings run by Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (FCSS).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Notes the contents of the report and instructs Officers to report back to Committee at the end of the next Concession Contract period; and
- 2.2 Agrees to extend the concession agreements with Flexible Childcare Scotland Services (FCSS) for another 4 years based on the positive evaluations and their ability to offer a choice of flexible services in areas where there are a limited number of funded providers operating.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Officers previously updated Committee on 24 January 2023 (CFS/23/019) and were requested to continue to monitor the concession agreements and report back to Committee at the end of the contract period.

Tillydrone and Northfield Localities

- 3.2 Engagement with parents and carers prior to the expansion of ELC identified there was a limited choice of more flexible provision for families. In some localities across the city there was a higher concentration of funded providers, whilst other areas had very few, which restricted the choice available to parents and carers. The latter was the case in our priority areas. Consultations with parents and carers revealed in priority areas, funded providers are often more sought after than school-based provision. Some parents/carers reported they

felt more comfortable building a relationship with a funded provider than with a school-based setting.

- 3.3 The expansion of ELC was an opportunity to remove barriers, engage parents/carers and enhance the choice available to families. To this end, and as part of the ELC capital programme, two new purpose standalone nursery / ELC settings were built in Cummings Park in Northfield and in Tillydrone. In line with the ambition of the ELC Delivery Plan, the Early Years Team sought to increase choice and flexibility within our priority regeneration areas by appointing an ELC provider to occupy and deliver ELC services in the two aforementioned Council owned, new build nurseries.
- 3.4 An open tender was undertaken in Spring 2021 and conducted in line with the Concession Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2016. Following this process, Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (FCSS), a registered charity operating across Scotland, was awarded the contract for Cummings Park and Tillydrone nursery / ELC settings. This approach presented an excellent opportunity to support the funded provider sector, enabling access to a purpose-built facility without incurring the upfront/capital costs and to increase choice for families.
- 3.5 The concession contracts allows the Council to charge the provider for the use of the property and/or a percentage of any profit generated above a threshold value, whichever is higher. As part of the agreement, it is expected the provider throughout the duration of the contract meets the Council's prescribed outcomes, which are aligned with the ELC Delivery Plan and the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP).

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (FCSS)

- 3.6 FCSS is the operator of the concession agreements at Cummings Park and Tillydrone ELC / Nursery settings. It offers a unique, fully flexible model of ELC delivery, which has no minimum booking requirements, allows for changing work patterns and thereby can remove barriers to families, particularly those with lower income and/or insecure work and those entering employment, education and training. FCSS works in partnership with Aberdeen City Council, as a funded provider, to deliver the ELC funded entitlement to eligible children (eligible 2 year olds and 3-5 year olds) in the Northfield and St Machar ASGs.
- 3.7 The contract was approved for a duration of 4 years with the option to extend by a further 4 years. We are pleased to report a very positive picture for the concession agreements overall, with improved quality, improved inspection evaluations, more funded children placed and beneficial impacts for children and families reported.

Number of Funded ELC Placements

- 3.8 FCSS welcomed families to the new ELC / nursery settings in the Cummings Park and Tillydrone areas from January 2022.

Cummings Park

- 3.9 Cummings Park ELC / Nursery is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 80 children at any one time, from the age of two years to those not yet attending primary school, within the Northfield ASG. The number of funded

children has increased year on year since it opened. In particular, the opening of this setting has significantly helped to support the high demand for Eligible 2's placements in the Northfield area with a large proportion of our eligible 2 year population now placed there.

Year	3-5s	Eligible 2's
2021/22 *from January 2022	15*	18*
2022/23	41	27
2023/24	48	42
2024/25	67	58
2025/26 **year to date	78**	30**

Tillydrone

- 3.10 Tillydrone ELC / Nursery is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 56 children at any one time, from the age of two years to those not yet attending primary school. The number of funded children attending has also increased at Tillydrone ELC / Nursery.

Year	3-5s	Eligible 2's
2021/22	7*	10*
2022/23	37	4
2023/24	51	6
2024/25	44	12
2025/26 *year to date	39**	7**

Quality Assurance

- 3.11 The Early Years team have supported FCSS at both Cummings Park and Tillydrone ELC / Nursery settings. Regular quality assurance visits by the Early Years Team are undertaken. Care Inspectorate evaluations for both settings have improved since their inception and are detailed below:

Cummings Park ELC / Nursery

Aspect being inspected	Initial evaluation 28 July 2022	Second evaluation 2 June 2023	Third evaluation 11 September 2023	Most recent evaluation 24 April 2024
How good is our care, play and learning?	1 – Unsatisfactory	3 – Adequate	Not evaluated	4 – Good
How good is our setting?	2 – Weak	2 – Weak	3 – Adequate	4 – Good
How good is our leadership?	1 – Unsatisfactory	3 – Adequate	Not evaluated	4 – Good
How good is our staff team?	2 – Weak	3 – Adequate	Not evaluated	4 – Good

3.12 The Early Years Team have worked closely with FCSS to support the improvement of the quality of their services and positive progress has been made. Progress at Cummings Park Nursery has been reported at Education and Children’s Services Committee as part of our regular inspection reporting.

Tillydrone ELC / Nursery

Aspect being inspected	Initial evaluation 16 February 2023	Second evaluation 10 October 2023	Most recent evaluation 1 August 2024
How good is our care, play and learning?	4 – Good	4 – Good	4 – Good
How good is our setting?	5 – Very Good	4 – Good	5 – Very Good
How good is our leadership?	3 – Adequate	4 – Good	5 – Very Good
How good is our staff team?	4 – Good	3 – Adequate	4 – Good

3.13 FCSS has sought to develop partnership links with community groups and projects and local services. It is recognised that engaging with the local community and understanding the context in which they are operating helps FCSS meet the needs of families. There has been a commitment from FCSS to build relationships with community groups and other local organisations.

3.14 A Health Visitor visits the Cummings Park Nursery frequently throughout the week, supporting 107 families. Positive feedback from parents has been received. Flexible Childcare Services Scotland also works in partnership with CFine and Fareshare at both Cummings Park and Tillydrone ELC / Nursery settings to offer a food larder which is well used and provides excellent support for families.

Impact

3.15 The concession agreements have created local employment, training and career progression opportunities in the Cummings Park and Tillydrone ELC / Nursery settings.

3.16 Parents and carers were surveyed as part of the FCSS Impact Report 2025 (Appendix 3). When asked “how flexible childcare helps you and your family”:

- 77% of respondents reported that they could work more;
- 68% of respondents highlighted that it helps them save money on childcare;
- 36% of respondents reported that they had more time to themselves which in turn improves their mental health;
- 18% of respondents indicated that they could increase their other caring responsibilities; and

- 14% of respondents reported that they could study more.

3.17 Parents highlighted the following positive impacts as a result of using FCSS:

“I wouldn’t have been able to go back to work as quickly without these services. They have given me the opportunity to take care of my family financially and also have the odd couple of hours to myself, which improves my mental health.”

“It allows me to have my child in for 4 days (per week) throughout the whole year and not cost me a fortune.”

“Navigating autism, ADHD, working and studying part-time – all on a low income – has been extraordinarily difficult with a toddler in the mix. My mental health was really tanking before we found the service and could buy a few hours here and there throughout the week where I could breathe a bit easier.”

“ Provided flexibility for my and my husband’s work. It was an affordable option too.”

“Before we found FCSS we were struggling to pay typical nursery fees. Paying only for the hours we need has really improved our financial situation and overall wellbeing.”

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Aberdeen City Council, as primary guarantor of quality and key enabler of flexibility and choice, is funded by the Scottish Government to deliver ELC, as part of Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE).

4.2 Aberdeen City Council works in partnership with Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (FCSS) to deliver fully flexible funded ELC places in the Cummings Park and Tillydrone areas of the city, in line with the commitment in our ELC Delivery Plan 2024-26 to deliver a mixed model of ELC provision in every area of the city.

4.3 The concession agreements also generate additional income for the Council. FCSS Tillydrone is charged £10K per annum and FCSS Cummings Park is charged £15K per annum. From Year 2 of the contract, the charge changed to a percentage of the provider turnover, specifically 5% if that is higher than the amount above. If it is not, then the amount above will be continue to be paid. With the increase in the number of children placed at both ELC / Nursery settings the annual amount charged by the Council has increased.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The expansion of ELC has brought a number of duties on the Local Authority under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014:

- The provision of 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare for eligible two year olds and all three and four year olds.

- Aberdeen City Council will retain the statutory responsibility for ensuring that funded ELC entitlement is available to all eligible children in the city.
- Aberdeen City Council will continue to be the primary guarantor of quality and key enabler of flexibility and choice, ensuring that there is a range of options for all families in the city.
- Aberdeen City Council is responsible for engaging and consulting with parents and carers on a regular basis (minimum of every 2 years) on the provision of ELC delivered locally.
- Aberdeen City Council is responsible for preparing and publishing an Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan every 2 years.

5.2 The concession agreements assist the Council to continue to develop and deliver high quality ELC in the city and, in particular, in two of our priority regeneration areas.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 No negative environmental impacts have been identified. Across all ELC settings, good use is made of outdoor and green spaces where practicable and where feasible to do so.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No risks identified	N/A	N/A	N/A
Compliance	Risk of not meeting statutory obligations around 1140 hours.	Mitigated through delivery of the Expansion Programme and subsequent annual monitoring of supply and demand of ELC places.	L	Yes
Operational	Risk of not attracting enough new practitioners into the workforce.	Mitigated through the ongoing activities being undertaken to support workforce development, as outlined in ELC Delivery Plan 2024-26.	L	Yes
	Quality assurance	More robust quality assurance process		

	processes are not robust	<p>now implemented by the provider.</p> <p>Close monitoring of progress by the Early Years team.</p> <p>Support in place from the Early Years team and commitment from the provider to implement recommendations made by Care Inspectorate.</p>		
Financial	Risk of building a financially unsustainable model.	<p>Care has been taken to redesign ELC around improving quality rather than simply doubling to reflect the additional hours and a more sustainable staffing model has been put in place.</p> <p>Officers monitor supply and demand on an annual basis in order to maximise resources and achieve best value.</p>	M	Yes
Reputational	Risk of not delivering on legal obligations	Mitigated through delivery of the Expansion Programme and subsequent annual monitoring of supply and demand of ELC places.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No risks identified	N/A	N/A	N/A

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025-26</u>	
Impact of Report	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	The proposals within this report support the delivery of the policy statement " <i>Aberdeen – A place where all people can prosper</i> ".

	<p>The provision of funded Early Learning and Childcare has the potential to be transformational for many families, but especially for those with the lowest incomes in the city, and it contributes to our high level priority to reduce child poverty.</p>
<p><u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u></p>	
<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>74% employment rate for Aberdeen City by 2026 (Stretch Outcome 2)</p>
	<p>The Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26 continues to have a positive impact on this priority theme and helps to deliver the LOIP.</p> <p>The workforce has increased significantly in order to deliver the increase in ELC provision and, importantly, has offered local employment opportunities in the Cummings Park and Tillydrone Nursery / ELC settings.</p> <p>At Cummings Park Nursery, 2 members of staff are undertaking the BA Degree in Childhood Practice, whilst 3 team members have commenced SVQ Level 4 and 6 team members are currently undertaking SVQ Level 3 qualifications.</p> <p>At Tillydrone Nursery, one member of staff is currently undertaking the BA Degree in Childhood Practice and 4 team members are undertaking SVQ Level 3 qualifications.</p> <p>95% of all children will reach their expected developmental milestones by their 27-30 month review by 2026 (Stretch Outcome 3)</p> <p>Our work in partnership with families and communities including through a Peep offer in all settings as part of a partnership Family Support offer will support children to reach their expected milestones. It will also increase the number of parents and carers who have awareness of how to support their children’s learning and development at home.</p> <p>Furthermore, every child who attends Early Learning and Childcare over a lunchtime period receives a minimum of one free meal per session attended as part of their statutory entitlement, as well as a portion of milk and fruit or vegetables daily via the Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme.</p>

	<p>A Health Visitor visits the Cummings Park Nursery frequently throughout the week, supporting 107 families. Positive feedback from parents has been received.</p> <p>Flexible Childcare Services Scotland works in partnership with CFine and Fareshare at both Cummings Park and Tillydrone ELC / Nursery settings to offer a food larder which is well used and provides excellent support for families.</p> <p>Early Learning and Childcare can improve long term outcomes for children and families.</p> <p>95% of children, living in our priority neighbourhoods (Quintiles 1&2), will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026 (Stretch Outcome 6)</p> <p>The expansion of Early Learning and Childcare has contributed positively to supporting positive destinations.</p> <p>We now have a Modern Apprenticeship (MA) position within our ELC staffing structure in Aberdeen City Council ELC settings. This involves training young people to become Early Years Practitioners as part of our ‘Grow Our Own’ workforce strategy. This provides a positive destination and career pathway for our young people as well as strengthening our workforce across all ELC sectors. We currently have 30 Modern Apprenticeships working across the city and are in the process of recruiting 2 new MA’s.</p> <p>34 young people completed their training in 2023-2024 and 13 completed in 2024-2025. On completion, young people can apply for ELC posts in either Local Authority or Private, Voluntary and Independent sectors, therefore supporting recruitment and retention across all ELC sectors.</p>
<p>Regional and City Strategies</p> <p>Strategic Development Plan</p> <p>Children’s Services Plan</p> <p>National Improvement Framework Plan</p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the Strategic Development Plan by supporting the workforce. The provision of high quality Early Learning and Childcare:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Supports families to take up employment and training opportunities; 2. Develops the Young Workforce; and

	<p>3. Supports businesses to recruit and retain staff.</p> <p>The Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26 is aligned to the Children’s Services Plan and the National Improvement Framework Plan and work to address poverty in the Child Poverty Action Plan.</p>
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9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Previous Integrated Impact Assessment relating to the provision of Early Learning and Childcare has been reviewed and no changes are required: ED-07R~1.PDF
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required as no personal information will be shared.
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Aberdeen City Council Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix 1 – Care Inspectorate Report

[FCSS Cummings Park Inspection Report April 2024](#)

11.2 Appendix 2 – Care Inspectorate Report

[FCSS Tillydrone Nursery Inspection Report August 2024](#)

11.3 Appendix 3 – Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (FCSS) Social Impact Report 2024-25

[FCSS Social Impact Report 2024-2025](#)

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (Cummings Park) Day Care of Children

Cummings Park Nursery
Cummings Park Crescent
ABERDEEN
AB16 7AS

Telephone: 07502055023

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
24 April 2024

Service provided by:
Flexible Childcare Services Scotland
SCIO

Service provider number:
SP2019013370

Service no:
CS2022000029

About the service

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (Cummings Park) is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 80 children at any one time, from the age of two years to not yet attending primary school.

The service is provided from a purpose-built nursery within the residential area of Northfield in Aberdeen. The children have access to two large playrooms with integral kitchens and toilets. There is direct access from the playrooms to a large outdoor play area.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 22 April 2024 between the hours of 08:30 and 18:00 and 23 April 2024 between the hours of 08:30 and 13:00. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- Spoke with children during their play.
- Spoke with parents as they collected their children.
- Received thirteen parent/carer online questionnaires.
- Received nine staff online questionnaires.
- Spoke with staff and management.
- Observed practice.
- Reviewed documents.
- Spoke with visiting professionals.

Key messages

- Staff were kind, warm, and nurturing in their approach with children.
- Staff knew the children and their families well, supported their individual needs, and acted on cues for comfort and reassurance.
- Children led their own play through a well balanced mix of activities, both indoors and outside.
- Staff were passionate about their role and were keen to extend their professional development to further improve outcomes for children.
- To ensure positive and nurturing mealtime across the setting, staff in the two's room should consider staff deployment and the age, stage and development of children when encouraging self service.
- To ensure high quality care and experiences for children quality assurance, including effective audits and monitoring should be embedded into practice.

From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	4 - Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How good is our care, play and learning?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support.

Staff were gentle, warm, and caring in their approach. They were in tune with children and their needs, responding to children's requests and picking up on their cues. Comfort, reassurance, and support were given when needed, contributing to positive attachments being formed. Parents told us they had a strong connection with the staff caring for their children. One parent said "Me and my child have a strong bond with all staff members within the nursery including management". Another parent said "The bond my child has with staff members makes putting them into nursery all the easier".

When speaking to staff it was clear that they knew the children well and were able to discuss personalities, sensitivities, likes and dislikes, and anything they were supporting them with. This allowed experiences, care, and support to be tailored to children's individual needs which supported them to feel safe and secure.

Children's wellbeing and progress was supported through effective personal planning. Plans contained information which captured the children's likes, dislikes, routines, and interests. Personal planning documents were individualised for each child. The wellbeing indicators captured individualised information and supported the children's progression. This ensured a holistic approach to care and allowed staff to effectively track children's progress in relation to their health and wellbeing. Support plans were in place for children with additional support needs. This ensured all staff were clear on sensitivities and how these were being supported as well as outlining any triggers and strategies being used. Plans highlighted a good level of agency working, with the team having been proactive in reaching out to and seeking advice from agencies and professionals. This ensured good support was in place for children and families.

Parents told us that they were fully involved in their child's care including developing and reviewing their personal plans. One parent told us "Regular updates on my child's progress and regular updates on their plan which ensures they are reaching their full potential". Another parent said "Have had regular meetings and updates with staff discussing goals and expectations. Staff promoted toilet training when we informed them we were starting this at home".

All staff had undertaken child protection training and were clear on their roles and responsibilities surrounding this. Chronologies were being used to capture significant events in the children's lives. These highlighted that staff were aware of potential safeguarding and wellbeing issues and that action had been taken, when appropriate.

The setting's policy detailed how they would safely manage the administration of medication. Medication was stored appropriately in the original packaging, however not all medication was clearly labelled with the child's name. Management took immediate action to rectify this. Medication forms contained accurate information; however we asked that more details around administering medication were included; for example when using inhalers. Providing clear details for staff to follow would contribute to children being safe and well.

We recognised mealtimes had been an improvement focus for the setting and could see the team were striving to provide a nurturing, unhurried experience for the children. Children benefited from healthy and plentiful mealtime options including fresh drinks. This supported them to be healthy and nourished. Parents told us their children could choose from a healthy range of snacks and meals that reflected their culture and dietary needs. There were opportunities for the children to be independent through serving food and drink, using cutlery, and scraping and putting away plates after their meal. This supported the development of important life skills. Staff sat with the children, chatting to them, and supporting them well with skills, such as using their cutlery. Staff within the two's room should take into account the children's age and stage of development when promoting independence. This would ensure tasks were achievable and right for them.

(Area for improvement 1 reinstated)

We observed nappy changing to be a nurturing and relaxed experience for the children. Staff took time to talk to children about what they were doing and involved them in the process. Staff were respectful in their approach, asking children if they could change their nappy. Staff wore personal protective equipment (PPE) in line with best practice guidance which helped to ensure that children were safe and protected from infection. This supported the health and wellbeing of children and staff.

Children slept in the two's room during our visit as part of their daily routine. The setting was equipped with mats and cosy spaces where lights could be dimmed. Staff took time to sit with children to settle and supervise them which supported the children rest comfortably and safely. We asked that they consider the distance between the mats to reduce risk of infection. Parents told us that their child could rest, sleep or relax when they needed to.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were engaged in play throughout their day. A good range of age-appropriate resources, including loose parts and open-ended resources were on offer, in both indoor and outdoor environments. These promoted children's curiosity and encouraged them to be creative, problem solve, and use their imagination. For example, a group of children were building with the wooden blocks in the construction area. Children were trying to balance wedges on the top of towers and were being supported by a staff member to try different ways. They then went onto rolling the cars down them and were enjoying trying to make them go faster. The children were seen to be engaging well with this experience, which supported their current interests, allowing them to experiment and problem solve together. We highlighted that the use of open questions would have extended the children's thinking, rather than staff giving the children suggestions.

A child-led approach to learning had been implemented. Children were seen to be independent and could choose where and what they played with. We could see lots of shelves and baskets on offer with a variety of resources to choose from. Children accessed these well and knew where to find resources to support their play and learning. Parents told us that their child's development was supported through interesting and fun play experiences. One parent said "They play in the garden, role play and dolls. Also gets to do messy play, painting and sand tray". Another parent said "Outdoor play, games involving their interests like dancing and drawing while also learning numbers and letters. They've also got a lot better at playing with and sharing with friends outside of nursery and I believe being at nursery helped that skill develop".

Opportunities to explore literacy and numeracy were naturally embedded within the setting. There were real resources, such as environmental print, phones, clock and magazines for the children to explore in the house corner. We observed children enjoying stories and singing songs with adults on a one-to-one basis and in a group.

Children were using chalk outdoors to draw around each other, make games like hop scotch and create number lines. These resources and activities supported the development of early literacy and numeracy skills.

The setting used a planning wall to display current planning. All staff were encouraged to contribute. Staff explained their approach to planning and we could see that responsive and intentional planning were taken into account. We discussed the benefits of including the children's interests into the experiences and outcomes to ensure staff were not missing opportunities and to allow for extending learning and deeper thinking. The setting had already recognised the need to track children to support them better and to monitor development. Putting this in place would help identify gaps in learning and enable staff to have a clearer understanding of the children's progress and put support in place if needed. Floor books were being used to capture the child's voice and plan for next steps. These also allowed children to look back and reflect on their experiences which supported them to build on life skills, such as questioning, memory, investigating, and explaining.

The 'Caerus' App was used to document observations and capture individual children's learning. These contained an overview of child development and observations under curricular areas. We found the learning outcomes identified were not always relevant to the observation and for some children observations did not reflect highlights in their personal plans. We suggested monitoring of observations to ensure these are significant to the children and their learning. Children's opportunities were enhanced through connections with the wider community.

Children regularly visited a local care home. This intergenerational connection allowed children and older people to come together to share activities they enjoyed, such as crafts and games. Children also had the opportunity to explore the local area and visit the parks and the shops. This encouraged children to get involved within the community and feel a sense of belonging. Management and staff had highlighted that they would like to develop this further making connections with Northfield Community Flat to support them utilise a grant they were awarded recently through planting with the children.

Areas for improvement

1. To ensure children experience positive and nurturing mealtimes, the manager and staff should ensure they are well planned to meet children's individual needs. This should include but not be limited to:

- a) There are enough staff at mealtimes to effectively supervise and support children.
- b) Staff consider the age, stage, and development of children when encouraging children to self serve.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'If I need help with eating and drinking, this is carried out in a dignified way and my personal preferences are respected' (HSCS 1.34).

How good is our setting?**4 - Good**

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

The environment was well maintained and secure with plenty of natural light and ventilation. Children were observed to move around the setting with confidence and could choose where they played. They had direct access to the toilets and had the opportunity to play indoors or out with an effective free-flow system in place most of the time. Parents told us their children had the opportunity to play outdoors. One parent said "My child is always in the garden exploring the mini beasts, painting or doing the obstacle course and risky play". Another parent said "The doors at nursery are almost never closed, they do so much in the garden but also visit the park and the shops and walks in the community".

Indoors was set up thoughtfully using furniture to create areas which were inviting for the children to explore and to ensure staff could see all children playing. There was variety of resources to support different play experiences. Resources were accessible in baskets and on shelves. Materials, such as hessian and greenery, were used to soften the environment. Children's photos and art work were displayed at their level. This helped create a homely, welcoming feel to the service.

The family room was a good additional space. We saw that the room was well used to support parents and for meetings with visiting professionals. This was an inviting and a comfortable space to meet.

Outdoors was set up to ensure children were given daily opportunities for outdoor learning experiences in all weathers. There was a range of resources to support learning, including open-ended resources such as wooden planks, reels, a digging area, mud kitchen, paths for children to use their balance bikes and a shelter. Children were seen to use this area and the resources well which supported their current interests such as climbing and balancing.

The infection control measures in place helped ensure a safe environment for children. We observed hand washing being carried out by both staff and children at appropriate times. Children were wiping their hands and faces on face cloths following mealtimes, we highlighted the importance of hand washing using running water following mealtimes inline with best practice guidance. Personal protective equipment was worn when required, for example, during personal care, nappy changing, and food preparation. This ensured that children were kept safe and well.

Accidents and incidents were appropriately recorded and shared with parents. Regular reflection and auditing of accidents and incidents were shared with the staff team. This identified and raised awareness of potential risks. Children were supported to be safe through staff having assessed and eliminated potential risks.

Risk assessments were in place for indoor and outdoor environments to support the safety and wellbeing of the children. These documented potential risks and measures in place to support a safe environment. We discussed updating risk assessments to reflect benefits and support risky play, such as climbing, in line with the experiences offered to children.

How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland have a vision which the company aspires to achieve, however the setting had created aims, personal to their service, involving staff, children and parents. This reflected the aspirations of everyone and supported them to feel valued and included.

Children and families views were valued which supported the service's ongoing improvements. They were consulted through questionnaires carried out on survey monkey, news updates and face to face chats about key aspects of the nursery. The setting used 'you said, we did' style displays in the cloakroom area to highlight to parents how their views had influenced change in the setting. Management spoke about additional ideas they planned to implement to gather views and suggestions, such as a parents group. This ensured families were valued partners in ongoing improvements within the nursery. Most parents felt they were involved in a meaningful way to develop the setting. One parent said "I've signed up to be part of the parents and carers group to discuss changes and future plans within the service and awaiting the date for the 1st meeting".

Staff expressed that they felt well supported by management. Staff 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that their wellbeing needs were recognised and supported by leaders. One staff member said "I feel valued as a staff member and feel that my input is considered and valued. I also feel if I had any needs that I would be able to confidently discuss these with my managers and they would do what they could to help me fulfil these needs such as more training or improved communications". Another member of staff said "My leaders are always supportive and provide me with help when needed". This ensured staff felt supported and valued.

Staff observations and monitoring of practice were in place. We saw that this was supporting staff identify strengths and consider what could be improved on to support improvement within the service. This was encouraging staff reflect on their practice to bring about improved outcomes for children and families.

The setting had documented their improvement journey using floor books to support staff. Engaging with recognised audit tools, such as the quality framework, had allowed them to recognise what they were doing well and identify areas for improvement. An improvement plan was used to support improvement and document developments. The setting should now use their success criteria to evaluate their improvements and consider whether there is a need for further development or if the outcome had influenced further improvements. Reflecting on this as team would support staff to be clear on the settings focus for improvement.

The setting was using a quality assurance calendar to support the procedures, audits and monitoring within the nursery. These were evaluated and shared with staff to ensure everyone was clear and knew the outcome and the impact of these. As a result of our findings, for example around medication, we suggested some additional audit checks be undertaken which would ensure that they were more robust and effective.

(Area for improvement 1 reinstated)

Areas for improvement

1. To support positive and improved outcomes for children and families, the provider and manager should ensure effective quality assurance systems are fully embedded into practice. This should include but not be limited to:

- a) Audits of medications administered.
- b) Audits of children's chronologies.
- c) Monitoring of staff practice, including interactions to support children's learning.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

How good is our staff team?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator: 4.3 Staff deployment

Staff were warm and responsive in their approach. They joined in children's play and followed children's interests. All staff knew the individual needs and interests of the children which allowed them to offer individualised support and care.

Children appeared confident, happy, and engaged in their play supported by staff who were observed to be taking a genuine interest and chatting to the children about what they were doing. We observed that positive relationships had been formed between staff and the children who had fun together. There was lots of laughter, encouragement, and celebrating success.

Staff were flexible and moved with children dependant on their interests and needs. Staff communicated well with each other and staffing levels throughout the day supported the wellbeing and safety of children using the service. At busier times, such as lunchtime in the two's room, not all staff were clear about their role, some being task-focused for example cleaning and serving food. This meant they weren't able to spend quality time engaging with the children, supporting their needs. **(See area for improvement 1.1)**

We found the staff team to be motivated and passionate about their roles. Staff were appropriately qualified, some working towards gaining further qualifications and had a good knowledge of child development. They were able to discuss how they had identified areas for development and were supporting children with their social skills, confidence, and speech. One parent told us "My child's confidence is growing and their speech is coming along well since starting". Another parent said "They are a much better eater and also trying a lot more foods. They have come on a lot more with their learning and speech; they also deal a lot better with their emotions".

Staff had the opportunity to take part in training and were enthusiastic about continuing with their professional development. They were reflecting on their practice and were able to discuss the impact training had on outcomes for children.

For example, a staff member talked about recent training on autism and how developing their knowledge and understanding had helped them understand the behaviours and put effective strategies in place to support.

New staff also spoke about benefiting from an induction which contributed to them feeling settled in their new role. The setting used the 'Early Learning and Childcare National Induction Resource' to support inductions, encourage questions and reflection. We saw that during a staff induction, a lot of information had been given in one day. We discussed the importance of checking that when information is shared, it is fully understood. This would support staff to have a better understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and effective ways of working.

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

To support children's health and wellbeing, the provider and manager should ensure children are provided with the individual care they need. This should include but not be limited to:

- a) Ensuring children's up-to-date care and support needs are included within their personal plan and staff use this information to effectively support them.
- b) Ensuring staff are knowledgeable and competent in GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child) and use this information to provide individualised and responsive care relevant to children's needs.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My needs, as agreed in my personal plan, are fully met and my wishes and choices are respected' (HSCS 1.23). This area for improvement was made on 2 June 2023.

This area for improvement was made on 2 June 2023.

Action taken since then

When speaking to staff it was clear that they knew the children well and what they were supporting them with. This allowed experiences, care, and support to be tailored to children's individual needs.

Children's wellbeing and progress was supported through effective personal planning. Personal planning documents were individualised for each child. Support plans were in place for children with additional support needs. This ensured all staff were clear on sensitivities and how these were being supported as well as outlining any triggers and strategies being used. **(This area for improvement has been met)**

Previous area for improvement 2

To ensure children experience positive and nurturing mealtimes, the manager and staff should ensure they are well planned to meet children's individual needs. This should include but not be limited to:

- a) There are enough staff at mealtimes to effectively supervise and support children.
- b) Staff consider the age, stage, and development of children when encouraging children to self serve.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'If I need help with eating and drinking, this is carried out in a dignified way and my personal preferences are respected' (HSCS 1.34).

This area for improvement was made on 2 June 2023.

Action taken since then

Staff in the three to five room encouraged independence, sat with the children, chatting to them, and supporting them well with skills, such as using their cutlery. Staff within the two's room should take into account the children's age and stage of development when promoting independence. This would ensure tasks were achievable and right for them. **(This area for improvement has not been met)**

Previous area for improvement 3

To support children's learning and development, the manager and staff should ensure children experience high quality play and learning relevant to their age and stage of development. In order to do this, the provider should ensure staff are knowledgeable and trained in supporting children's learning and use this to plan meaningful play experiences.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'As a child, I have fun as I develop my skills in understanding, thinking, investigation, and problem solving, including through imaginative play and storytelling' (HSCS 1.30).

This area for improvement was made on 2 June 2023.

Action taken since then

Children were engaged in play throughout their day. A good range of age-appropriate resources, including loose parts and open-ended resources were on offer, in both indoor and outdoor environments. These promoted children's curiosity and encouraged them to be creative, problem solve, and use their imagination. We saw staff interacting well with children during play, modelling and using questions to support this. We highlighted that the use of more open ended questions would extended the children's thinking. **(This area for improvement has been met)**

Previous area for improvement 4

To support positive and improved outcomes for children and families, the provider and manager should ensure effective quality assurance systems are fully embedded into practice. This should include but not be limited to:

- a) Audits of medications administered.
- b) Audits of children's chronologies.
- c) Monitoring of staff practice, including interactions to support children's learning.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

This area for improvement was made on 2 June 2023.

Action taken since then

The setting was using a quality assurance calendar to support the procedures, audits and monitoring within the nursery. These were evaluated and shared with staff to ensure everyone was clear and knew the outcome and the impact of these. As a result of our findings, for example around medication, we suggested some additional audit checks be undertaken which would ensure that they were more robust and effective.

(This area for improvement has not been met)

Previous area for improvement 5

To ensure children are provided with consistent nurturing interactions to support their health, welfare, and development, the provider and manager should ensure staff are effectively deployed to provide high quality outcomes for children.

This should include but not be limited to:

- a) Ensuring children are fully supported at mealtimes by skilled and experienced staff.
- b) Ensuring children are supported by staff skilled in developing their learning.
- c) Ensuring children are supervised when playing outdoors to keep them safe and well.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice, and follow their professional and organisational codes' (HSCS 3.14).

This area for improvement was made on 2 June 2023.

Action taken since then

Children were provided with consistent nurturing interactions to support their health, welfare, and development by skilled and experienced staff throughout the day. This ensured children were kept safe and well. **(This area for improvement was met)**

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	4 - Good
1.3 Play and learning	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	4 - Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	4 - Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good
4.3 Staff deployment	4 - Good

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ਬੇਨਤੀ 'ਤੇ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ।

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Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (Tillydrone) Day Care of Children

Tillydrone Nursery
Gort Road
Aberdeen
AB24 2YS

Telephone: 01224002445

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
1 August 2024

Service provided by:
Flexible Childcare Services Scotland
SCIO

Service provider number:
SP2019013370

Service no:
CS2022000006

About the service

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (Tillydrone) is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 56 children from the age of two, not yet attending primary school at any one time.

The service is accommodated in a purpose built nursery, located in the Tillydrone area of Aberdeen, close to local amenities such as shops and parks and one of the local primary schools. The nursery has an entrance area which is secure and welcoming. Children have access to playrooms with good facilities. Free flow access to an outside garden allows children to choose where they would like to play.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 31 July 2024 between 08:45 and 17:00 and 01 August 2024 between 09:00 and 12:00. Two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate carried out the inspection. To prepare for inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- Observed and spoke with children using the service.
- Spoke with two families using the service.
- Received feedback from seven families from our online questionnaire.
- Received feedback from six staff members from our online questionnaire.
- Spoke with the staff and the management team.
- Observed practice.
- Reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children were happy, confident and settled.
- Children were leaders of their own play and learning and could transport resources to meet their interests.
- Daily access to fresh air and outdoor experiences supported children's health and wellbeing.
- The staff team were motivated and enthusiastic about their roles and were keen to undertake training to develop their practice.
- Staff and management should work together to ensure they have a planning, observing and tracking system in place with supports good experiences and outcomes for children.
- Staff would benefit for training around planning, observations and tracking children's development to support their understanding and give them confidence to ensure there is challenge, breadth and depth to children's learning experiences.

From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How good is our care, play and learning?

4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths, taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality Indicator 1.1 Nurturing Care and Support

Children experienced warm and nurturing care and support from a dedicated nursery team. Staff were caring and kind in their interactions with children and children were seen to engage with staff well, inviting them into their play. As a result, children were engaged, happy and well supported. A parent commented; the staff are so welcoming and I can tell they know my child well. My child talks about certain staff members a lot so I know they have a strong bond which means a lot to me as a parent and I feel confident leaving my child in their care." Another parent said; "They are professional, warm and kind."

Children benefited from being cared by staff who knew them well. They were able to discuss children's individual needs and preferences and adapted their practice to ensure these were considered. Personal plans were in place and reviewed with parents regularly. Some plans contained quality information supporting staff to meet children's needs. Others, however, had information missing and strategies to support staff with individual children could have been clearer. The manager had already recognised this and had plans in place to make improvements. For children that required a care plan for support, these highlighted triggers and strategies to reflect children's specific needs and support needed. This ensured children experienced consistent approaches from all staff, including relief staff members.

Child protection training ensured all staff were clear on their roles and responsibilities surrounding this. Chronologies were being used to capture significant events in the children's lives. These highlighted that staff were aware of potential safeguarding and wellbeing issues and that action had been taken, when appropriate.

Mealtimes had been an improvement focus. We saw that snack time was an unhurried and relaxed social experience which gave children choice and promoted independence. This included choosing when they ate, chopping fruit, serving their own food and pouring drinks. On both days of the inspection, food was nutritious and looked tasty however, on the first day lunchtime was not such a positive experience for children. They weren't able to choose when to come for lunch, there was limited space for children to be independent and the area was busy and got messy. We addressed our concerns with the manager and the lunch time experience improved on day two. Staff were better positioned to support children and to keep the area clean. This led to a more relaxed and calm eating experience. Management should continue to monitor mealtimes to ensure they are consistently a positive experience for children with opportunities to learn and develop important life skills.

The service had systems in place for the administration, monitoring and storage of children's medication. These ensured the safe management and administration of medications. Staff were knowledgeable about children's health and medication needs resulting in children being safe and well.

Quality Indicator 1.3 Play and Learning

Children were provided with opportunities to develop their play and learning. They were actively involved in leading their learning and chose what to play with and where.

They had lots of fun and were fully engaged during our visit. Life skills and independence were promoted. For example, staff encouraged children to help tidy up, and they were keen to sweep the floor using a pan and brush.

Staff allowed children to follow their interests and we saw a group of children get involved in a 'water party' outdoors. Children began by throwing stones into a muddy puddle and then used the water butt to fill ladles of water and throw them into the air. Staff promoted their thinking talking about the ripples and bubbles in the water and encouraged mathematical language by asking questions like 'how high did the water go?' a child replied, 'taller than me.' We did not see a follow on to this experience. Children were clearly interested in water, with a child saying, 'I love getting wet, we're having a water party.' We discussed how this might be extended through providing further experiences for children to explore water, directing them to pipes and gutters for example. This would promote children's curiosity, imagination and problem-solving skills.

Language, literacy and numeracy experiences were good and woven throughout the provision. These included calendars, old phones, scales and books. Staff were encouraging numeracy during play, counting fruit and encouraging number recognition. Early writing was promoted through a range of mark making materials available indoors and outside. Children enjoyed stories and songs spontaneously across the environment, individually and in groups. This supported the children's early language, literacy and numeracy development.

Planning, learning experiences, observations and tracking had been identified by management as an area for development and were documented within the setting's improvement plan. We discussed the importance of planning taking account of planned learning experiences and responsive planning around the children's interests. Floor books had been introduced to record children's experiences and allowed them to revisit their learning. These were relevant and linked to children's current interests such as going to school.

Management had identified that they needed to use the 'Caerus' App better to share planned observations of children's learning and achievements with families. They had already involved parents in information gathering around the App and were monitoring observations. From this they had identified further training was required for staff around observations, next steps and tracking to support staff's understanding and develop their confidence. This would ensure there was challenge, breadth and depth to children's learning experiences and would support families and children to feel like partners in their learning and development.
(Area for improvement one reinstated)

Learning opportunities for children were enhanced through connections with their wider community. Children enjoyed using the library and regular visits to a local care home. This intergenerational connection allowed the older people and children to spend time together to sharing activities they enjoyed, such as games. Children had the opportunity to play at local parks and had recently visited the zoology museum at the University of Aberdeen to explore the animals following their interest in mini beasts. Management had been working with Aberdeen city council to develop the community garden, which would encourage links with the wider community and allow the children to be involved. These opportunities supported children to feel connections to their community.

Areas for improvement

1. To further promote children's learning and development, the provider should ensure that an effective system is in place to support staff in identifying, assessing and recording children's learning and planning for their progression.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I am supported to achieve my potential in education and employment if this is right for me' (HSCS 1.27).

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore, we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

The environment was very well maintained and secure with plenty of natural light and ventilation. Resources such as natural materials on the walls, greenery, lighting and curtains, sofa's, rugs and cushions had been added to soften the atmosphere within room. These all helped create a very welcoming feel to the service. Some children's work and photographs were displayed throughout the setting, giving the children a sense of ownership and belonging. Children were observed to move around the spaces with confidence, while being able to choose where they played. One parent commented; "The setting is also great with plenty indoor and outdoor space, so my child never gets bored." Another parent told us; "I love the open plan and that my child can go play outside in the garden when they want."

The indoor and outdoor environments were developmentally appropriate spaces, offering children stimulating places to play. A very good range of age and stage appropriate resources were available for children to access. Loose parts and open-ended resources supported children to be creative and develop their curiosities. As a result, children were busy, engaged and having fun. One parent told us; "My child loves outdoor play and the nursery always encourage this. They regularly sing and dance which they also love. The nursery do fun activities where they learn about different things, one recent one was with items to see if they would float or sink in a tub of water." Another parent said; "They play in the mud with water, dancing, blowing bubbles, singing, everyday there's different activities."

Children benefited from free flow access to the outdoor space. Outdoors offered children a wide range of resources and opportunities for different types of play. These included a tunnel and slide, mud kitchens, planters of flowers, a digging area, bamboo tunnel and access to loose parts which supported a very good outdoor environment. Parents told us their children always have the opportunity to play outdoors. One parent said; "The nursery has a great garden space where the children can play, climb and jump around. They also have garden toys. The children go out in all weathers which we love and our child has lots of fun jumping in puddles and playing in the rain." Another parent said; "My child loves being outdoors and this setting has a large outdoor space, children have the opportunity to be out as often as they want."

Risk benefit assessments were in place and implemented effectively by staff to ensure that the environment was safe for the children attending. Children were encouraged to consider risks and staff were seen to support their understanding of potential risks within the environment during their play. We heard children refer to the 'purple elephant' helping to keep them safe. During snack while chopping fruit, one child said to another; "Remember the purple elephant is watching to make sure your fingers are safe."

Effective hand washing, cleaning practices and the use of PPE (personal protective equipment) at appropriate times such as nappy changing and food preparation, supported effective infection control practices, meaning, children's health and safety were maintained.

How good is our leadership?**5 - Very Good**

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children; therefore, we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality Indicator 3.1 Quality assurances and improvements are well led

The nursery's aspiration had recently been updated involving staff and families. A display within the setting shared everyone's thoughts in words and supported the nursery's welcoming ethos. This ensured that there was a shared aspiration for the service, capturing what was important to all using the setting and those working there.

Children and families benefited from a service that valued their involvement. Parents commented that they had enjoyed a recent stay and play session and an international Polish day. Parents supported these, bringing in food and resources. Parents told us they benefited from very good handovers regarding their child's day and liked looking at the photos posted on the Facebook page as these generated conversations with their children about their experiences. Regular newsletters were well thought out and considered diversity within the setting. A lending library, rag bags, swap shop and information about the community were available within the cloak room area to support families and we heard these were well used. One parent commented; "We have regular meetings to discuss my child and their needs. The staff are also always happy to discuss anything during drop off or collection." Another parent said; "There is always a member of staff available to discuss my child's care, play and learning. At the end of each day, we are given an update on the things they have done that day."

Feedback was encouraged from parents to inform future improvements using a range of questionnaires and the introduction of 'Friends of Tillydrone' a parent council. Parents told us they were involved in a meaningful way to develop the service. We saw that following a recent questionnaire around accessing the 'Caerus App', the feedback had been varied and management had taken this onboard. To support parents access the App, a help sheet had been created and shared on Facebook. This highlighted to parents how the setting have taken onboard suggestions and acted upon these contributing to positive outcomes for children and families.

Staff expressed that they felt very well supported by their team and management. They told us that they felt listened to and their ideas valued. Management took time to give staff 'shout outs' and awarded 'employee of the month' to ensure they felt valued and recognised for their hard work and commitment. Staff told us that their wellbeing needs and professional goals were recognised and supported by leaders through regular support and supervision which they welcomed. One staff member said; "Managers and seniors are great and welcoming. Always reassuring and always making sure we are all happy and nothing is too much. Staff appraisals take place often and feel happy to discuss anything." Another said; "When I am struggling with workloads I can talk to the managers and they may suggest ways to help or make a plan to help me with my workload. The manager and senior carry out support and supervision every eight weeks which helps with them knowing where I am with my wellbeing in the setting."

Quality assurance processes supported the development of the service, including monitoring and peer observations of staff practice. Staff were using current best practice guidance to evaluate the service, supporting them to identify strengths and areas for improvement to create an improvement plan. The setting recorded and collated this in a floor book where we could see the positive impact self-evaluation and findings from quality assurance processes had on the children's experiences. This was reviewed and evaluated with children, staff and families to support improved outcomes for children.

How good is our staff team?

4 - Good

We made an evaluation of good for this key question, as several important strengths, taken together, clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality Indicator 4.3 Staff Deployment

Deployment and levels of staff were effective in ensuring good quality outcomes for children most of the time. The staff team worked well together and were courteous and respectful to each other. We asked that seniors were mindful of staffing levels at key times, such as during lunch, to supervise, engage, and keep children safe and well. Staff communicated well with each other throughout the day and were clear on their roles and responsibilities. Staff picked up on children's cues and one staff member was able to take time to cuddle and settle a child to sleep when they required it. This helped to ensure a happy, safe and relaxed environment for children.

Children appeared confident, happy and engaged in their play supported by staff who were observed to be warm and nurturing. Staff took a genuine interest in the children, having fun and chatting to them about what they were doing. We observed that positive relationships had been formed between staff, children and parents. Parents were seen to be welcomed into the service at drop off and collection times. This supported opportunities for building positive relationships and communication. All parents strongly agreed or agreed that they had a strong connection with staff caring for their child. One parent said; "The staff are very good at what they do. They are very nurturing and really take time to know my child." Another parent said; "The staff are all very friendly and approachable. I feel comfortable discussing anything with them."

Staff were appropriately qualified, some working towards gaining further qualifications and had a good knowledge of child development. They were able to discuss how they had identified areas for development and were supporting children with their social skills, language, and personal care.

Staff undertook regular training and were very enthusiastic and passionate about their roles and continuing with their professional development. They were reflecting on their practice and were able to discuss the impact training had on outcomes for children. For example, a few staff members discussed the benefits of 'Children's rights' training and how this has supported them as a setting to really think about giving children choice and promoting this in the setting around mealtimes, the environment and clothing. Management had recognised that staff would benefit from training around planning, observations and tracking children's development. This had been identified and was in the setting's improvement plan going forward. This would support staff in their understanding and give them confidence to ensure there is challenge, breadth and depth to children's learning experiences.

The setting had an induction programme in place to support students, relief and new staff. The 'Early Learning and Childcare National Induction Resource' was being used effectively to encourage questions and reflection. Staff told us this supported them to have a better understanding of their roles, responsibilities and effective ways of working.

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

To further promote children's learning and development, the provider should ensure that an effective system is in place to support staff in identifying, assessing and recording children's learning and planning for their progression.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I am supported to achieve my potential in education and employment if this is right for me' (HSCS 1.27).

This area for improvement was made on 10 October 2023.

Action taken since then

Planning, learning experiences, observations and tracking had been identified by management as an area for development. We discussed the importance of planning taking account of planned learning experiences and responsive planning around the children's interests. This still had to be developed.

This area for improvement has not been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To support positive outcomes and experiences for children through continuous improvement, the provider and manager should establish systems for the quality assurance and self-evaluation of the service. They should promote opportunities for effective feedback from stakeholders including families, children and other agencies.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

This area for improvement was made on 10 August 2023.

Action taken since then

Quality assurance processes now supported the development of the service, including improvement planning, self evaluation, taking account of children and families views and staff monitoring. The setting recorded and collated this in a floor book where we could see the positive impact self-evaluation and findings from quality assurance processes had on the children's experiences.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To ensure children receive consistent care the service should make sure deployment and levels of staff are effective, ensuring high quality outcomes for all children.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'My care and support is consistent and stable because people work together well' (HSCS 3.19).

This area for improvement was made on 10 October 2023.

Action taken since then

Deployment and levels of staff were effective in ensuring good quality outcomes for children most of the time. The staff team worked well together and were courteous and respectful to each other. We asked that seniors were mindful of staffing levels at key times, such as during lunch, to supervise, engage, and keep children safe and well.

This area for improvement has been met.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	4 - Good
1.3 Play and learning	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good
4.3 Staff deployment	4 - Good

To find out more

This inspection report is published by the Care Inspectorate. You can download this report and others from our website.

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অনুরোধসাপেক্ষে এই প্রকাশনাটি অন্য ফরম্যাট এবং অন্যান্য ভাষায় পাওয়া যায়।

یہ اشاعت درخواست کرنے پر دیگر شکلوں اور دیگر زبانوں میں فراہم کی جاسکتی ہے۔

ਬੇਨਤੀ 'ਤੇ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ।

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**FLEXIBLE CHILDCARE
SERVICES SCOTLAND**



IMPACT REPORT 2024 - 2025

fcss.org.uk



INTRODUCTION

Who we are, what we do & how it helps



Flexible Childcare Services Scotland is a national charity and social enterprise with numerous childcare settings and services for children and young people across Scotland.

We provide flexible early learning and school age childcare for families with children of all ages.

The flexibility of our model means that parents can book by the hour, pay as they go and use their funded entitlement flexibly as well.

We also provide a range of clubs for children with Additional Support Needs across Aberdeenshire.

Our services are primarily located in areas of high deprivation, areas where traditional childcare providers are reluctant to operate in, but also areas where we can have the greatest impact.

All of our services are designed to remove childcare as a barrier to working, studying or accessing respite.

In this report we will highlight how our services are supporting children and families, other childcare providers, and local and national economies.

OUR VISION, MISSION & VALUES



At Flexible Childcare Services Scotland, our vision is simple; to create a world where every child and family has access to the services they need to thrive.

Our Mission is to empower children, families, and communities to work, rest or learn by creating access to flexible, affordable and responsive childcare, education, children's services and wraparound support.

Developed in consultation with our board, our team and the families we support, our Values are:



People First



Flexible & Accessible



Nurture & Learn



Quality



Integrity

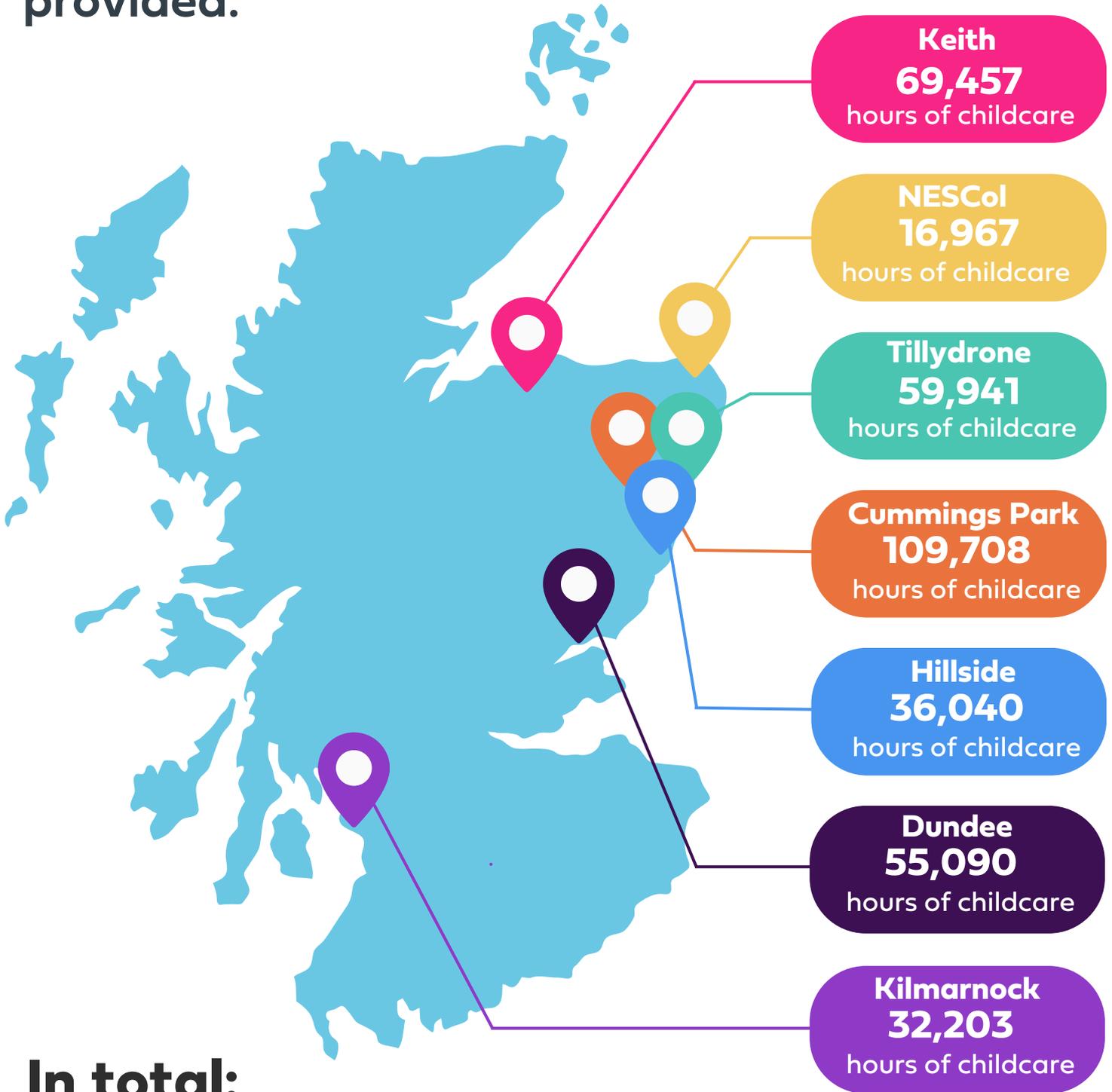


Resilience

- We put People First
- We are Flexible and Accessible
- We will Nurture and Learn together
- We are committed to delivering Quality in all that we do
- We act with Integrity, doing the right thing
- We are solution focussed and Resilient

OUR IMPACT

Over the course of 2024 - 2025 our early learning and school age childcare settings provided:



In total:



WE'VE DONE THE NUMBERS

And we know that flexible childcare saves families money and helps them increase their income



IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT

We asked our parents:
if they were currently employed.



Yes ! I wouldn't be able to do my job without FCSS

Yes they have helped me stay in my job due to the flexibility

Yes I couldn't have went back to work full time otherwise

Yes, I feel as though I'm working for a purpose now rather than just to pay nursery fees

Yes because i can work more than i would've been able to before having my daughter in NESCol. Its very affordable for my family

Yes, I work 12.5hr shifts so the flexibility allows early drop off, flexible days

Yes I would have had to drop either my studies or my work to continue caring for our child without FCSS.

I am just returning to work after maternity leave and having flexible childcare means I can change the days I require childcare to suit my work. It also means I don't need to find someone to collect my child at 3pm like a traditional nursery setting.

Amazing I managed to start working part time because of FCSS!

It has allowed myself and husband to stay in full time employment

It has helped me give my best at my job as I'm not rushing as I can drop off at 7:30

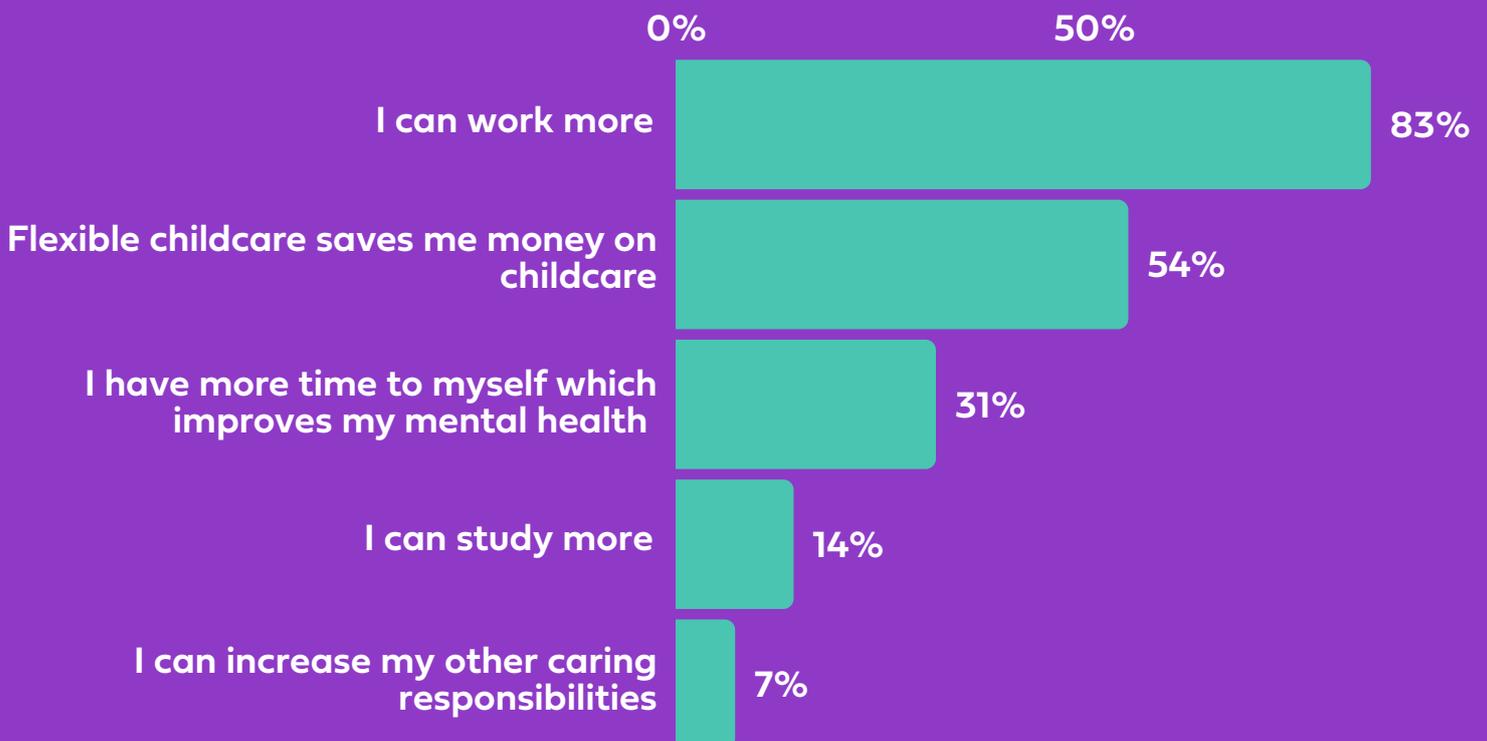
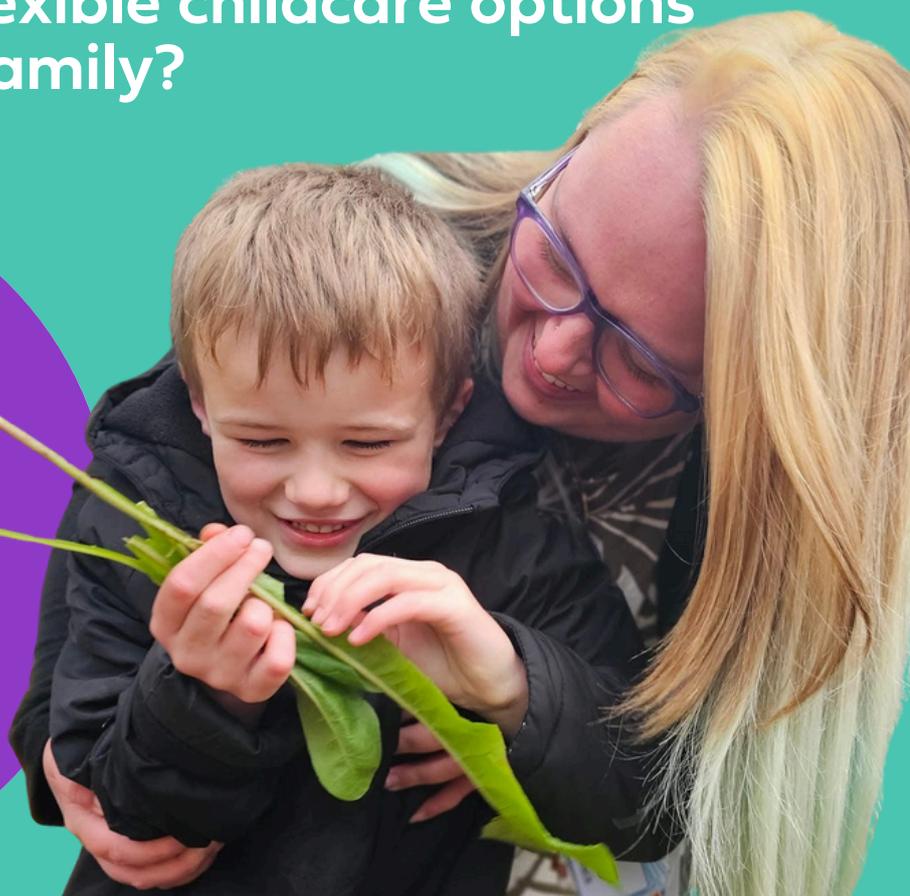
I can pick up extra shifts

Yes, allowed me to go to college and then have more available hours when applying for jobs

Yes able to get a promotion

IMPACT ON FAMILIES

We asked our parents:
How does having flexible childcare options help you and your family?



PARENTS TOLD US

how flexible childcare helped them:

Without Flexible childcare I wouldn't be able to go back to work

My partner works offshore so I have no support when he's away and work full time. I wouldn't be able to do this without FCSS

Massively as this means I can work all day & into the evening & my husband can pick my little boy up at dinner time.

As two full time working parents it allows us to continue working to provide for our family and have the knowledge that our children are being well cared for at the out of school club.

Before we found flexible childcare we were struggling to pay typical nursery fees. Paying only for the hours we need has really improved our financial situation and overall wellbeing.

I work shifts and set childcare doesn't work for me so the flexibility saves money so we don't pay for nursery when we aren't needing it

I can collect her at any time to help save money which is allowed by flexible. Also, having her in NESCol i can work more days making sure i can make more money to spend on her childhood and memories.

I wouldn't have been able to go back to work as quickly without these services they have given me the opportunity to take care of my family financially and also have the odd couple of hours to my self which improves my mental health

Navigating autism, adhd, working and studying part-time - all on a low income - has been extraordinarily difficult with a toddler in the mix. My mental health was really tanking before we found the service and could buy a few hours here and there throughout the week where I could breath a bit easier.

It has made a huge difference to us. We have been struggling financially, and having the flexible support means that my son is getting looked after so that I am able to work. Since I work from 4-7pm each weekday, the flexible childcare means we can just have our son there when we need it rather than having to pay for full days / half days like at other nurseries which would not be financially viable for us.

I work full time and I'm doing a masters degree. When I'm off work over holidays, I can still use the service the odd day to make sure my child is socialising and staying in a routine whilst having a break for myself. It also saves me a significant amount of money each year whilst not making me feel guilty that I need to put him in when I'm off simply because I'm paying for it already.



IMPACT ON INCOME



We estimate that in 2021/22 families who used our flexible ELC services increased their income by more than **£800k** / year.

In 2022/23 this had increased by 24% equating to more than **£1m** / year and in 2023/24 a further increase of 89% resulting in **£1.92m** each year.

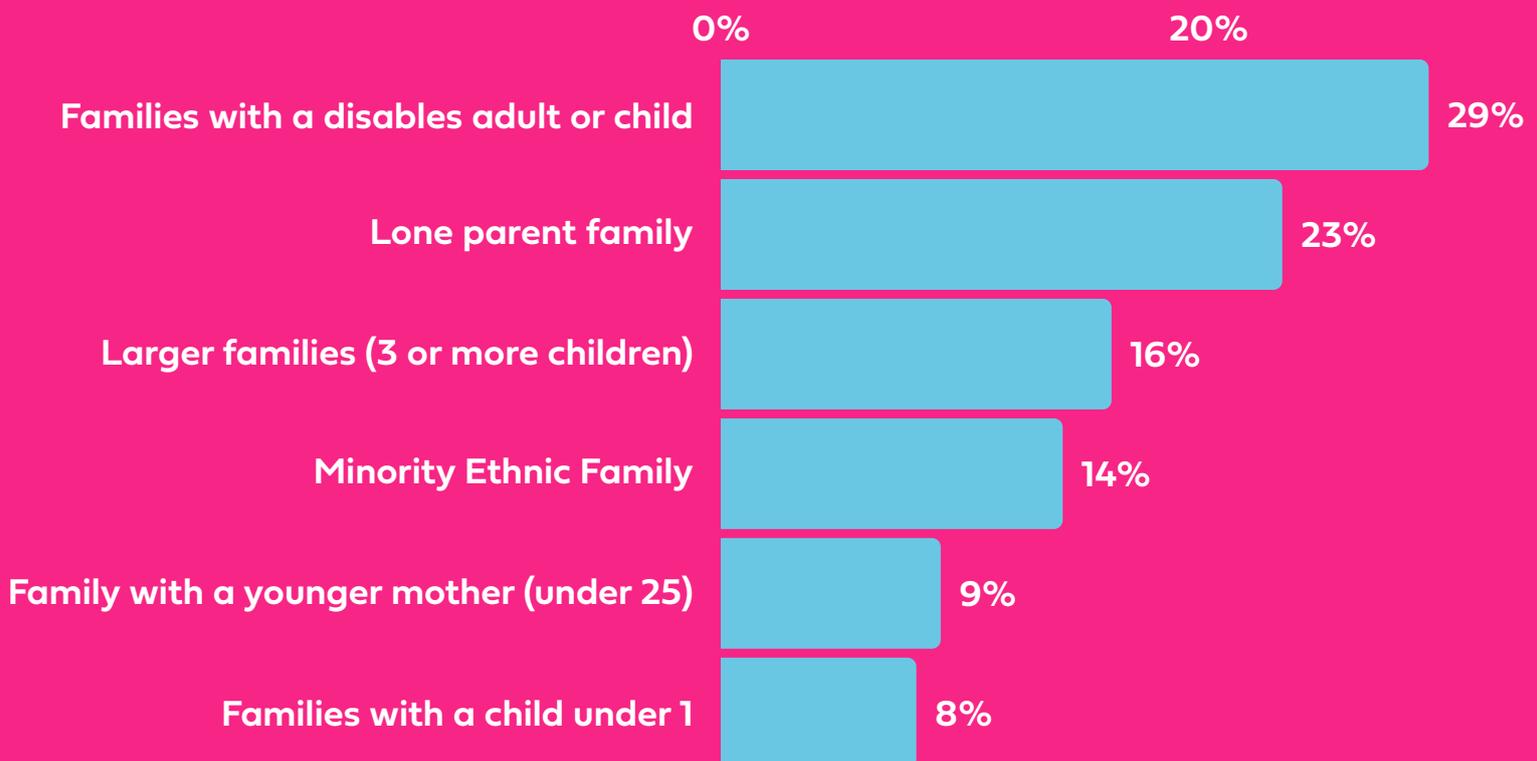
In 2024/25 this figure increased by a further 11% meaning that our flexible childcare model has helped families to increase their income by more than **£2.13m**.



IMPACT ON PRIORITY GROUPS

We asked our parents:
if they were one of the Scottish Government's
6 priority family types who are at higher risk
of child poverty.

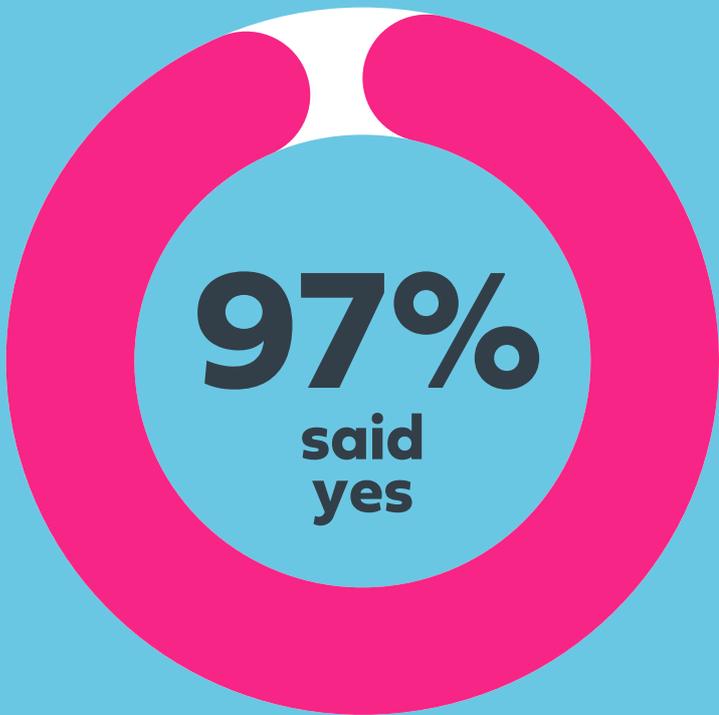
63%
said
they were



IMPACT ON QUALITY

We asked our parents:

Do you feel that flexible childcare gives you the quality of care that you want for your child(ren)?



My son is looked after very well, he is always happy going to nursery and I can tell the really do care about him and he loves his teachers

Allows familiar setting where they can make friends but also works round shifts

He's learned so much and his social skills are miles ahead of his milestones

There's a big range of different learning opportunities

Most staff are friendly and always put my little brother needs first

My daughter loves nursery and the staff that look after her. Always happy to come

They have been intentional in tailoring their care to the child's specific needs and interests, centring them as an autonomous individual.

The staff are amazing. They have wonderful bonds with the children and show that they truly care

My child is very happy and always comes home excited to say what they got up to today

The care our girl receives is great her needs are always met and she is happy with the ladies caring for her

The nursery is child led which is amazing for this age as children's attention spans are so short and it means our children have their independence

In the ever evolving world, flexibility is key as parents are more often than not trying to juggle both work and appointments daily

It gives a better quality of life - we're not rigid in what we do

It's a good nursery with great staff who care about the children there

IMPACT FOR OTHERS

We asked our parents:
Would you encourage other childcare providers to offer flexible booking options?

97%
said
yes



Who doesn't like flexibility in their day to day lives?

To allow people more options fitting their circumstances and proximity to home/work

It works perfectly for working parents

Most people don't work 9-3 so require wrap around care

It helps greatly when work schedules are different to nursery hours

The traditional route for childcare is not compatible with modern working and living. The traditional route of non flexible childcare costs the service users more money which is not cost effective in a cost of living crisis

I love the values flexible have and the reasons behind what they do

Definitely. It is great! Allows working parents to work or study.

I have no idea of the systemic constraints or why they don't but I can't see scenarios where it would not be better for our communities broadly to offer parents additional support as it is needed.

It's helped me not need to spend extra when it's not needed

It's really helpful for lots of different shift patterns and takes pressure of parents when needing to work but not the same patterns every week. The care and service provided is of a good standard and have recommended to some of my friends already

Not everyone works the same hours every day so the option to book as you go is so very helpful

It fits in so much better with work

OUR IMPACT WITH ASN

As well as our early learning & school age childcare services we also provide specialist support services for children and young people with ASN across Aberdeenshire. Over the course of 2024 - 2025 we have provided:



29,761

hours of
childcare



196

children
supported



191

families we
work with

I can spend time doing activities with my other two children that is difficult to do while caring for my daughter with special needs

Allows me to work longer on certain days and provide different activities for my toddler at weekends

Fantastic service - staff are great with my child and very knowledgeable about him. Provide lots of fun activities to do

Gives my son a chance to socialise & me to work or have a rest

I would recommend services. All staff are approachable and caring who look after my son

Opportunity to spend 1 on 1 time with other child. Enables my child with ASN to socialise with other children, especially important in holidays when they would otherwise only be with me.

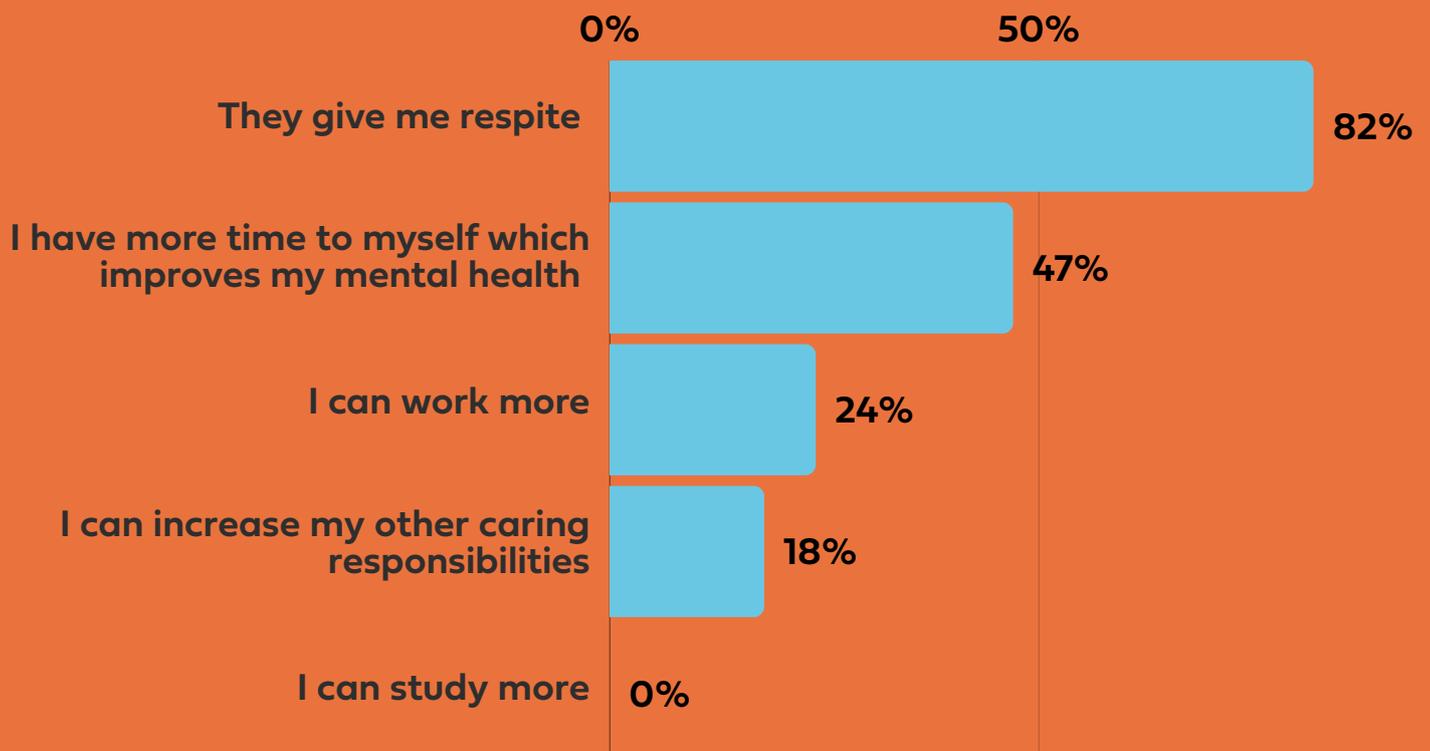
My daughter needs this club as much as i need it for her. There aren't much clubs at all that are suitable for her to attend.

Gives me time to spend with my eldest daughter

Gives me more time to spend with my other child

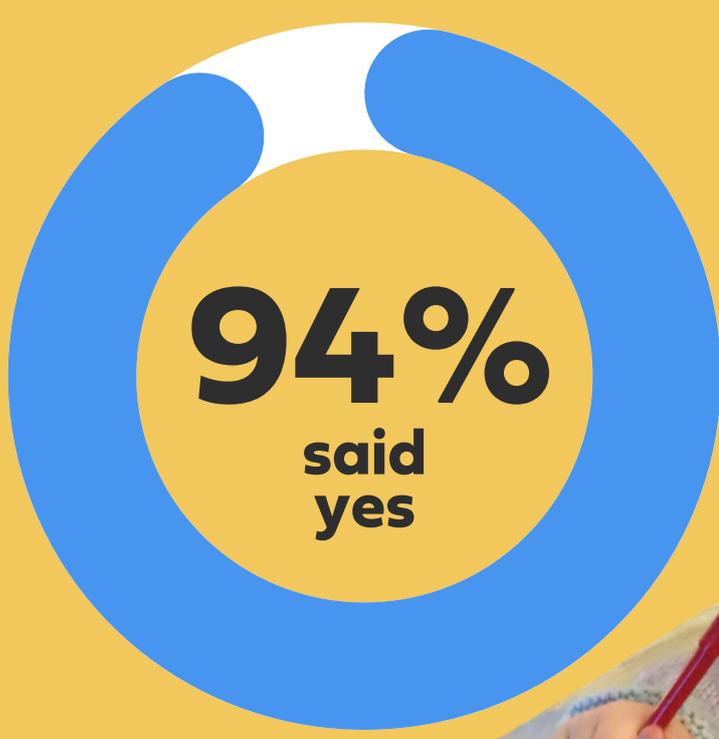
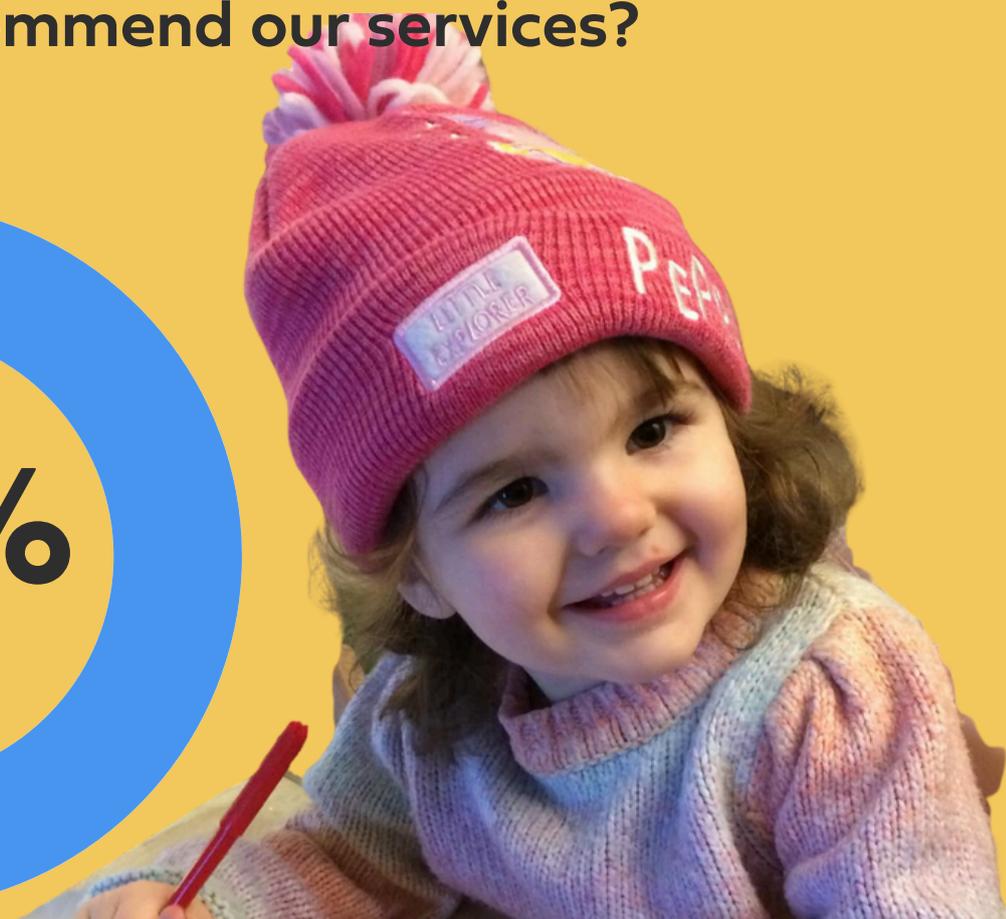
IMPACT ON FAMILIES

We asked parents who use our ASN Groups:
How do our services help you and your family?



RECOMMENDATIONS

We asked our parents:
Would you recommend our services?



94%
said
yes

Yes i always recommend flexible to anyone as they are great for working parents

Yes the Cummings park setting had really helped my child grow and learn! They are all fantastic!

I can't fault the service provided. The team care for our children highly and provide an excellent service. My child adores his key worker and talks about her consistently, even after only been at the group for a few hours weekly.

Absolutely. I'm very impressed by the team, their care for the children and blown away at how affordable it is compared to other options. It has been a real life saver.

I would really highly recommend your services! There is no other nursery around in our area. It's been a life saver, I'm glad I heard about it, it is very sad it is closing, devastating for all the families who's little ones still need proper nursery. As other nurseries only offer 4h a day that is not enough for working or studying parents.

We highly recommend FCSS! Fraser has been there over 2 years now and we'll continue to use them when he's not in at the big nursery. His language and speech skills are ahead of others his age as well as his numeracy and counting. Social skills are hugely important to a developing child and we think Fraser has advanced leaps and bounds just by attending and participating at FCSS!

Yes. My child loves breakfast, after school and holiday clubs. Mixing with children of all ages amongst other things has improved his confidence greatly

Yes I would highly recommend FCCS Cummings park. The staff are amazing with the children and always go above and beyond for them and the management are always helpful and therefore providing any information needed

I would! My child loves the nursery and the range of activities it provides make me feel that he spends good quality time and not just basic care.

PARENTS TOLD US

why they would recommend our services

Absolutely. I'm very impressed by the team, their care for the children and blown away at how affordable it is compared to other options. It has been a real life saver.

Yes absolutely! Great nursery with great staff and love the idea of it being flexible! Doing shift work, this works best for our family as we can choose times/dates suitable.

Absolutely would recommend your service. We were able to choose days and times that suited us and our child. Our child has flourished immensely attending your service and I have already recommended to others looking for similar childcare options

Yes definitely it's a great service and my children are thriving here especially my son who was shy before but now has made friends and talking more there

Would absolutely recommend the team at NESCol. All the ladies have helped my son immensely in his 3 years of attending this setting. So sad to see the funding for their setting being pulled, they absolutely go above and beyond to make sure our children are cared for.

Definitely I would recommend your services to other partners. My daughter loves your nursery. I love the flexibility and the fact that I pay only for the hours I booked

I highly rate FCSS Keith to many parents due to their respectfulness to the children and the kindness they show. My child has come on amazingly being there, if there's ever an issue they deal with it accordingly and gently with my child. My child adores the girls there.

Would definitely recommend! My daughter has thrived & came right out her shell into her own person since starting. Helped her speech come along also.

I would recommend to other parents. The staff at Keith are so good with my son. He's enjoys it and I get time to myself.

Yes , FCSS Cumming Park nursery has funded places which makes it possible for my child to attend nursery as she is 2 and the school do not accept 2 year olds at their nursery , this gives me vital time to myself as a single mother of 3 children with no support it's vital and it means my child gets to learn skills and play with other children

Yes I would recommend the services to everyone. When we found flexible childcare we were overwhelmed trying to pay typical nursery fees during a cost of living crisis just after I had been on statutory maternity pay for 9 months. It really has made such a difference for us.

Absolutely would recommend. Good nursery where (teachers) putting lot of work and energy in children's, I feel quite save leaving my child in nursery- as they have interesting things what they teach to children's, and my child loves nursery.



WRAPAROUND SUPPORT

Our services go beyond childcare. We also support families with food, clothing and external professional support

Food Larder

In Fintry Mains, thanks to our partnership with FairShare, we distributed

219 trays of food and drinks!

This included fresh fruit and vegetables, cupboard staples such as flour, pasta and rice and even luxury items like marmalade! YUM!



Getting extra vegetables and my child chooses the vegetables

We use the food larder. It has helped my son to expand the range of foods that he eats and try things he wouldn't normally choose and we wouldn't normally buy.

Health Visitor

Thanks to a new partnership, our Cummings Park Nursery, now hosts a health visitor on site at their early learning and childcare setting in the Northfield area of Aberdeen ensuring that families have access to the advice and support they need, when they need it.

Having access to our health visitor at nursery has helped massively with any questions

Hadn't had a health care visit since child was 6 weeks so was great to get one when enrolled

It's helped me a lot with health visitor giving me support and guidance.

Spoke with health visitor team regarding toilet training and received great advice

It's great having the Health Visitor around the nursery as she then gets to see the children in the setting and observes to see if they need anymore additional help and she's great at getting to it straight away if they do need the extra support. The food larder and clothes exchange is a brilliant idea too for helping everyone who may need the help! Such a great idea!

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Although our purpose is social, we are very conscious of our environmental impact



'Rag Bag' Recycling

We are proud members of the 'Rag Bag' recycling scheme. The scheme increases awareness about textile recycling and by increasing recycling rates we can help the environment by ensuring less material goes to landfill.

4 of our ELC settings have collection banks within their buildings and over the course of 2024/25 we collected

995kgs of textiles and clothing

which otherwise would have been sent to landfill.



Clothes redistribution

Each year we run numerous clothes and costume swap initiatives where parents can trade or donate seasonal clothes and costumes to alleviate the financial strain on families and ensure that all children can take part in the seasonal festivities.

In October 2024, Jackie Dunbar MSP raised a motion in Scottish Parliament to celebrate the initiative. [Read more](#)



Better than new

Within our settings we are very conscious about the resources we buy and how they will be used by the children we support.

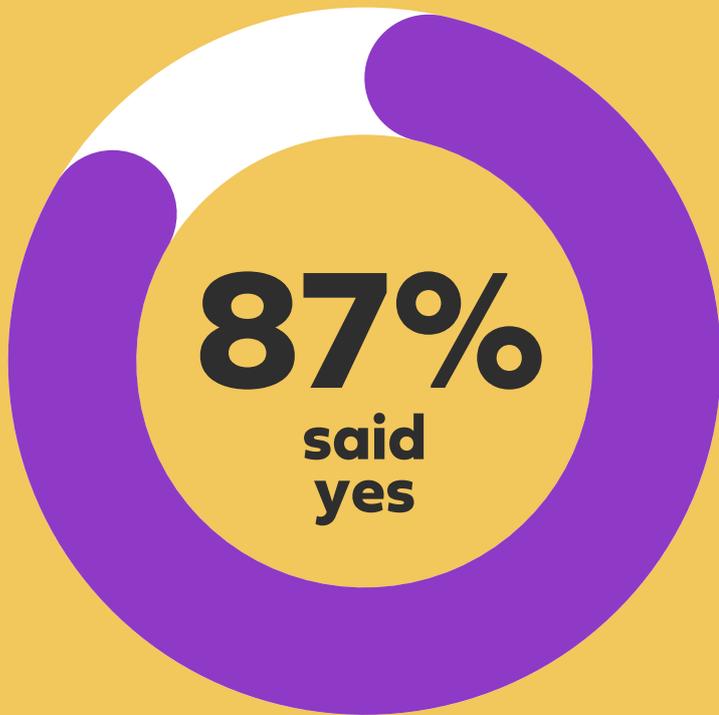
In recent years we have adopted an approach developed by our friends at the [Curiosity Approach](#) – using calm and natural play spaces and loose parts to create a rich learning environment where children harness their imagination to create their own learning experiences.

To achieve this, we are reusing, repairing and reimagining existing materials, giving them a new lease of life.

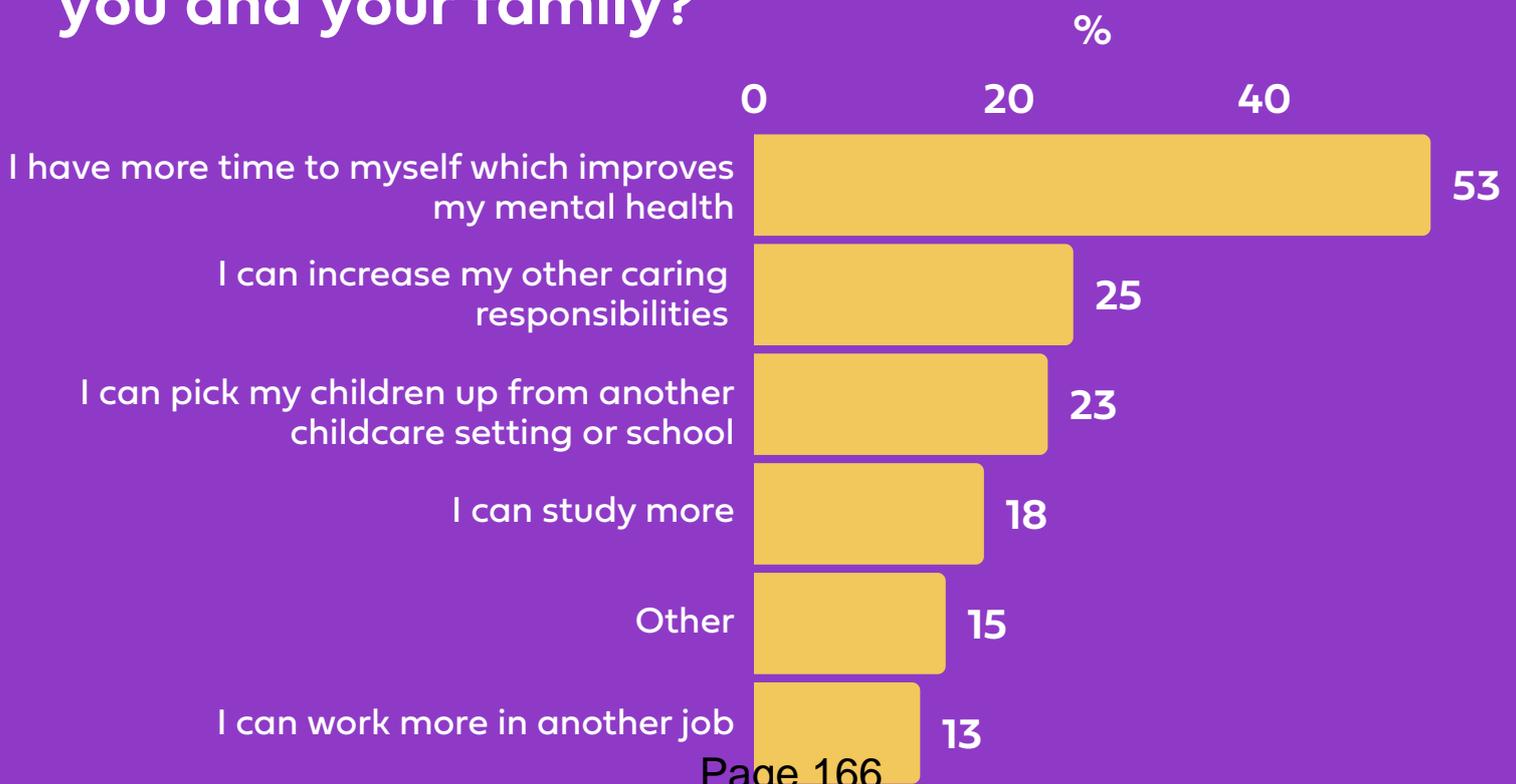
IMPACT ON OUR TEAM

We asked our team:

Do you have a flexible working pattern?



We asked our team:
How does a flexible working pattern help
you and your family?



OUR TEAM TOLD US

their favourite thing about working at FCSS

The children - working in the ASN groups is such a privilege and watching the children develop and become more confident is a honour

Giving the children opportunities to develop and watching them do it

The children seeing them grow and thrive and being happy and enjoying themselves

Working with children with ASN its been my dream career since i was a teenager

My favourite thing is coming in and being greeted by all the children

The children, environment and management

The bonds with the children and parents

The children and working with them on a day to day basis

The children by far. The helpful and supportive staff team also

I love seeing the children thrive

I love how welcoming all the staff were when i first started, i haven't looked back since i started nearly 3 years ago!

My team and how we provide a great level of care for our children and families

Having a good manger who leads and inspires me to work harder and give my all and is supportive to us as members of her team

The amazing team and children we support. I also appreciate the flexible working schedule

Knowing that what I do, genuinely helps my colleagues and the organisation as a whole

All being one big family and supporting the families to our best potential

My favourite thing about working in the Cummings park setting in particular is how supportive the staff and management team are I would be able to do it without them x

How understanding and flexible management are for being there for my own child as well as others

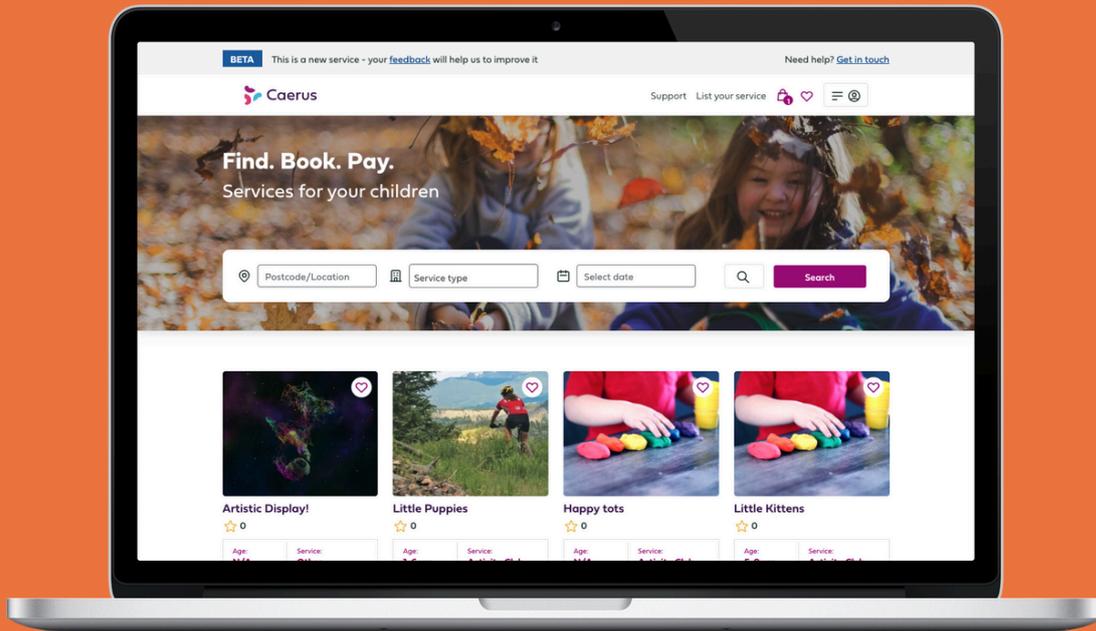
The values and what we are aiming to do

If has improved my mental health I began to think childcare wasn't for me anymore but since joining FCSS I have been able to work in a setting that supports each other

Getting to create a nurturing environment for the children alongside a great bunch of colleagues

Flexibility and always enjoy the company of the children





Caerus is a trading subsidiary to FCSS and gives early learning and school age childcare providers and children’s activity and club providers a robust childcare management solution that will help them to increase bookings and drive efficiencies in their organisation.

The software gives parents a secure platform to find book and pay for the childcare and activities they need.

It also provides valuable data to local and national policy makers helping them make changes to local and national supply.

Parents told us:

I think it’s a great thing to have because I often forget dates from the newsletter and maybe forget to check the posters in the room...so its great to go in and check what’s on to sign up to

Overall the process was not difficult at all. It was signposted well and I received the authentication email almost immediately

I would certainly use this to book any activities for my child

In March 2024, we began a collaboration with the Tech Army, a Scottish charity that mobilises skilled volunteers from the tech community to drive positive impact.

Our initial project focused on enhancing our system and improving the user experience.

We are now successfully concluding our first project together and are preparing to enter an exciting new phase of development in partnership with the Tech Army.

WITH THANKS

The impacts of our services are only possible due to our fantastic team who have once again demonstrated incredible dedication over the last year - thank you!

Also to our funders: Catalyst for Impact, the Robertson Trust, Changing Ideas Fund, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund - Aberdeen City Council, Centre for Social Justice, The Northwood Foundation, Dundee Festive Fund, Murdoch Forrest, Hubub Foundation, The Rank Foundation, STV Appeal, Tesco Stronger Starts and many others who know the value of our work.

We would also like to thank Local Authorities across Scotland who support our work; Dundee City Council, East Ayrshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and Moray Council.

To our Board of Trustees and other volunteers, thank you for your guidance, your commitment and the time that you all provide to ensure the success of our organisation.

Finally to the children & families we support each day, thank you for your trust, we will continue to work hard so that it remains.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

This report clearly demonstrates the positive outcomes delivered for children and families using FCSS services. We have a proven, and fully costed model. We know it works and know there is need for more of it.

We are delivering change for good, creating flourishing families, in thriving communities, right here, right now. With your help we can do more!

Find out more in our 5 Year Strategic Plan and Blueprint for Scale documents.

Strategic Plan

Find out how we plan to increase our impact to ensure that more families are able to access flexible childcare and reach better outcomes:

[Download Now](#)

Blueprint for Scale

We've developed a Blueprint for Scale and are seeking partnerships with local authorities and other relevant bodies to allow us to scale our model:

[Download Now](#)

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland,
Fintry Road,
Dundee,
DD4 9EZ.

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland is a registered charity in Scotland.
Scottish Charity Number: SC049318



ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	17 February 2026
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Action to Reduce Incidents in Schools
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/26/013
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
REPORT AUTHOR	Shona Milne
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.2,1.1.3,1.1.5

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report outlines the approach taken to managing incidents with offensive weapons in schools and provides an analysis of both Council and Police Scotland data. (as instructed by the Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee in August 2025).
- 1.2 The report then updates Members on learning from generic incident data held and provides an overview of how the education service is working with partners to reduce the number of incidents in schools.
- 1.3 Finally, the report shares learning from changes made at school level regarding mobile phone use. (as per the instruction from Committee in November 2025).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 2.1 Note the refreshed Anti-Weapon / Knife Crime guidance and acknowledge the work done by schools, central officers and partners results in robust multiagency responses to incidents;
- 2.2 Note that there are strong systems in place which are informing effective preventative strategies;
- 2.3 Note that the data shows incidents are clearly linked to developmental delays and wellbeing needs;
- 2.4 Note that the number of incidents is in line with comparable local authorities; and
- 2.5 Instruct the Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning to consider the learning from this report when updating school Lockdown Guidance.

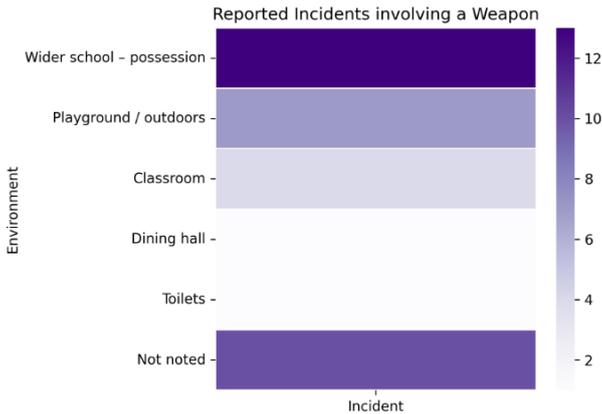
3.1 CURRENT SITUATION – ANTI- WEAPON GUIDANCE

- 3.1 The Council's Anti-Weapon Policy, which incorporated the recommendations of the independent Review carried out by Andrew Lowe, was first approved for educational establishments in 2017 by the Education Operational Delivery Committee. Guidance is provided to staff on how they should react, who they should involve, who needs to be informed, what they should record and the follow-up actions which are necessary in the event of a weapon being found or used in an incident.
- 3.2 The focus of the guidance is on prevention, and the service mitigates the risk of weapons being taken into / used in schools by working with parents, pupils and staff to educate and build a culture for young people, which signals the unacceptability of carrying weapons.
- 3.3 Schools are provided with an Anti-Weapon School Pack, which contains educational and promotional materials for use in individual settings. All schools are expected to comply with and implement the guidance, key features of which are:
- Anti-Weapon training is provided regularly for all staff e.g. through in-service day training, support from partner agencies e.g. Police Scotland and signposting to sources of support such as *No Knives, Better Lives*.
 - A table-top exercise is provided for schools to test their weapons incident procedures.
 - Anti-Weapon resources are provided to be displayed throughout schools.
 - Pupil training delivered jointly by school staff and Police Scotland is provided at the P7, S1 and S5 stages.
 - School Pupil Councils discuss and give feedback on Anti-Weapon strategy / resources.
 - Copies of the Anti-Weapons guidance and guidance leaflets are distributed to parents/carers.
 - Pupils and Parents are issued with Anti-Weapon Agreements to read, sign and return.
 - SEEMIS is updated to record that Anti-Weapon Agreements have been returned. No – returns are followed up by school staff.
 - Weapons incidents are recorded in SEEMIS Pastoral Notes and, in a database, managed by the central education team.
 - Quality Improvement Managers, the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning and Corporate Health & Safety are notified of all weapons incidents.
- 3.4 Confirmation of the return of signed Anti-Weapon Agreements is recorded for each pupil in SEEMIS. This marks the completion of a process which begins with Anti-Weapon guidance training and information sessions for pupils. In these sessions, pupils are given the Anti-Weapon Agreement with guidance leaflets for reading and discussion with parents and both are expected to sign the Agreement and return it to the school.
- 3.5 Management assurance over schools' compliance with the Anti-Weapon guidance is provided through checks of SEEMiS records undertaken on an annual basis.

- 3.6 Where a weapons incident occurs, detail of this is recorded in the relevant pupils' pastoral notes in SEEMIS and in the Corporate Health and Safety system.
- 3.7 In the event of a weapons incident in a school or setting, a report is submitted to the central education team detailing the incident, background, age and gender of pupil, information surrounding the incident, involvement of Police Scotland, date for Multi Agency Meeting, and confirming that all reasonable steps are being taken to mitigate any further incidents. The Quality Improvement Manager, Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning and Media teams are also updated on receipt of a report.
- 3.8 The effectiveness of the guidance is kept under routine review, with clarifying changes made under delegation and in agreement with Police Scotland. The most recent review was conducted in May 2025 and involved central officers, Headteachers and Police Scotland. The review determined that the guidance continued to provide a robust response to weapon incidents and that the clearly articulated procedure is consistently applied. The only update required was a change to contact details for our mental health provider and additional resource sign posting. The current version of the guidance is available in Appendix A.

3.9 Reporting and Monitoring Offensive Weapons

Complete and consistent management information is vital to ensure that school security strategy keeps pace with changing circumstances and emerging security threats. Having a clear categoric overview of the location, nature, and level of threat posed by security incidents can highlight the significance of contributing and mitigating factors. It can expose trends which need to be addressed and help identify where additional controls could strengthen school and pupil security further and inform school procedures, such as Lockdown arrangements. The heatmap below provides insight into the location of incidents.



- 3.10 As can be seen in the visual above, incidents tend to occur away from the classroom and in communal areas such as corridors and general-purpose rooms. This insight will form part of the evidence base for a review of school lock down arrangements now that all schools have completed scheduled testing of arrangements. Schools will also be reminded of the importance of recording the location of incidents accurately to ensure that learning from the data reported is maximised.

3.11 All pupil-related security incidents are recorded in pupils’ pastoral notes in SEEMIS and in the Council’s Health and Safety records via the Core HR system. The Service (through schools) informs the police of all weapon incidents and in addition to the corporate recording described above also hold information in a spreadsheet to enable ongoing review of the data. The spreadsheet is also used to record information received from the police of pupil-related weapon incidents which have occurred out with school hours. Holding full information about incidents across a community helps the Service fully consider all information available as they undertake periodic reviews of the guidance.

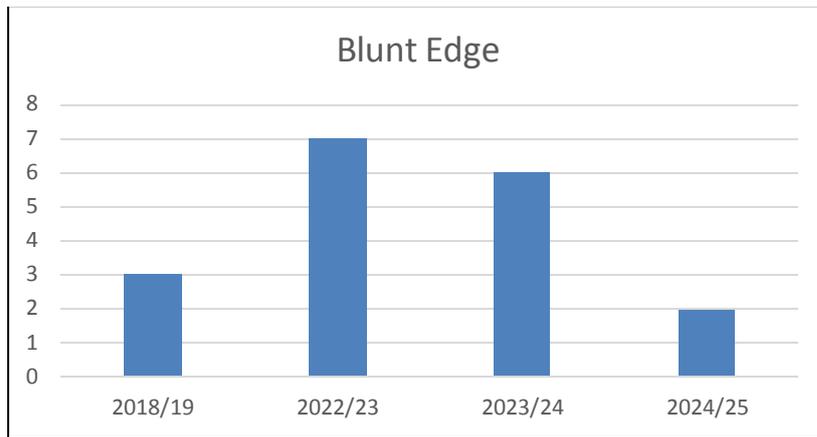
3.12 The Education Service ensures that it can demonstrate that the ongoing requirements of the Anti-Weapons guidance are being met by each school by checking SEEMiS annually in October to ensure that all Anti-Weapon Agreements have been signed and returned to confirm compliance with the Anti-Weapon guidance.

3.13 **Aberdeen City Council Data Reporting (Weapons)**

Aberdeen City Council Education Service data shows that the number of weapons incidents, whether these be sharp or blunt over the last three academic sessions, is relatively stable. All incidents are responded in line with guidance which includes reporting to Police Scotland and holding a Multi-Agency Meeting. All of the incidents triggered the establishment of a package of support for the young person. Scrutiny of pastoral notes evidence that the reported incidents provided an indication that the wellbeing of the child was compromised.



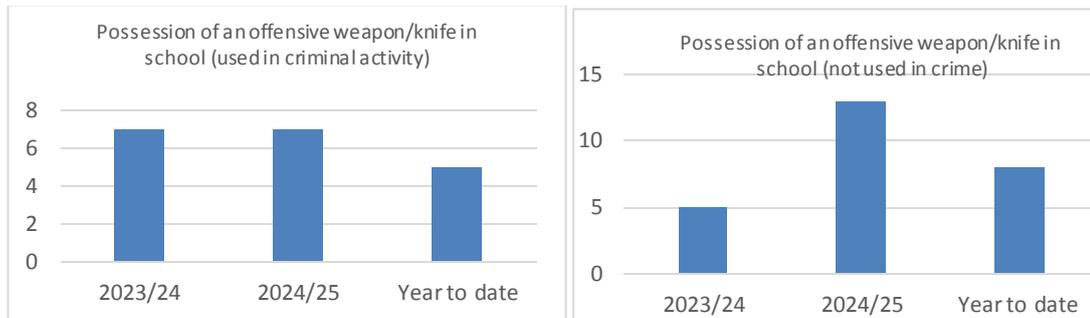
3.14 Some of the recorded weapon incidents are minor with the information shared showing little intention or planning behind actions. These include incidents such as a child having the blade from a pencil sharpener, butter knives from the canteen, scissors from the classroom craft area etc. Almost all incidents reported involving a weapon in our schools involve pupil dysregulation and, in some cases, a stated purpose of self-harm.



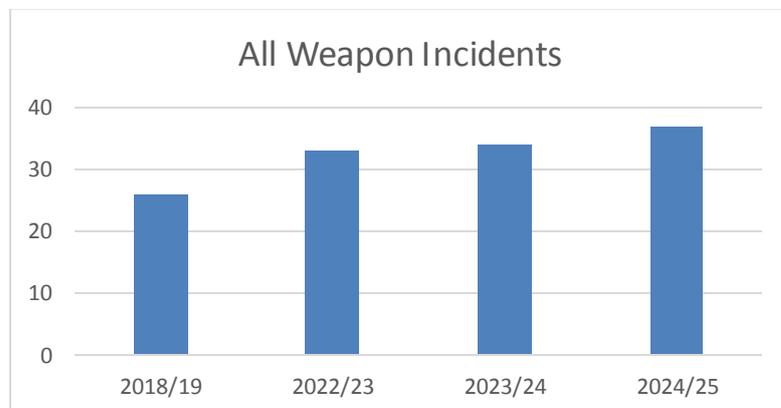
3.15 There is clear evidence that the guidance is helping prevent an escalation of knife incidents, despite rises being reported nationally, and helping to reduce the number of minor incidents through increased awareness of the risks.

3.16 Police Scotland Data Reporting

Data held by Police Scotland is for children who can be held criminally responsible, those aged 12 – 17.



3.17 Schools report all incidents to Police Scotland and these are the incidents which are allocated a police incident number. The number of incidents of a weapon used in criminal activity remained consistent between 2023/24 and 2024/25, however the number of incidents of young people in possession of an offensive weapon (but not one used in crime) with the offensive implement most likely to be sharp scissors, kitchen knives, butter knives or wooden knives used for craft activities, has increased.



3.18 When the increase in school roll is taken into account, we can conclude the number of weapon incidents has remained fairly consistent. Offensive

weapons in a school can take many forms. Service data shows the number of incidents involving an offensive weapon has increased, however, when this is considered alongside the Police Scotland Data there is no increase in criminal activity.

3.19 Looking holistically across both data sets, we can conclude that there is a need to continue to educate children and young people about the risks and continue to implement the guidance.

3.20 Reduction Strategies

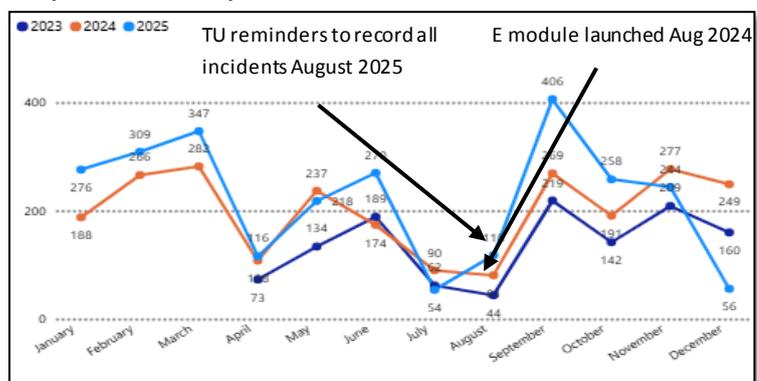
Both primary and secondary schools in the city are currently using a range of strategies to reduce the number of weapons incidents within schools and mitigate against the risk of incidents. These include but are not limited to: staff on duty rotas over the school day; a programme of special assemblies focussing on weapons; training for staff and pupil from external agencies such as Police Scotland; having positive relationships policies and participation in national programmes such as No Knives, Better Lives, Equally Safe at School and Mentors in Violence Prevention.

3.21 It is important that we continue to review our arrangements with Police Scotland, monitor emerging data, and reflect on trends to ensure they inform and strengthen our school security measures

3.22 Wider analysis of all incidents in schools

The current system for recording all incidents in schools has been in place since April 2023. It should be noted that the incidents being reported cover a range of scenarios including those that impact on the wellbeing of pupils (such as slips in the playground, medical situations, disagreements between pupils etc.), situations that risk business as usual delivery (flooding, near misses around security, misuse of property/contact with machinery etc.) and those that might impact on the wider school community/others such as dysregulated behaviours and weapons incidents.

3.23 Over 2024 there was a total of 156 incidents reported in ELC and 2256 reported by our schools. In 2025 there were 159 incidents reported in ELC and 2514 reported by our schools. Members should be aware that the school roll has increased by 1200 children since 2024, and this will account for a proportion of the rise. With around 30,000 children in our education system, this equates to one report in a year for every 11 children.

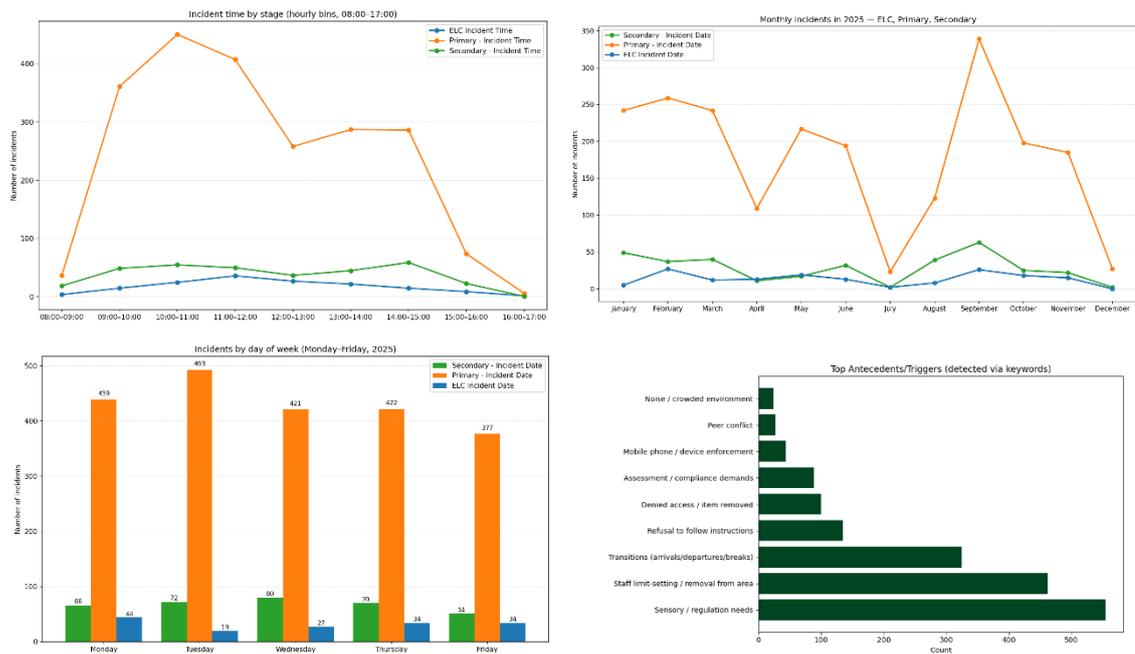


Encouragingly, the data identifies spikes in reported incidents following:

- school staff completing mandatory training
- reminders to report all incidents from Trade Unions.
- holiday periods.

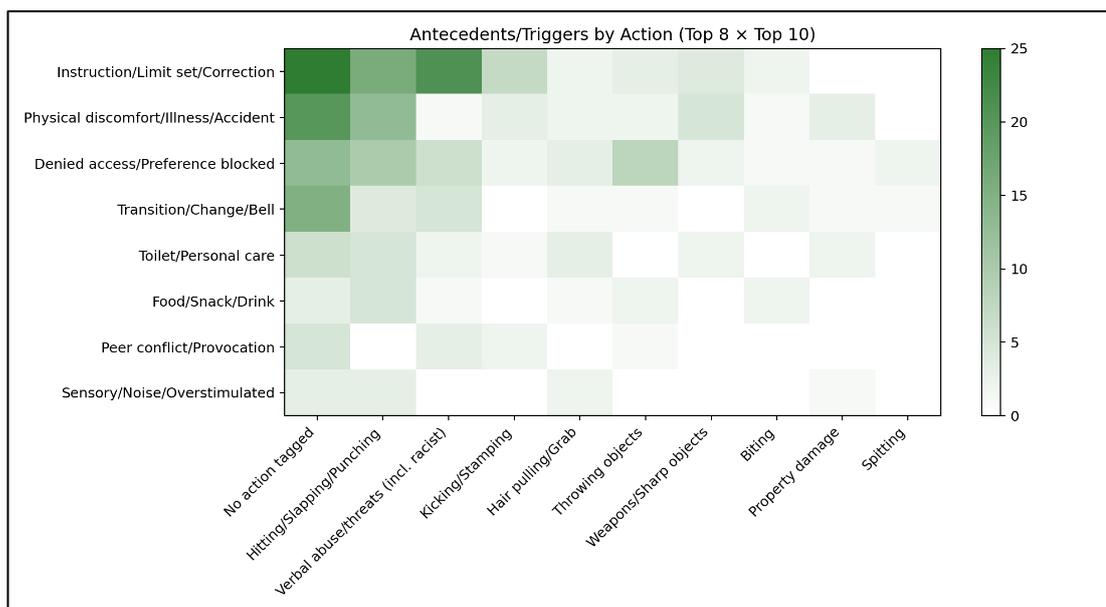
3.24 This suggests that the arrangements for training and consistent messaging with Trade Unions is helping ensure more consistent reporting. Officers have invested time in looking at the data in a range of different ways to determine what can be gleaned from it to inform our collective work to reduce incidents. The insights are outlined below by stage as there are some significant differences evident.

3.25 Data for all sectors (ELC, Primary and Secondary) is outlined below.



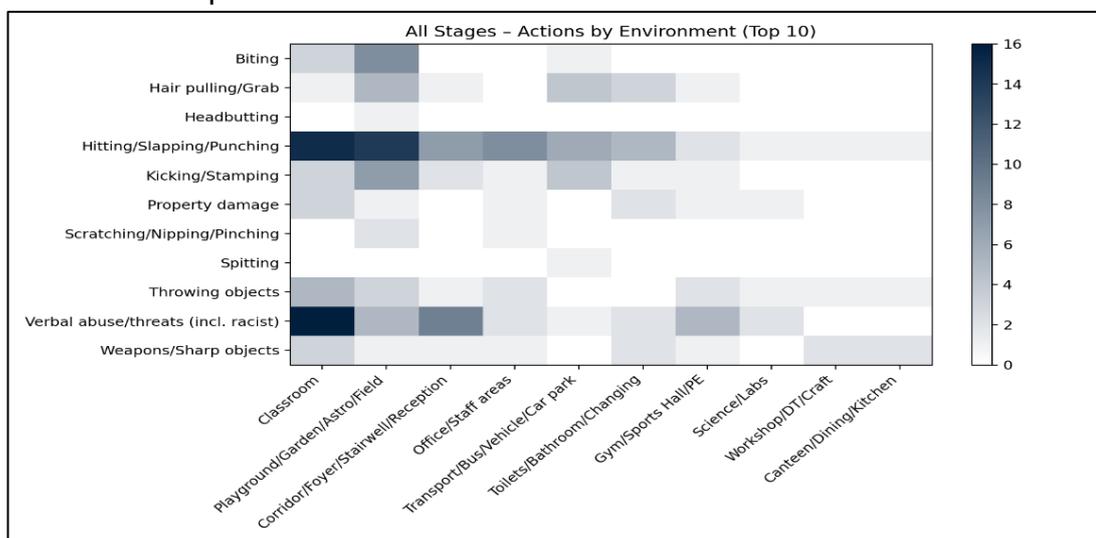
3.26 Considerable work has been undertaken to ensure that the data can be presented in a way that affords easy identification of risk factors so that action can be taken to address emerging trends. An example of insight now available is that most antecedents (triggers to behaviours being reported) result from transitions, the constraints of the school day and sensory or regulation needs.

3.27 The heat map below shows how the antecedents most often manifest in resultant action (which is then reported as an incident).



3.28 There is evidence that consistently applied behaviour and relationship policies which articulate school expectations are important. It is also clear that poor pupil wellbeing impacts on pupil behaviour and how important positive transitions are for children and young people.

3.29 The heat map below provides some further insight into the environment where incidents take place.

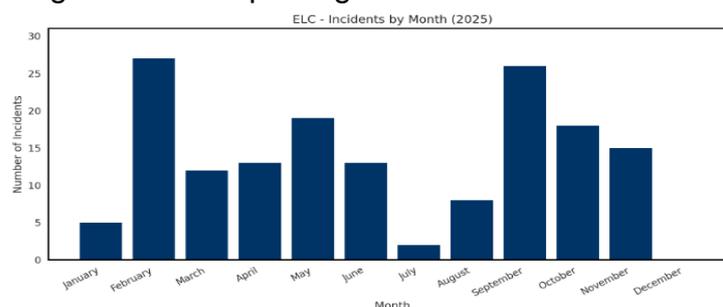


3.30 The information is more easily made sense of by looking by sector.

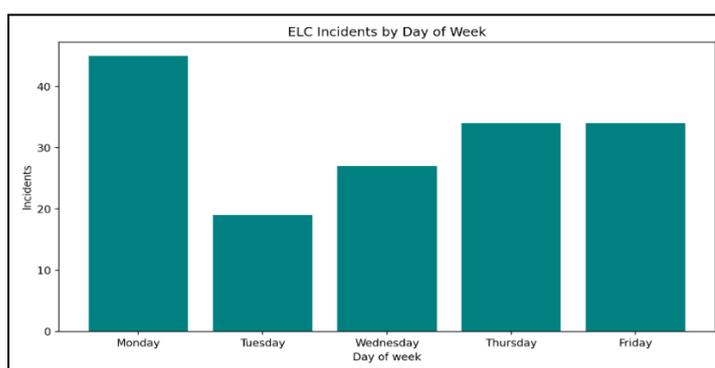
3.31 Incidents reported in Early Learning and Childcare settings

There were 156 incidents reported over 2024, compared to 159 reported over 2025. February saw the highest number of reported incidents. This could be partially attributed to the change in routine resulting from the in-service days and Monday holiday. The rise in September will likely be due to the number of new children entering their Early Learning & Childcare setting for the first time

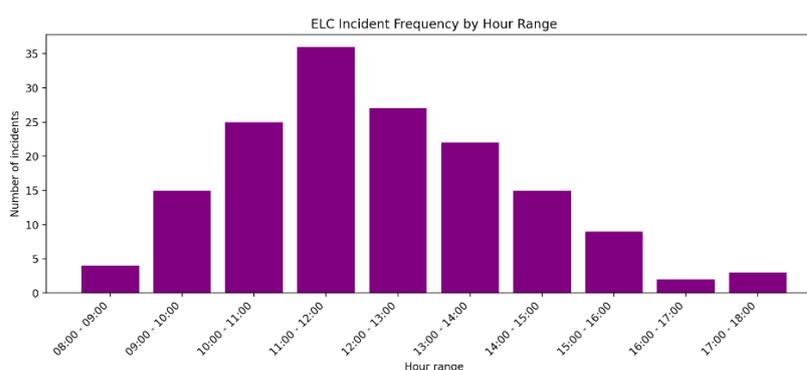
and becoming familiar with new routines and constraints, and then the September long weekend impacting on their establishment of learning routines.



3.32 When we analyse incident data by the days of the week, Monday has the greatest number of incidents.



3.33 This would support what we know about some very young children finding the transition from home to Early Learning & Childcare challenging. Children in Early Learning & Childcare could be in various stages of development (typical, atypical, or delayed) including responding with behaviour not words, not understanding language, casting things away, and cause and effect exploration as would be expected for this age group.

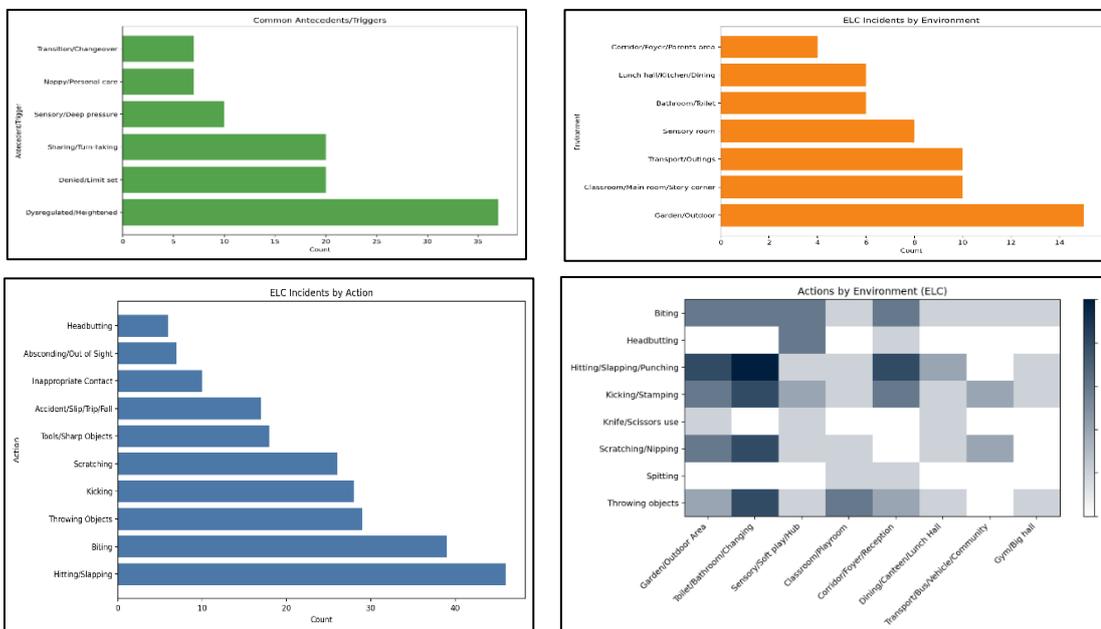


3.34 When we drill down to the time incidents have taken place, we can see that 36% of incidents occur between 10am and noon. This is when ELC settings are in transition from free play into structured snack or lunch activities. Some children could be hungry and this may motivate anger responses, and some others may find transitions and endings, or busy environments, a challenge or overly stimulating.

3.35 As can be seen below, most incidents occur in the outdoor or garden areas of ELC provisions. This is not unexpected as this is where children engage in free play and explore risk most fully, again transitions can be a factor for learners

not wanting to leave this space and move back indoors for snack, toileting, or other activities.

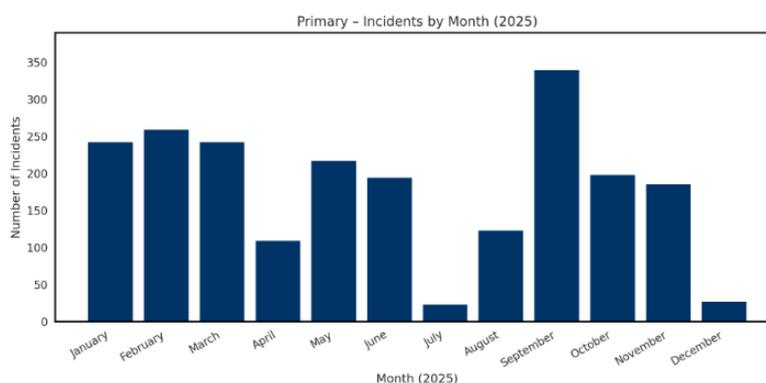
3.36 Our youngest learners are most likely to hit out. This is not unexpected given the age range and what is known about child development. As can be seen below in the heatmap, toileting/changing children can drive a number of behaviours, with our youngest learners most likely keen to stay in the playroom rather than have toileting needs met by staff.



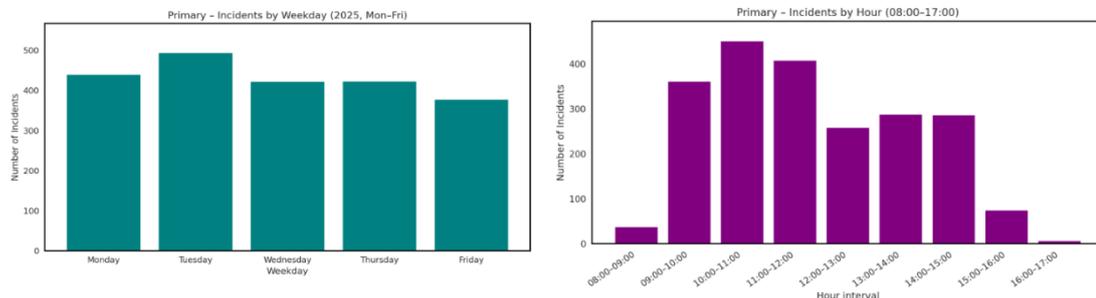
3.37 Transitions cannot be completely removed, however, we can look to minimise the impact of these and share strategies to support learners in different stages of child development. The Educational Psychology Service developed the Spotlight Resource to help Early Learning and Childcare and early stages of Primary with this and other key areas [Educational Psychology Service - The Spotlight Resource](#). Transitions are the focus of professional learning for session 25/26 and the impact of this training will be evaluated.

3.38 Incidents reported in Primary Schools

There were 1858 incidents reported over 2024, compared to the 2170 reported over 2025. The rise in incidents reported in September will be due to children settling back into routines and establishing relationships with new staff, and the impact of the long September weekend on this. Generally, we can see that incidents reduce as the school term progresses.

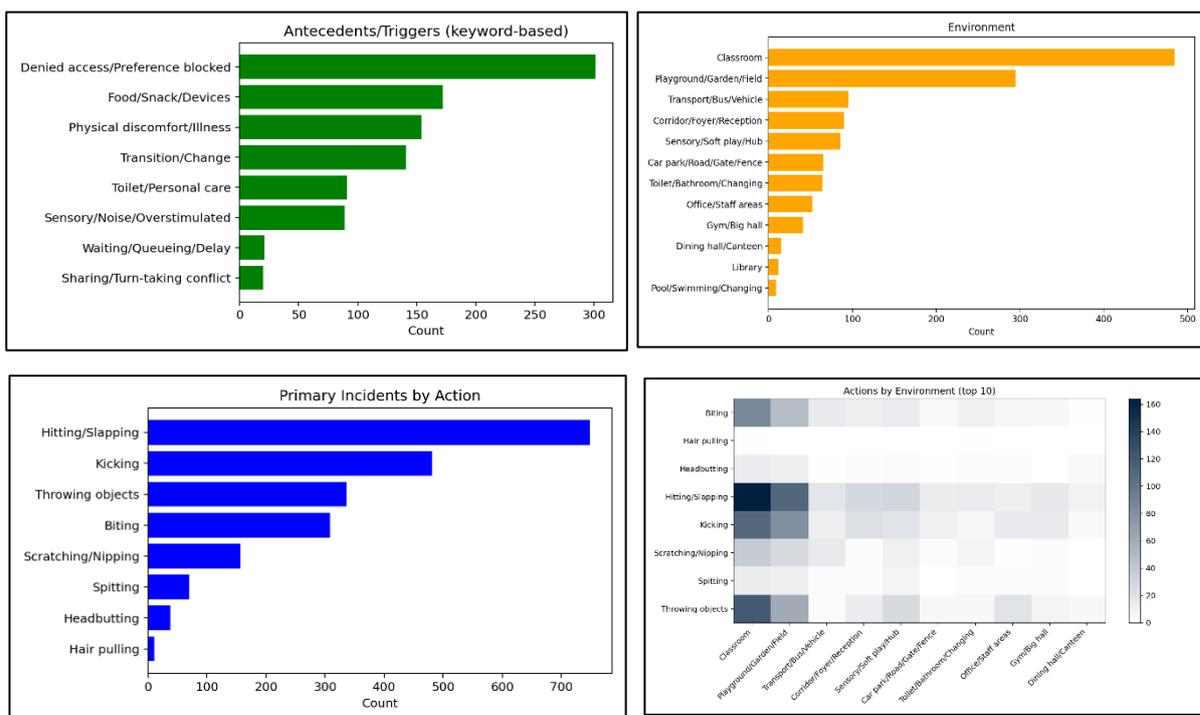


3.39 When we analyse data by days of the week, Tuesday has the greatest number of incidents. We know that this is the day of the week in Primary where learners traditionally settle into the learning of the school week and have got over the excitement of seeing friends and trusted staff members on the Monday.



3.40 When we drill down to the time incidents have taken place, we can see that 38% of incidents occur between 10am and noon, with over 20% between 10 and 11 when learners return from break times, snack options and stimulating break and play activities which are likely a contributing factor. The exertion and release of play time can lead to subsequent adrenaline crashes and learners can become unsettled and dysregulated as they await their next break time and something to eat to restore the post-adrenaline crash.

3.41 Most reported incidents occur in Primary. This is not unexpected as this is where the majority of our learners are, and at this stage demands have increased from those in Early Learning and Childcare. Research into child development tells us throughout the primary stages learners are working to acquire skills to understand how to regulate their bodies, emotions and behaviours. Children learn these at different stages due to biological and environmental factors. Many primary aged learners require coregulation, the support of adults to help them develop the skills to regulate.

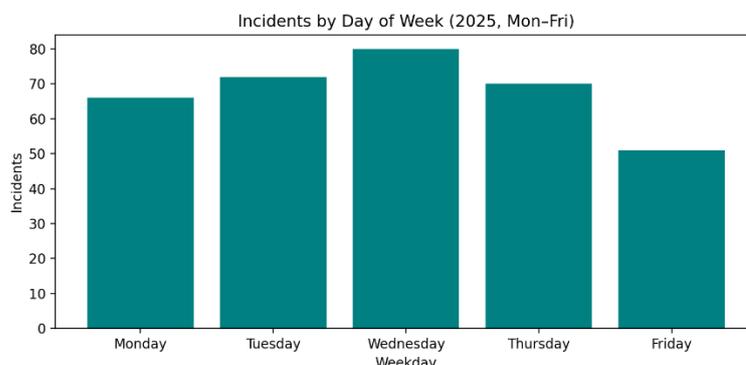
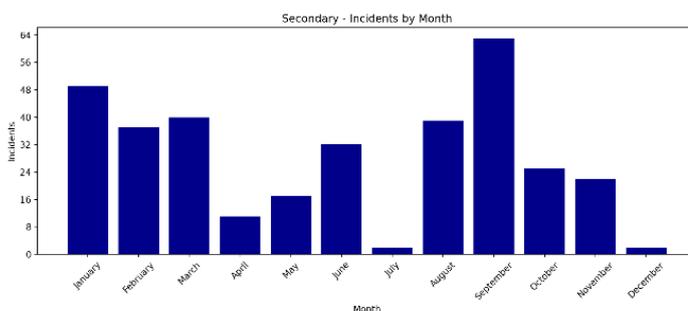


3.42 The majority of incidents take place in the classroom with the antecedent being transitioning from one activity to another or removing a preference. Toileting and intimate personal care triggers remain prevalent with higher numbers of children requiring this support than would have been the case previously.

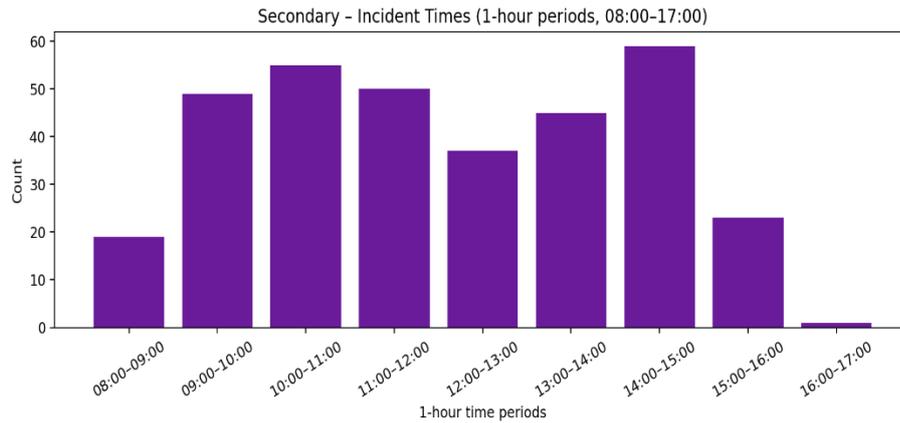
3.43 Children at this stage of development need to be clear about routines and understand what is happening next, but can find this challenging. Work being undertaken to routinely update school relationships policies, continued training and implementation of relational approaches, and the provision of clear class charters will support greater consistency of expectations in classrooms. However, even with clear known expectations, there will continue to be examples of children struggling to come to terms with constraints due to biological and developmental factors. There is evidence that *Maybo* training has helped to build knowledge and understanding in staff and this should enable more prompt and appropriate intervention.

3.44 Incidents reported in Secondary Sector

There were 398 incidents reported over 2024, compared to 343 reported over 2025. When we analyse data by days of the week, Wednesday has the greatest number of incidents (almost 25% of all incidents).



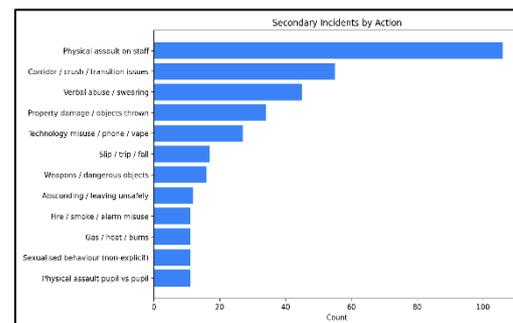
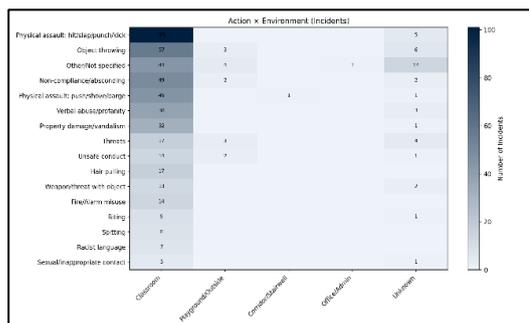
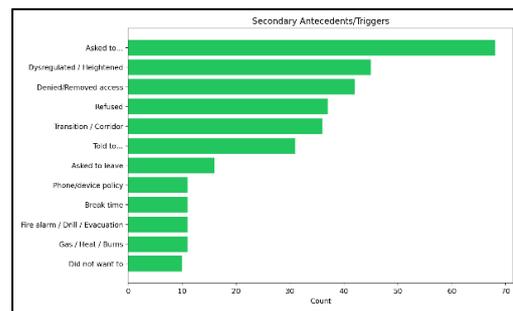
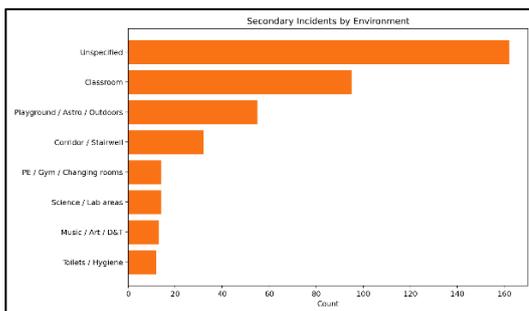
3.45 We know that in young adults and adults, Wednesday is regarded as the “hump day”, where many people find it the most difficult day to overcome, with tiredness and frustration being common. For some of our learners there will be building anxiety around weekend and changes to routines.



3.46 Drilling down to the time incidents have taken place, we can see that the majority of incidents occur in the morning, with an outlier spike of 17% happening between 2-3pm. We know from research into the teenage brain that mornings are a difficult time for learners over the age of 12, as they need more sleep in the morning than any other age group. The 2pm spike coincides with post lunch adrenaline crashes, and learners struggling to maintain focus and regulation till the end of the school day.

3.47 Exploring when incidents occur in the week and during the day provides further evidence that transitions are a trigger for some children and young people with increases in incidents following break and lunchtime. Reviewing school relationship policies to have clear routines following break and lunch should help to reduce triggers and incidents.

3.48 There has been a reduction in the number of incidents reported in secondary schools. The majority of incidents are reported as being in an unspecified location. In order to reduce the number of unspecified environments recorded the safeguarding group have developed a new recording format. This is being rolled out at the supporting learners festival in February 2026 and will help us glean further learning from the data.



3.49 The majority of incidents involving physical contact happen in classrooms and are related to young people being asked to do something. In the majority of these cases reported, the exit is blocked and the young person has no opportunity to leave the classroom causing the situation to quickly escalate. This learning was shared with schools. Schools regularly review class routines and there has been a reduction in the number of incidents over the last 12 months.

3.50 There has been a shift in incident causes over the last 12 months with the number being described as externalising behaviour increasing and the number of violent incidents reducing slightly. *Maybo* training is helping staff have a better understanding of the factors that can drive pupil behaviours.

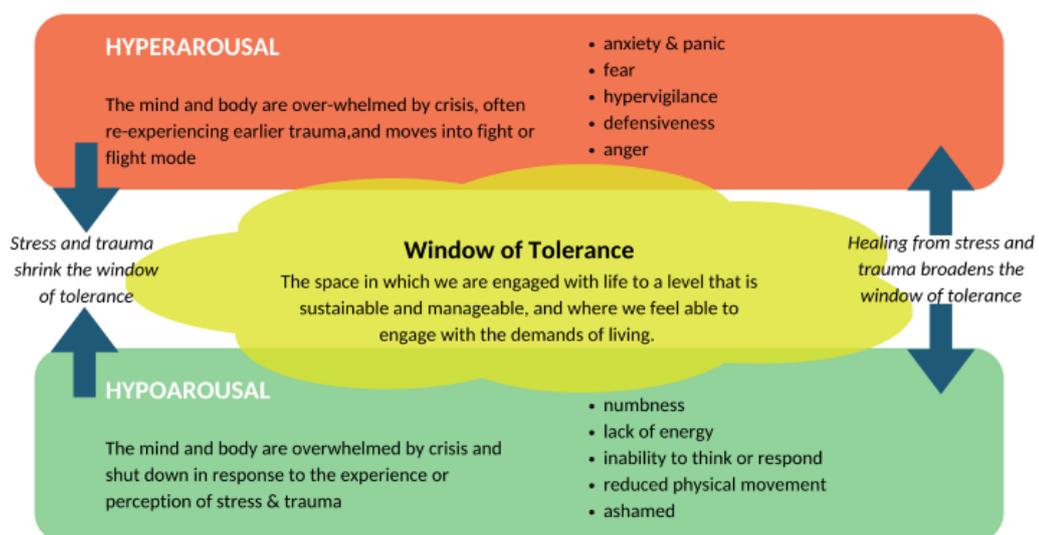
3.51 **What does the Research Tell Us?**

We know that high numbers of young people have experienced trauma of some description during childhood. Scotland’s trauma transformation programme research tells us that:

- 31% of a sample of >2000 18yr olds in the UK had been exposed to at least one significant traumatic event by the age of 18
- Almost 1 in 5 adults experienced physical or sexual abuse as children (was 1 in 9 in 2017) (higher still in economically deprived areas)
- More than 25% of women experienced domestic abuse
- 49% *increase* in emotional disorders since 2004

3.52 Our data shows increasing numbers of young people have delayed communication development which can result in an inability to make sense of or communicate feelings verbally, resulting in exaggerated physical, emotional or sensory responses e.g. tantrums, emotional outbursts. Trauma diverts attention away from learning to protection.

3.53 For these children the window of tolerance is narrowed and they often require the support of an adult to regulate behaviour and emotion.



The Window of Tolerance concept was developed by Dr. Dan Siegel, MD: <https://www.nicabm.com/experts/dan-siegel/>

- 3.54 There is a clear link between trauma & risk-taking/anti-social behaviours e.g. vaping, substances, criminality, unhealthy choices. Learners spend 190 days in school a year and schools and teaching staff have a significant impact on learners and their life outcomes.
- 3.55 Relational approaches (such as Emotion Coaching [Educational Psychology Service - Emotion Coaching](#), delivered to and supported with schools by the Educational Psychology Service) are an essential part of helping learners feel safe, reducing escalation & challenging behaviours, giving them the best chance for success post school. Routines, boundaries and structure are essential parts of trauma-informed approaches. Research tells us learners who have experienced significant trauma may take time to accept, or reaccept (after a holiday period) these essential boundaries of school life.
- 3.56 Throughout 2024/25 professional learning has focused on trauma informed practice. The shift in incident reporting categories from violence to recognising externalising behaviour demonstrates the training is having positive impact on practice in our schools. This focus remains for session 2025/26 along with a focus on supporting and managing transitions.

3.57 How are we doing compared to our Family Group?

Caution should be applied when considering this data as we do not have an understanding of how other local authorities gather or report incidents.

- 3.58 Data from our comparator local authorities can help us understand if issues are local or part of wider national picture. The most recent information available to us suggest that we are mid-table when considering the number of incidents per 10,000 pupils.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 (to date)	Incidents per 10,000 pupils 2024/25
Aberdeen	401	807	491	441	401	1.5
Aberdeenshire	223	196	852	1099	1186	3.3
East Dunbartonshire	99	258	321	381	251	1.5
Edinburgh	408	799	2454	2908	1843	3.5
East Renfrewshire			467	390	185	1.0
Orkney	64	42	113	7	113	4.1
Perth and Kinross	442	595	1003	1080	467	2.6
Shetland	68	144		537	501	15.7
Family Group Average						2.8
All local authorities						3.6

- 3.59 As well as considering our family group it is important we consider our position in relation to other urban local authorities. We remain mid-table for this group too.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 (to date)	Incidents per 10,000 pupils 2024/25
Aberdeen	401	807	491	441	401	1.5
Dundee City	794	914	1237	1645	225	1.2
East Dunbartonshire	99	258	321	381	251	1.5
Edinburgh	408	799	2454	2908	1843	3.5
Glasgow			2300	4049	2790	4.0
North Lanarkshire	261	423	969	697	296	0.6
Renfrewshire	191	342	576	1208	712	3.0
West Dunbartonshire				1518	1286	11.1
Family Group Average						2.9
All local authorities						3.6

3.60 What can we conclude?

Having considered all of the evidence available to us, we can conclude that:

- there is now more consistent reporting of incidents
- work done to improve how data is presented is helping officers identify risk factors and take proactive action
- professional learning is positively impacting upon staff understanding of behaviour and the use of language used to describe a trauma response
- there is no evidence that the situation in Aberdeen is more acute than in other Local Authorities, with Aberdeen City sitting mid-table in comparator data.
- there is evidence that the data insights are helping to reduce common risk factors (especially in secondary schools)
- there is evidence that many of the incidents being reported result from:
 - child development;
 - transitions;
 - hunger; and
 - intimate care needs.

3.61 Professional learning on managing transitions and supporting regulation are the main focus of our supporting learners' festival planned for February 2026.

3.62 The Safeguarding Group (a collaboration with Trade Unions) will continue to meet fortnightly and focus on providing targeted support to schools where there are an increasing number of incidents as well as identifying good practice in schools where incidents are decreasing.

3.63 Induction arrangements for new staff will now increasingly focus on strategies to support dysregulation in young people and transitions into and within school.

3.64 Updated Professional learning

Building on existing mandatory courses, officers have developed a programme of de-escalation training for all staff to strengthen preventative, relational practice; build confidence in recognising and responding to escalating behaviour; and ensure staff apply legally sound, proportionate, and rights-based approaches. It is designed for all practitioners working with children and young people, including teachers, support staff, leadership teams, early years practitioners, and ASN specialists.

3.65 The learning pathway is delivered across **four phases**:

1. **Consolidation of Maybo Level 1 (moving to bespoke ACC learn offer)** – reinforcing early intervention strategies, low arousal approaches, and understanding of triggers and escalation. Mandatory for all school staff
2. **Introduction to CALM Theory** – developing knowledge of crisis stages, dynamic risk assessment, communication under pressure, and organisational responsibilities.
3. **Integrated Application** – embedding learning into personalised plans, coordinating team responses, and improving environments to reduce risk.
4. **Post Incident Learning** – establishing reflective practices, restorative conversations, and service wide improvement cycles.

3.66 Overall, there is evidence that the programme strengthens workforce capability across all schools and settings, promoting safer, more consistent, and more relational learning environments for all children and young people.

3.67 Courses at all levels will be available to all staff throughout the session as part of our universal professional learning programme.

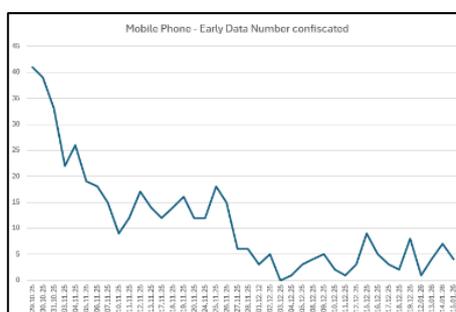
3.68 Mobile Phones in schools

All secondary school mobile phone policies are in line with Scottish Government guidance and have been developed locally with all relevant stakeholders. HMIe have commented on the effectiveness of arrangements in place during two of our recent Secondary school inspections.

Northfield Academy June 2025 - *Staff recently established a mobile phone strategy. This asks young people to keep phones out of sight or hand them in to teachers at the start of learning. This approach is helping to remove distractions during learning.*

Oldmachar Academy November 2025 - *The school's effective policy on mobile phones is one of the ways that teachers ensure that young people are prepared and ready to learn.*

3.69 Secondary schools will continue to review their arrangements for mobile phones by tracking the impact of their arrangements. Bridge of Don Academy has a phones out of site policy and has tracked the number of times a phone has been confiscated during learning.



supports the approach being taken across Aberdeen City. Key learning from the research suggests the need for policies to:

- be consistent and transparent,
- reflect local context,
- be developed collaboratively with school communities, and
- sit within wider strategies on digital literacy, wellbeing and positive school culture.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. All costs are being met from existing service budgets.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 places a duty on Local Authorities to protect children and young people. The Anti-Weapon/Knife Crime guidance gives direction to schools in sharing the main messages of weapon crime. The guidance outlines effective practice in safeguarding children and young people to ensure that the Council fully complies with legal duties.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. RISK

The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council's Risk Appetite Statement.

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	<p>Risk of not having appropriate response protocols to weapons incidents</p> <p>Risk of not having an appropriate response to incidents in school</p>	<p>Having robust protocol in place which is quality assured and matches those of Police Scotland</p> <p>Safeguarding and data groups looking at data regularly to identify best practice</p>	M	Yes

Compliance	Risk of not complying with Health and Safety legislation.	Implementing this guidance and reviewing it at relevant times will limit the risk of legal challenge. Adhering to this guidance will ensure that legal risks remain low.	L	Yes
Operational	Not being able to safeguard children and young people can present a risk to the wellbeing of employees	This guidance will provide employees with clarity on the authorities' expectations about what constitutes a weapon and how to report weapon incidents. The Guidance will help reduce the risk as the procedural steps and responsibilities are clear.	H	Yes
Financial	There are no financial risks associated with this guidance or its implementation.	None	L	Yes
Reputational	The Anti-Weapon/Knife Crime Guidance requires a consistent and centralised approach to the education of weapons and the recording of weapon incidents. This will result in the information about weapon incidents across our service to be more accessible and visible.	This is seen as a positive impact allowing Aberdeen City Council to work in close partnership with Police Scotland and in providing schools with immediate response and support to any weapon incident. Aberdeen City Council will continue to evaluate the provision and	M	Yes

		support provided by actions contained in the Anti Weapon guidance. This will be reviewed at relevant times ensuring that mitigating circumstances relating to any incident regarding weapon/knife crime is reduced as far as possible.		
Environment / Climate	There are no environmental risks identified with this guidance.	None	L	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025-26</u>	
Impact of Report	
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p> <p>Creating better learning environments</p> <p>Caring for young people</p>	<p>This report supports the following key Council priorities</p> <p>Work to ensure that every school community provides a safe and respectful environment for young people and staff.</p> <p>Ensure the Council follows best practice as a corporate parent to get the best outcomes for looked-after young people, those in kinship care and those with additional support needs such as autism, developmental disorders or mental health problems.</p> <p>Ensure local education services identify young people with mental health problems and help them get early support and help, where appropriate, to transfer to adult services</p>
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	The proposals within this report support the delivery of Children & Young People Stretch Outcomes 4: 90% of children and young people report they feel

	<p>listened to all of the time and 7: 83.5% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence in the LOIP.</p> <p>The paper seeks approval for the refreshed Anti Weapons Guidance which will support schools and services to continue to promote responsibility and a culture of safety in children and young people with regard to weapons.</p>
<p>Regional and City Strategies <u>City Strategies and Strategic Plans</u> Children's Services Plan</p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the outcomes within the Children's Services plan and will continue to be reviewed locally with partners as part of the Chief Officers Group (COG)</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	No assessment required. I confirm this has been discussed and agreed - Shona Milne Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning on 08/01/2026.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix A Current Anti-Weapons Guidance

11.2 Appendix B HDRC Research

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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Anti-Weapon Guidance



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DRAFT

1. Background

Following the tragic event at Cults Academy on the 28th October 2015 an independent multi-agency review was commissioned by members of a Chief Officer's Group.

The aim of the review was to provide independent assurance and recommendations for future practice. The independent review made 21 recommendations which were considered by multi-agency partners in developing this protocol.

2. Legislation and Children's Rights

Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995.

Any person who without lawful authority, or reasonable excuse, has with him/her in a public place, any offensive weapon commits an offence.

Children's Rights

Our responsibilities are set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

"Children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally. Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone else who looks after them." (Article 19)

3. Guidance Objectives

- To clarify expectations of schools with regard to weapon/knife crime.
- To clarify expectations of school staff with regard to the searching of pupils' personal belongings.
- To outline links to Aberdeen City Council Anti Bullying Policy

4. Expectations of Schools

4.1 Curriculum Input

Primary and Secondary schools have been provided with an anti-weapon pack containing educational resources, some of which have been adapted from resources shared by the Ben Kinsella Trust in London.

SCHOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share the age appropriate learning resources and lessons provided specifically for Primary 7 pupils. Schools can deliver these resources where and when appropriate to their individual curricular structures and design.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work in partnership with Police Scotland to deliver the anti-weapon/knife crime presentations and assemblies to all Secondary 1 and Secondary 5 pupils.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage pupil councils and forums to have regular discussions of agenda items linked to the broader area of carrying weapons within schools. This will allow pupils to share their knowledge and to use the pupil voice to further develop safe practices.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide pupils with an opportunity to feedback on the resources in the pack so that improvements can be made where appropriate.

4.2 Non-curricular Expectations

Within the Aberdeen City Council anti-weapon school pack there are promotional materials to assist schools in highlighting the main messages of anti-weapon/knife crime.

SCHOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure the contents of the pack are displayed and distributed appropriately throughout their establishment and to the wider school community thus promoting a zero tolerance approach to the possession of weapons/knives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss the Anti-Weapon guidance with all staff to ensure they are aware of procedures and adhere to them.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Secondary schools to deliver a tabletop exercise to test school procedures for dealing with a weapon related incident.

4.3 Parental Engagement

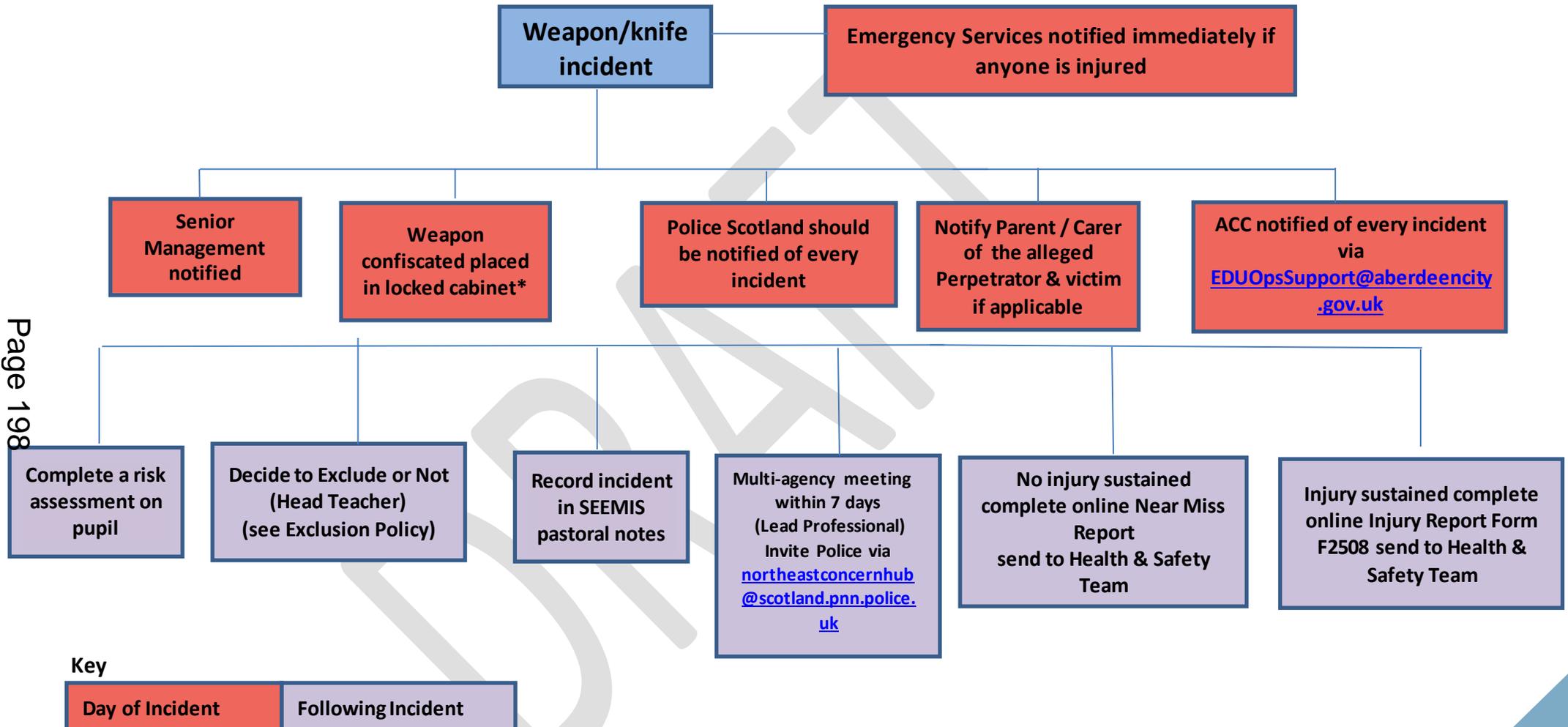
Aberdeen City Council has provided a parent guidance leaflet which presents the facts on weapons crime and the consequences of carrying a weapon. Parents and carers have a responsibility for ensuring that their child receives appropriate guidance which should include educating them about the dangers of weapons.

Aberdeen City Council will also provide a parent agreement letter setting out the expectations of the school with regard to weapons/knives. It is the parent's responsibility to read the letter, sign it and return it to school. If a child is old enough he/she should also sign the agreement letter.

SCHOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools should share the Anti-Weapon guidance with Parent Council.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools are responsible for ensuring that parents/carers receive both a parent agreement letter and a guidance leaflet.<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Incorporate the parent letters into the school's Primary 1 induction pack and also put out again to S1 pupils capturing transition from P7 –S1.➤ Ensure new pupils/parents/families from out with Aberdeen City Council receive the parent letter as part of the school's induction pack.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All parent agreement letter returns should be recorded on SEEMIS using the ACC tab.

It is important to emphasise that the success of the Anti-Weapon/Knife Crime Strategy lies heavily on all adults modelling and presenting the appropriate messages and behaviours.

5. Procedural Guidance for Incident Notification and Reporting



*Do not attempt to disarm a pupil armed with a weapon seek support from Police Scotland.
Please note Child Protection Services should only be contacted if the incident constitutes a child protection issue.

6. Pupil Searches

If there is reason to believe that a pupil is carrying a knife or other offensive weapon the following steps should be followed –

Do not attempt to disarm a pupil armed with a weapon seek support from Police Scotland.

In accordance with the law of Scotland searches must be made with the pupil's consent.

Physical searching of a pupil can only be carried out by Police Scotland.

Where consent is given the Head Teacher or nominee can undertake searches of the pupil's belongings.

Where no consent is forthcoming schools will contact Police Scotland

A minimum of two adults should be present at any search for safety & potential evidential reasons

Parents will be informed of any searches

Any weapon/knife found in a pupil's possession will be confiscated and stored in a locked cabinet awaiting action by Police Scotland

7. Link to the Aberdeen City Council Anti-Bullying Policy

The 2023 ACC Education Settings - Anti-Bullying Policy has been launched and implemented within Aberdeen City schools. This revised service-wide Policy provides a framework to support schools in developing their own local level policy to meet the needs of their school and school community.

Our expectation for the local level policies, key messages and ethos is to keep a high profile in everyday practice, through relationships between staff, parents/carers, children and young people to foster respectful relationships and behaviours.

8. Useful Contacts

Police Scotland	101
Crimestoppers	0800 555 111
Parentline	08000 28 22 23
Childline	0800 1111
Respect Me (Scotland's Anti-bullying Service)	www.respectme.org.uk
Barnardos	www.barnardos.org.uk
Children 1st	www.children1st.org.uk
Ben Kinsella Trust (London)	www.benkinsella.org.uk
Scottish Action for Mental Health	0141 530 1000 info@samh.org.uk
Penumbra Self Harm Service Aberdeen	www.penumbra.org.uk 01224 621266

THE USE OF MOBILE PHONES IN SCHOOLS

A rapid evidence review



JANUARY 2025

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HDRC ABERDEEN

Title of Report	Rapid Evidence Review on Mobile Phone use in Schools
Report authors	Dr Daniel Crabtree, David Burns, Dr Aileen Grant, Dr Sarah McGarrol
Date	22 January 2026

Executive summary

This rapid evidence review brings together international research evidence on the impact of banning mobile phones and restrictive phone policies in schools. Identified studies were from high-income countries in Europe, Australasia, the UK and the United States. Collectively, the evidence explores if and how phone restrictions influenced academic outcomes, student wellbeing and mental health, behaviour and bullying, classroom practice, and policy implementation.

Across the identified literature, there is limited and inconsistent evidence that banning mobile phones leads to improved academic attainment. Large quasi-experimental studies, including national level analyses, show no significant improvement in test scores following the introduction of school phone bans. Some studies identify small improvements in classroom engagement or focus, but these changes do not reliably translate into sustained gains in academic performance. Where benefits were observed, they tended to be modest and appeared more pronounced for particular groups, such as lower-attaining or more disadvantaged students, rather than across student populations as a whole.

The relationship between banning and or restricting mobile phones and student wellbeing is complex. There was no overall improvement in mental wellbeing, anxiety or depression because of restrictive phone policies within the studies identified. Some studies suggested small reductions in psychological distress, particularly among specific sub-groups such as older adolescents or boys, but effect sizes were limited. At the same time, some studies highlighted unintended consequences, including increased anxiety among students who were uncomfortable being separated from their phones. Overall, the identified evidence suggests that policies banning phones alone are may not function as mental health interventions and most were considered alongside broader wellbeing and support strategies.

The identified evidence relating to behaviour, bullying and social interaction was mixed. While some studies reported improvements in face-to-face interaction and classroom focus following the removal of phones, there was no consistent evidence that bans reduce bullying or cyberbullying. In some contexts, bullying levels were similar in schools with and without bans, suggesting that wider social and environmental factors could be influential. Qualitative research with students showed

that many experienced positive changes in peer interaction and engagement, but also reported reduced autonomy, difficulties managing emotional distress, and concerns about limited access to parents during the school day.

Identified studies on research on implementation highlights that enforcing mobile phone restrictions could generate significant organisational and relational challenges. Teachers often reported that collecting and monitoring phones was time-consuming and could negatively affect student–teacher relationships, particularly when policies were applied inconsistently. Even in schools with strict restrictions, phones continued to be used for educational purposes, and other digital devices became alternative sources of distraction for some. Evidence suggests that structured approaches to implementation, including the use of storage systems, clear leadership, and advance consultation with students, staff and parents, were associated with higher levels of acceptance and smoother implementation.

Comparative studies of policy design indicate that full bans do not deliver clear advantages over partial or regulated approaches. Restrictive policies reliably reduced phone use during the school day, but they did not reduce overall screen or social media use. In some cases, stricter bans were associated with lower school belonging or weakened student–teacher relationships, particularly for certain groups. Across multiple studies, students, teachers and parents expressed stronger support for clear limits on classroom use, age-appropriate expectations, flexibility, and involvement in the development of school policies.

Taken together, the identified evidence base provides limited support for mobile phone bans as a standalone solution for improving learning, wellbeing or behaviour. Where positive improvements were identified, they were generally small, vary between groups, and depend heavily on how policies are designed and implemented. The research suggests that effective approaches move away from blanket bans towards clear, regulated and age-appropriate restrictions that are embedded within wider strategies for digital literacy, student wellbeing and positive school culture. Mobile phone policies are likely to have most impact when they are consistent, transparent, informed by local context, and developed collaboratively with school communities.

Rapid reviews, by their nature are not comprehensive, and as such, the findings should be treated with caution. For example, these included studies were mainly explorative and descriptive and were not specifically designed to measure the effects of banning or restricting use on a range of outcomes, such as academic attainment and psychological wellbeing.

Based on the evidence we have identified and reviewed, we have generated recommendations for policy makers, which are presented at the end of this report.

Background

Young people are among the most intensive and frequent users of smartphones [1]. There is increasing international concern about the potential negative psychological and physical health consequences associated with excessive engagement with digital technologies, particularly among children and adolescents [2]. As mobile phones have become increasingly embedded in school life over the past two decades, an increasing number of countries have implemented policies restricting or prohibiting their use in educational settings [3]. The United Nations has reported that approximately one quarter of countries, including France, Israel, and Turkey, as well as parts of Canada and Australia, have enacted legislation requiring public schools to prohibit mobile phone use during the school day [3]. In contrast, other countries, such as the UK, have adopted non-statutory guidance that recommends restricting phone use while allowing schools discretion over implementation [4]. Notably, even prior to the introduction of recent legislation and guidance, many schools had already implemented their own policies to limit student mobile phone use during the school day [3,4]. Restrictive school phone policies are based on assumptions that prohibiting phone use in schools will improve mental health and wellbeing, educational attainment, and reduce problematic use and levels of disruptive behaviour [4,5].

This rapid evidence review was conducted to find and synthesise published evidence on:

- use of smart mobile phones in schools - both primary and secondary
- high income countries only
- focussed on interventions to ban and/or reduce phone use during teaching time in schools
- published between 2020-2026

Methods

The design of this study is a rapid evidence review. Academic databases (PubMed, ERIC and MEDLINE) and Google Scholar were searched for relevant academic publications from 2020 until 15th January 2026. Different search strategies were employed across the databases and given the rapid nature of the review the search was comprehensive but not systematic. Search terms included: 'mobile phone', 'cell phone', 'smart phone' or 'mobile device' in combination with 'school', 'education', 'classroom' or 'teach'. Truncation and spelling variants were employed where appropriate and the searches included relevant subject headings, where available, alongside the keywords.

We also adopted ‘forward-and-backward’ citation checking to search the reference list of relevant papers and the papers that cited those relevant papers. Besides citation checking, we searched for relevant grey literature (i.e., reports published outside of traditional commercial publishing) in the Google search engine and Google Scholar. The eligibility criteria were articles published between 2020-2026 exploring the effectiveness of interventions employed to restrict phone use during teaching time in both primary and secondary schools in high-income countries, with an emphasis on secondary schools, and written in the English language.

We identified and summarised eleven peer-reviewed research articles and two reports.

The evidence was summarised into an Excel file under the following headings:

- Type of evidence
- Source of evidence (e.g. citation)
- Link to source of evidence
- Date(s) of intervention
- Place of intervention
- Population
- Age range
- Type of intervention/methodology
- Outcomes
- Conclusions

We identified and reviewed eleven peer-reviewed articles and two published reports. The studies reviewed include quasi-experimental evaluations, natural experiments, scoping and systematic reviews, cross-sectional surveys and qualitative research conducted across high-income countries in Europe, Australasia, the UK and the United States.

Evidence summarised from academic publication

- *The impact of banning mobile phones in Swedish secondary schools* [6].

Since 2006, Swedish teachers have had the authority to confiscate mobile phones. Kessel et al. (2020) implemented a difference in differences (DID; a quasi-experimental technique that measures the causal effect of some non-random intervention) strategy to investigate the impact of schools banning mobile phones on

the test scores of students aged 15-16 years. The researchers sampled from schools that operated in the school year 2016/2017 (n = 1423).

The effect of a mobile phone ban on test scores in Sweden seems to be very small. The researchers found no improvement in student performance in schools that introduced a mobile phone ban in Sweden. The policy guidance is therefore as follows: although a national ban is a low-cost policy, small or no learning gains are to be expected in Sweden and in countries with a similar school system.

Despite these findings, Sweden is implementing a nationwide mobile phone ban in primary and lower secondary schools (ages 7-16) starting in autumn 2026, requiring students to hand in devices at the start of the day for storage until dismissal.

- Complexities of Managing a Mobile Phone Ban in the Digitalized Schools' Classroom [7].

This was a longitudinal qualitative study conducted between 2018-2019, with the aim of exploring the implementation of a teacher-initiated ban of students' mobile phones during secondary school classes in Sweden. Participants in the study consisted of eight certified teachers, with approximately fifty students aged between 16-19 years subjected to the ban.

Six themes emerged from the discussions:

- Motives and strategy for implementing the ban - To tackle disturbances and create a positive learning environment, the teachers devised a procedure to collect mobile phones at the beginning of each class and return them at the end of that class.
- Making exceptions - The analysis shows that implementing the ban turned out to be a challenge and was not done consistently across the teachers. The collection of devices was seen as challenging, time-consuming, stressful, and often involved conflict and negotiation.
- Students' responses to the implementation of the ban - initially most students complied with the ban but became less positive over time. Strategies to avoid handing in their mobile phones were used and phones were used surreptitiously.
- Relationships and trust - teachers expressed that upholding the ban affected relationships with teachers, particularly where the student resisted handing phones for collection.
- Mobile phones as a tool for learning - in 11 of the 13 team discussions revealed that, despite the ban, teachers continued to integrate students' mobiles into their teaching in various ways.

- Other occurring disturbances - the teachers noted that the school's laptops emerged as a source of distractions when mobile phones were not present.

The study outlines difficulties of implementing strict mobile phone policies that are consistent and efficient. Implementing a ban brings new organisational, pedagogical, and relational challenges that can be difficult for the individual teacher to handle in situ in the classroom.

- *Evidence for and against banning mobile phones in schools: A scoping review* [8].

Researchers at Queensland University of Technology, Australia conducted a scoping review covering original research studies which explored the impact of mobile phone use in school on academic outcomes, mental health and wellbeing, and cyberbullying in both primary and secondary schools. The review identified 22 studies conducted in 12 countries (Bermuda, China, Czech Republic, Ghana, Malawi, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, UK, USA).

The authors stated that despite the variability of findings, it seems that in some circumstances there were some negative, although small, impacts of mobile phone use on academic outcomes. This suggests that restrictions on mobile phones in schools might be beneficial for some students' academic achievement but make no difference to others.

While some studies reported that mobile phones had a negative impact on students' mental health, other studies reported students are likely to feel anxious if they are not able to check their phones regularly (referred to as 'nomophobia' (fear of 'no mobile phone')) and that such problem was particularly evident as schools re-opened after COVID-19. Two quasi-experimental investigations, nonetheless, reported no significant effects of mobile phone bans on student social wellbeing.

The evidence for banning mobile phones on the grounds of reducing cyberbullying was mixed. They conclude that considered collectively, removing mobile phones from schools is unlikely to have significant impact on cyberbullying.

The scoping review showed that there is limited robust evidence to support the mobile phone ban debate. There was also a lack of studies able to demonstrate cause and effect, such that many were either cross-sectional or qualitative designs, and over half of the identified studies were unpublished papers and therefore lack the rigour of the peer-review process.

Despite this, legislators in several countries have enacted, or are considering, legislation to ban or restrict mobile phones in schools. For example, from August 2023 all states and territories in Australia have enacted bans on mobile phone use in schools.

- *Smartphones at school: A mixed-methods analysis of educators' and students' perspectives on mobile phone use at school* [9].

Gath et al. (2024) used a cross-sectional survey design to examine educator (n = 217) and student (n = 332; aged 7 years to 18 years; mean = 13.9 years, standard deviation = 2.0) perspectives on students' mobile phone use in New Zealand schools in 2023 through a mixed-methods approach. At the time of data collection, there were no government regulations in place regarding students' use of phones at school or in the classroom.

Of the 89 schools included in the study, the vast majority of schools allowed students to bring their phones to school with them, and nearly all of these schools had rules in place for student phone use. When educators and students were asked about mobile phone use rules in schools, the two most common types of regulations that both participant groups thought schools should put in place were (1) having phones locked away for the school day and (2) having allotted times of the day when phones could be used (such as during break times but not during class). Those who suggested that phones should be locked away for the entirety of the school day provided various suggestions for implementing this rule, including use of lockboxes in the classroom, handing phones in to the teacher each morning, or turning phones off and putting them away in the students' school bags. Fewer participants suggested a complete ban, whereby no phones are allowed at school at all. There was a recognition by some participants that the rules should be age-dependent, with stricter rules for younger students and more freedom for self-management in older students.

The authors proposed several recommendations based on the findings:

1. Policies related to student phone use should move away from the rhetoric of a complete "ban" to the regulation of mobile phone use during the school day.
2. All schools should implement transparent and enforceable regulations on student phone use during the school day as follows:
 - (a) Students should be allowed to bring their phones to school but have them locked away during the school day.
 - (b) The use of phones for specific educational purposes or at allotted times is allowed at the teachers' discretion.
3. Schools should provide contexts for students to develop digital device self-management skills, learn about the risks and opportunities of mobile phones, and develop the ability to critically evaluate online content.

- *“Phones off while school's on”: Evaluating problematic phone use and the social, wellbeing, and academic effects of banning phones in schools* [10].

This natural experiment employed a 2 (phone ban: yes/no) x 2 (time: baseline, follow-up) repeated-measures design, chosen to align with the Department for Education of South Australia (DECD) 2023 mobile phone policy. The phone ban policy in South Australia requires all students' phones to be stored away in a bag or locker during school hours. Schools employed the Yondr© pouch, a magnetically locked bag, for restricting phone access.

The study involved surveying one group of schools (n=3) at the end of Term 2 (June), 2023, and then in early Term 3 (August), 2023, after they had implemented the ban. Students (n = 1282 at baseline; n = 1256 at follow-up) aged 12-18 years were recruited from five public secondary schools. Surveys measured the mobile phone ban's influence on students' problematic phone use, academic engagement, school belonging, and bullying.

There was no significant main effect on problematic phone use or psychological distress and life satisfaction. Academic engagement increased over time for the ban group but did not significantly change in the no ban group. However, there was no significant between-group difference in academic engagement at follow-up.

In terms of bullying, the ban group had higher bullying than the no ban condition. Furthermore, bullying decreased over time, but there was no significant difference between the ban and no ban groups.

Imposing access restrictions may not affect the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive problematic phone use. The results indicated that the ban and no ban schools either did not differ significantly, or there were minimal differences, in terms of problematic use of mobile phones, academic engagement, school belonging, and bullying. There was a small decline in bullying and problematic phone use over time in both school groups regardless of phone ban, suggesting the phone ban may not necessarily underlie these changes.

- *Psychological consequences of school mobile phone bans: Emulated trial of a natural experiment in South Australia* [11].

Baggio et al. (2025) conducted a secondary analysis of a natural experiment using an emulated trial framework to examine the impact of a mobile phone ban implemented in Australian schools in 2023 (King et al. 2024; see above). The exposure was a school-wide mobile phone ban (ban already implemented, ban not yet implemented). The secondary analysis included 1062 participants (mean age =

14 years). The primary outcome measure was psychological distress. Secondary outcome measures included positive and negative affect assessed by a mood scale.

The phone ban was associated with reduced psychological distress (small effect sizes). The effect of the ban was not significant for positive affect (happy, lively, proud, joyful, and cheerful), but the ban was associated with a significant decrease in negative affect (scared, able, afraid, and sad). Stratifying the analyses by age group, gender and deprivation suggested that the phone ban could benefit specific subgroups more than others. For instance, impacts of the phone ban were identified for adolescents over the age of 14, and boys.

The significant reduction in the psychological distress scale suggests that restricting phone use in schools may be beneficial. A significant reduction in psychological distress in relation to the mobile phone ban implies lower levels of depression and anxiety. However, the small effect sizes suggest that phone bans should be complemented by other interventions that target mobile phone use and mental health. Such complementary approaches could include digital literacy and e-safety education, mental health promotion programmes and strategies to promote positive social interactions during school hours.

- Student perspectives on banning mobile phones in South Australian secondary schools: A large-scale qualitative analysis [12].

This study was part of a larger research project involving evaluation of the 2023 South Australian school phone ban (King et al. 2024). This phase of the project employed qualitative methodology to examine students' perspectives on phones in schools and their personal views and experiences of the phone ban, including perspectives on the benefits and challenges related to phone bans in schools. A total of 1549 (752 females, 729 males, 62 other; aged 12-18 years (mean =14.4, SD =1.5 years)) students from five secondary schools in South Australia provided 7188 responses to open-ended survey questions.

Thematic analysis of 69,589 words identified five categories with 16 themes. In terms of undesired effects of the bans, students reported: (i) feeling less independent and trustworthy, (ii) losing access to digital learning tools, and (iii) difficulties in regulating emotional distress without phones. However, students also reported benefits in areas of: (i) face-to-face social interaction, (ii) personal health and safety, and (ii) classroom engagement. Some students expressed a desire for education on responsible phone use, as well as approaches to managing digital devices with flexibility and personal agency, as an alternative to banning phones outright.

The present study's findings highlight the complexities of the phone ban from the perspective of students and add to the currently limited number of evaluation studies.

Positively, many students reported that the ban had improved their academic engagement, peer interactions and friendships, and had multiple health and safety benefits. In this way, these data appear to provide support for the policy's main objectives. However, students also highlighted personal challenges related to the ban, including a reduced sense of autonomy, having less available communication with parents, and difficulties in managing emotions and well-being.

- Implementation of Social Media Initiative in 2 Middle Schools: "Be Focused. Be Present. Be Somebody" [13].

The 'Be Focused. Be Present. Be Somebody' program to restrict mobile phone was implemented in schools in Georgia, US August 1, 2024. The program involved students locking their phones and smartwatches in a Yondr pouch upon arrival to their first period class. At the end of the school day, teachers unlocked each pouch, which stayed at school. Exceptions were made for students with medical conditions that required technology to monitor health, such as diabetes.

Gazmararian et al. (2025) carried out pre- and post-program surveys with staff; parents were surveyed prior to the program; and students were surveyed annually (student n = 2050 in 6th-8th grades; typically aged 11-14 years).

Results of the staff survey post-implementation showed that phone and smartwatch use during class time dramatically declined. The most common problems were students expressing worries about their inability to contact parents from their devices and general resistance to providing their devices. Amongst staff the programme was perceived to lead to a notable increase in student focus, reduced distractions, and fewer behavioural issues, with many staff respondents also seeing improved engagement and less tardiness.

Parents considered that 'safety/safe/emergency' should be the highest priority regarding the impact of student mobile devices.

Comparing student surveys before/after implementation, amongst 7th grade students, there was an increase in respect from teachers (4%) and in productive classroom behaviours (13%). There was also an increase in rates of bullying on social networks (1–7%) and a decrease in adults to contact when they needed help (6%). For 8th grade students, there were similar increases in rates of productive classroom behaviours (22%) and bullying on social networks (3–10%), in addition to unique increases in feeling successful in school (12%) and adults to contact when they needed help (7%).

Preliminary feedback and data indicated that the program was well received with a notable positive impact on teachers and students. It was considered that the

thoughtful approach to obtain feedback of concerns during the planning stage as well as ongoing monitoring and solicitation of feedback from students, teachers, and parents was likely a critical component to ensure acceptability of the programme. Strong programme leadership and responding to early concerns were also seen as important.

- School phone policies and their association with mental wellbeing, phone use, and social media use (SMART Schools): a cross-sectional observational study [14].

The SMART Schools study conducted a cross-sectional observational study between 2022-2023 with adolescents (n = 1227; aged 12-15 years) from 30 English secondary schools, comprising 20 with restrictive (recreational phone use is not permitted) and 10 with permissive (recreational phone use is permitted) policies. The primary outcome measures were mental wellbeing (assessed using Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale [WEMWBS]). Secondary outcome measures included smartphone and social media time.

No evidence of a difference between groups was observed for mean WEMWBS mental wellbeing score when controlling for other variables. Regarding the mental health outcomes of anxiety and depression, there was no evidence of a significant difference between permissive and restrictive schools.

Students attending restrictive schools had significantly lower in school smartphone time and social media time compared to students in permissive schools. However, this reduced use in schools with restrictive phone policies did not manifest in differences in the overall time spent on phones and social media. Increases in smartphone and social media time were associated with reduced mental wellbeing on a weekday, on a weekend day, and across a week, although in-school phone and social media use was non-significant.

This study does not provide evidence to support the use of school policies that prohibit phone use during the school day in their current form, given that no differences were observed in mental, physical, and academic outcomes for adolescents attending schools that permit, versus restrict phone use. However, the negative associations found between increasing time spent on phones/social media and worsened mental health and wellbeing do provide evidence on the need to address phone and social media use in adolescents, and school policies should be developed as part a more holistic approach.

- Secondary school smartphone policies in England: a descriptive analysis of how schools rationalize, design, and implement restrictive and permissive phone policies [4].

This study provides a descriptive analysis of the content and implementation of smartphone policies across 30 secondary schools in England, comparing schools that do (permissive) or do not (restrictive) allow phone use during recreational time. School policy documents were collected, along with survey data from pupil (n = 1198; aged 12-13 years and 14-15 years), teacher (n = 53), and SLT (n = 30) participants between 2022-2023.

Pupils in permissive schools showed significantly lower agreement than pupils in restrictive schools, that most teachers understand the school phone rules. However, pupils in permissive schools showed significantly higher agreement than pupils in restrictive schools, that most pupils support the school phone rules, and that most pupils follow the school phone rules. When students were consulted on the school phone policy rules, they indicated a preference for rules around the use of phones within the classroom to prevent them from becoming a distraction to learning.

Teachers/Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in restrictive schools showed significantly higher agreement than those in permissive schools, that most pupils understand the school phone rules. Furthermore, teachers/SLT in restrictive schools showed significantly higher agreement than those in permissive schools that most teachers support, and ensure the pupils follow the school phone rules.

Evidence from this study suggests that rather than simply prohibiting phone use during the school day, the challenge for schools is to develop more balanced and collaborative approaches to phone use, and that resemble a middle ground between a blanket ban and unstructured use. Overall, people tend to be more supportive of rules if they have been involved in designing them. Furthermore, it is important to contextualize policies in the needs of the local context.

Disconnect To Reconnect: How Variations between Types of Smartphone Bans Influence Students' Well-being and Social Connectedness in Dutch Secondary Education [15].

The researchers explored to what extent the type of smartphone ban (i.e., partial versus full) in Dutch secondary schools influenced problematic social media use and screentime, well-being, social connectedness at school, bullying at school, and cyberbullying; and whether these associations were moderated by sex.

Students (678 boys, 687 girls, and 33 students who preferred not to disclose their sex at birth; mean age = 16.2 years) from 27 secondary schools completed a digital survey. Additionally, another survey regarding several school policies was filled out by one school employee (i.e., rector, vice-rector, teacher, school psychologist, etc.).

Overall, the study finds that full smartphone bans offer no clear advantages over partial bans in reducing problematic social media use, improving student well-being, or decreasing bullying and cyberbullying. Across multiple outcomes, students in fully restricted schools showed similar levels of social media use, well-being, and peer relationships to those in partially restricted schools. Notably, stricter bans were associated with lower school belonging among girls and reduced student–teacher connectedness for both boys and girls, suggesting that full bans may introduce unintended social costs without delivering substantial additional benefits compared to more moderate restrictions.

Evidence summarised from reports

- *Disconnect: the case for a smartphone ban in schools* [16].

The think tank 'Policy Exchange' distributed a 'Freedom of Information' request survey to a random sample of 800 UK schools in 2023 asking about their mobile phone policy and the number of mobile phone confiscations in the Autumn Term 2023. Also, a subset of secondary schools in England were investigated on any correlation between the type of ban and school performance. Of the 800 requests, 177 primary and 230 secondary schools responded, including 12 primary and 24 secondary schools in Scotland.

Across the UK, 84% of primary schools had 'Effective bans' (phones not permitted on school grounds; phones removed at start of school day). For secondary schools, 11% had an 'Effective ban', 52% had a 'Ban with phone present' (phone use not permitted, but students can retain phones) and 36% had a 'Partial ban' (phones used for educational purposes and during breaks). No schools had 'No ban'.

In Scotland, no schools had an 'Effective ban', 88% had a 'Ban with phone present' and 8% were categorised as having a 'Partial ban'. No schools had 'no ban'. The response rate for this question for Scotland was 24 out of 50 total responses.

In England, secondary schools with an 'Effective ban' had 26 confiscations, schools with 'Banned but phone present' had 159 confiscations, and 'Partial ban' schools had 141 confiscations. In Scotland, there were 10 confiscations in 'Partial ban' schools, with only 4 schools answering this question.

Secondary schools in England with an 'Effective ban' had only a marginally higher score than schools with other policies, a difference that was not statistically significant.

The report recommends that school leaders should implement effective bans on mobile phones, and that this should involve phones being handed in or stored in

lockers, Yondr pouches, or equivalent, at the beginning of each day, or alternatively banned from site.

- *Smartphone policies in schools: what does the evidence say?* [17].

The Digital Futures for Children centre conducted a scoping review - a 'review of reviews' - on the efficacy of school smartphone policies, with most of the research identified in the report concerning secondary school students.

School smartphone policies vary considerably in content and implementation, and "few, if any" schools have implemented outright bans.

Several studies show benefits for students' academic performance when smartphone use is restricted, especially for less advantaged children or children whose performance is suboptimal. However, the results are mixed, with methods being contested and some studies showing no benefits or even harmful effects.

Many teachers, parents and students favour restrictions on school smartphone access and use at school. Smartphone policies should be underpinned by a digital literacy curriculum that encompasses privacy, safety, genre, learning outcomes and monitoring, and embedded in wider policies to bridge school and home use. Policies will likely be more effective when the views of students, teachers, parents and school leaders have been considered.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this report that should be noted. In particular, the rapid turnaround from initiation of the report to production meant that a systematic and rigorous review could not be developed. Therefore, this is a rapid review, and by their nature reviews of this type are not systematic and comprehensive. This limits the reliability of the review and the capacity to generalise the findings to other settings.

The search was limited to high-income countries and English-language studies since 2020. Again, this narrowed the search but was seen as pragmatic given the time constraints. The included evidence-base (11 peer-reviewed articles and 2 reports) is relatively small and diverse. Different national contexts are included and the terminology used across the studies varies, with, for example, the term 'ban' covering policies that fell short of a complete ban.

The included studies were not assessed on quality, and a range of different research designs, populations, sample sizes and outcomes were included. Several studies

relied on self-reporting to measure outcomes and across the studies short follow-up periods were used to measure behavioural outcomes. The different outcomes within and across studies included academic achievement, pupil engagement and social interactions, bullying and cyberbullying, and mental health and wellbeing issues. This diversity of measures within different contexts and using different definitions makes drawing overall conclusions difficult. As Rahali et al. [17] concluded it is “difficult to systematically review the evidence in any meaningful way”. There is a clear need for further, more rigorous research to be conducted to inform policy.

Recommendations

These recommendations should be interpreted within the context of the limitations outlined above.

1. *Replace Blanket “Bans” with Regulated, Purpose-led UseLed Use-Led Use*

Schools could consider moving away from framing mobile phone policies as absolute bans and instead propose adopting clear, **feasible regulations** that limit phone use during the school day while allowing phones on site (e.g. stored in lockers or pouches).

2. *Enable School-led, Co-designed PoliciesLed, CoDesigned Policies-Led, Co-Designed Policies*

Policymakers should consider granting schools the **autonomy to design phone policies collaboratively with students, staff, and parents**. Co-design enhances legitimacy, acceptability, and compliance, particularly given the importance of phones to students’ autonomy and sense of agency. Co-design enhances legitimacy, acceptability, and compliance, particularly given the importance of phones to students’ autonomy and sense of agency. -design enhances legitimacy, acceptability, and compliance, particularly given the importance of phones to students’ autonomy and sense of agency.

3. *Embed Phone Restrictions within a Wider Digital Wellbeing Framework*

Mobile phone policies could be embedded within **broader approaches to digital wellbeing**, including digital literacy, e-safety education, mental health promotion, and positive social interaction strategies. Restrictions may be effective when paired with education and support, such as safety education, mental health promotion, and positive social interaction strategies. Restrictions are most effective when paired with education and support. -safety education, mental health promotion, and positive social interaction strategies. Restrictions are most effective when paired with education and support.

4. Support Student Responsibility, Autonomy, and Individual Needs

Policies could support the development of **self-management and responsible device use**, providing opportunities for students to demonstrate responsible behaviour. Additional support could be considered for students who rely on phones for medical purposes, emotional regulation or social connection, and discreet parent-student communication.

5. Implement Gradually, and Base Decisions on Evidence

Changes to phone policies should be **introduced gradually**, supported by leadership and clear communication. Those implementing phone policies should have regard for emerging evidence when reviewing and evaluating policies.

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ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children’s Services
DATE	17 February 2026
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Committee Update - Early Intervention Support Service – The Bridge Service
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/26/015
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
REPORT AUTHOR	Emma Powell, Elaine Thomson
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1, 1.1.2,1.1.3

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report aims to update Members on early progress in implementing an Early Intervention Service Test of Change at Riverbank School for younger primary school pupils from August 2025.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

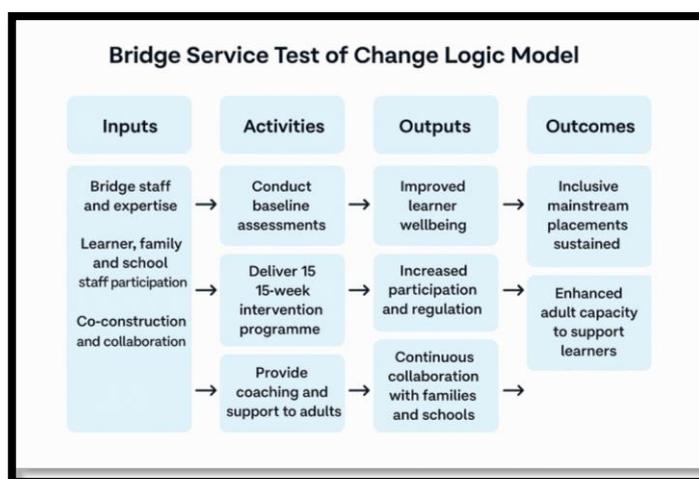
- 2.1 Note progress made in establishing The Early Intervention Support Service, The Bridge Service, and interim learning informing next steps; and
- 2.2 Instruct the Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to scope a Secondary Early Intervention Support Service and present an operational model to Committee for approval before the end of the calendar year.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Bridge Service was commissioned following the identification of a small number of learners who face significant barriers to attending, engaging, and progressing in their mainstream home school setting.
- 3.2 The Bridge Service focuses on supporting learners with Complex Additional Support Needs, their families, and their schools to gain the knowledge, skills, confidence, and trust needed to sustain inclusive mainstream school placements. This ensures children can participate and achieve in their learning journeys—fully seen, heard, and understood *and*, to achieve in a way that is meaningful to them.
- 3.3 This report reflects on the steps taken to establish The Bridge Service and shares emerging impact data, pending a more comprehensive evaluation carried out by the Educational Psychology Service later in the year. Members should note that this report does not articulate all of the evaluation approaches used but rather gives a flavour to provide assurance to Members.

APPROACH TAKEN TO ON-GOING EVALUATION

- 3.4 As a Test of Change, evaluation is central to the establishment, operation and on-going development of The Bridge Service. This approach is helping to ensure that learning (both positive and negative) is captured and directly informs the development of the service. There is both internal evaluation from within The Bridge Service team, and external through The Educational Psychology Service.
- 3.5 The staff team exhibit a strong commitment to co-create systems, processes, and practices. The extended Bridge Service community—including learners, families, schools, and partners—are actively encouraged to co-design through mixed-methods of engagement.



PHASED MOBILISATION PLAN

- 3.6 Following committee approval of the Operational Guidance in late April 2025, the Committee instruction was to have a fully functioning Bridge Service by August 2025. To achieve this ambitious timeline, the process was organised into five programme phases:

Conceptualising	Designing	Developing	Implementing	Living
Jan/Feb	Mar/May	May/Jun	Jun/Aug	Aug/Ongoing

- 3.7 **The Design Phase (May 2025):** To strengthen the design phase through co-creation, all Head Teachers and the Quality Improvement Team were introduced to the service model. Using a polarisation and Diamond 9 exercise, their analysed data highlighted key priorities, which aligned with the Service operational guidance:

Head teacher/QIO Leadership Key Priorities



3.8 The overall response from Head Teachers was overwhelmingly positive, with two main concerns raised:

Transport – Identified as a potential barrier to equitable service access and this was worked through for the length of the pilot. This may have to be considered more fully in the future.

Length of Intervention – Head Teachers were reassured that intervention is responsive to the child’s needs and may continue for more than one cycle.

3.9 The Developing phase focused on producing a comprehensive Bridge Service Action Plan to align with ‘business as usual’ arrangements across schools and education services, guided by Quality Indicators from How Good Is Our School (HGIOS) 4. This prioritised plan successfully enabled service leads to progress within a tight timescale.

3.10 Action Plan Priority 1: Delivering intervention for up to 10 children

Extensive consideration was given to the intervention process, including testing multiple prototypes. The agreed approach was to identify all 10 learners for placement at the start of the academic session, ensuring optimal use of time and allowing for up to three 14-week intervention cycles across the year. While three cycles were not anticipated as necessary, this flexibility provided confidence in the model.

3.11 Action Plan Priority 2: Delivering a robust referral process

A structured timeline was developed and met for the Request for Assistance (RfA) process. Time was also invested in defining criteria to ensure there were clear identifiers for referral to help ensure that the group of learners thought most likely to benefit would be selected.

3.12 A digital Request for Assistance (RfA) format was designed to ensure efficiency and the collection of high-quality data to support decision-making. The format takes a different approach to other established systems by including express questions, rating scales, and both qualitative and quantitative data to help provide a robust baseline of information. Head Teacher feedback informed the inclusion of Participation and Leuven scales to capture wellbeing and engagement.

3.13 Head Teachers all recognised the need for timely completion of the Request for Assistance (RfA) and submitted requests for 41 children (from 50% of primary schools and one private nursery) from across the city. Referrals were then filtered to 20 learners, followed by observations by the Principal Teacher Autism Outreach, identified Bridge teacher and panel. We conclude that a comprehensive forum for decision making was developed and this ensured an equitable approach. The final cohort of learners comprises 10 learners from 10 different schools (21% of city schools):

3.14 Action Plan Priority 3: Delivering a skilled team

To deliver The Bridge Service effectively, staff were selected from Orchard Brae's existing teams due to their advanced skills and experience. This approach ensured a high level of skill while maintaining a cost-neutral model. The Team is comprised of:

- Teacher from the Autism Outreach Service who is trained in nurture principles, a range of therapeutic interventions, experienced in sensory profiling, neuro affirming, is an experienced mainstream primary teacher and has a proven ability to work collaboratively with families and schools to enhance learner outcomes.
- Early Years Practitioners (2) and Pupil Support Assistants (2) – skilled in supporting learners who have complex additional support needs and experience dysregulation, consistently use relational practice and who have the skills to share transactional supports and strategies with both families and educators.
- An Occupational Therapist has the role as a highly skilled Family Support Practitioner, to take the lead on facilitating and building family relationships and support into The Bridge Service, based on the co-creation model being championed for cohort 1.

3.15 Staffing allocations were achieved by returning staff from secondment and adjusting work priorities. While this enabled The Bridge Service to launch effectively, it is important to acknowledge that Orchard Brae is currently operating without these skilled staff, which may impact its capacity in other areas. The service will monitor the impacts on Orchard Brae carefully but do not feel that further action is required at this time .

3.16 In order to support this team proactively, the Executive Head Teacher Orchard Brae has undertaken supervision training and rolled out a program of support which has been well received. This will be maintained to ensure that staff are well supported over the lifetime of the Test of Change.

3.17 Action Plan Priority 4: Delivering partnerships

Family support was identified as an essential component of The Bridge Service work, but partners were understandably concerned about removing resources from elsewhere to enable the provision of a suitably skilled member of staff. As a result, an Occupational Therapist has been secured through Scottish Government resources allocated to support those with Additional Support Needs. An Occupational Therapist now acts as our Family Support lead.

- 3.18 The Educational Psychology Service are working in partnership with The Bridge Service leadership team however, securing other external partners has been less successful given the demands on their own services. This remains an area of focus.
- 3.19 Action Plan Priority 5: Delivering a responsive but safe environment
The Family Room articulates our commitment to relational practice and offers a safe space for exploration. Environmental audits evidence the affirming learning space inside and out however, the bell remains a challenge and requires further consideration. This consideration is on-going.
- 3.20 Working within a cost neutral model, almost all equipment, toys and resources have been gifted or repurposed by colleagues and partners across our city schools.
- 3.21 **The Implementation Phase:** As implementation commenced in August 2025, the core team were in a period of transition to ensure that the children and young people at Orchard Brae were not left unsupported on their return from the school holiday period.
- 3.22 Ten learners began their transition into The Bridge Service through a staggered start from 1st September 2025. Prior to this, Bridge staff visited home schools to gather detailed information using their bespoke Sensory, Predictability, Acceptance, Achievement, Communication, Empathy (SPAACE) document. This process enabled staff to build strong relationships not only with the children but also with home school teams.
- 3.23 To foster collaboration and clarify expectations, Open Afternoons were held for home school staff, partners, and parents/carers. Following the relocation of one learner out of the city, another learner from the original RfA list was identified and began placement in October, maintaining the number of pupils at ten.
- 3.24 All learners currently attend four sessions per week (2 hours each), providing 8 hours of Bridge time weekly. To stabilise, understand, and address individual support needs, each child has a comprehensive and evolving profile in place, which includes a:
- Learning Care Plan, incorporating a Person-Centred Risk Assessment (PCRA);
 - Sensory, Predictability, Acceptance, Achievement, (SPAACE) Overview, including a mini profile;
 - Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, Transactional Support. (SCERTS) Assessment and Plan, co-constructed with family and home school staff, firmly focused on learner voice;
 - In-depth Sensory Assessment and Plan, developed collaboratively with family and home school staff;
 - Personalised Intervention Map;
 - Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, Transactional Support. (SCERTS) Activity Plan and Visual Transactional Support Profile;
 - “All Day Long, All Day Strong” Visual Regulation Strategy Plan;

- Non-Negotiables for Consistent Support;
 - Communication Tools; and
 - Daily Session Plans.
- 3.25 Three case conferences take place for each child during every Intervention cycle. These meetings have a clear focus on addressing key priorities; however, evidence suggests further adjustments are needed to ensure closer alignment across all parties, most notably capturing key voices of all stakeholders, continuing to centre the learners and their families, but ensuring previous multi-agency learning is capitalised on, and a focus on transitioning back to the home school and planning for this.
- 3.26 A range of pedagogies, systems, and practices are utilised to ensure consistency around the quality of support, whilst also ensuring that these are transferable to the home school, understood and actioned. The impact of these approaches continues to be routinely analysed for effectiveness with a view to either Adopting, Adapting or Abandoning as part of the real-world research being undertaken by the team.
- 3.27 Professional learning for The Bridge Service staff was identified and delivered. Feedback on the training was overwhelmingly positive, raising confidence across all team members.
- 3.28 Co-creation with families has been a key tenet of the implementation phase with families helping identify priorities and shape working practices. Evidence highlights its critical role in the positive feedback and key engagement from families. The Bridge Service Family Room provides a safe and welcoming space for families to come together, fostering shared understanding and reducing isolation. This environment helps quickly establish a sense of belonging for most families, supported by the skilled relational approaches of staff—particularly the Family Support Worker.
- 3.29 Evidence gathered demonstrates that families trust The Bridge Service staff, and there is a growing correlation between parents’ sense of felt safety and children’s ability to regulate their emotions. The Family Support Lead offers a range of responsive strategies to enhance families’ knowledge, skills, confidence, and trust. To date, families have participated in 10 group sessions and over 30 individual sessions, delivered both at The Bridge Service and in their homes. Parents consistently praise the prompt response to queries, which are addressed through phone calls and other communication channels in addition to scheduled sessions. The Family Support Padlet, offering extensive signposting and learning resources, has also been highly valued by parents.
- 3.30 Feedback indicates a strong sense of satisfaction among families, with many expressing that they feel “accepted and not judged” and that The Bridge Service is going “above and beyond.” One father remarked that the service has “overachieved” for his child. These efforts have led to significant positive outcomes for children particularly at home, including milestones such as improved self-regulation. The majority of families report that The Bridge Service is helping their children overcome challenges, to discover and celebrate their strengths—some previously unknown.

- 3.31 Partnership with Home Schools is central to the model. Significant effort has been invested in developing effective partnerships through a range of measures. These partnerships are established prior to any child transitioning into the Bridge, ensuring a smooth and supportive process. There is a need now to work with head teachers to very clearly define the expectations of the Home School, to realise greater consistency in our partnerships with home schools.
- 3.32 **IMPACT AND KEY INSIGHTS:** The Bridge Service aligns with the Scottish Government's Four Pillars of Inclusion (2019), which are essential for creating inclusive educational environments. These pillars have been used to help shape this midpoint report. The four pillars are:
- **Present – Ensuring learners are physically or virtually present in the learning environment.**
 - **Supported – Providing appropriate resources and assistance to meet individual needs.**
 - **Participating** – Actively engaging learners in meaningful learning experiences.
 - **Achieving** – Enabling progress and attainment through inclusive practices
- 3.33 **'Present' Impact at Midpoint:** Attendance data at this stage is highly encouraging. Most learners demonstrate strong engagement with The Bridge Service despite complex transitions. While headline attendance figures for a few learners appear lower, deeper analysis reveals substantial gains in actual learning time.
- 3.34 Home school attendance has improved for the majority of learners, though decreased for a few. These figures require nuanced interpretation to reflect individual circumstances
- 3.35 Family attendance and collaboration has been significant, even among adults with demanding work commitments. The Bridge Service staff have conducted multiple visits to home schools, though acknowledge the need to increase this presence. Conversely, home school staff attendance at the Bridge has been limited in some cases due to staffing constraints. Evidence suggests a difference of opinion among schools with some requesting more visits whilst others are satisfied with current levels and one requesting fewer visits. This requires to be explored more fully.
- 3.36 Next Steps under the Pillar of 'Present' are to:
- **Increase Attendance:** continue to work closely with home schools to increase attendance
 - **Strengthen Partnerships:** explore if a formal agreement with home schools would be beneficial, to include engagement with The Bridge and resourcing
- 3.37 **'Supported' Impact at Midpoint:** All families report that their children feel safe at The Bridge Service and experience a strong sense of belonging. Data

indicates that key adults around each child recognise the positive impact of The Bridge Service's relational practice, with children demonstrating consistently positive daily Leuven well-being levels.

- 3.38 Learner voice remains central to The Bridge Service practice. Learners, through mixed-method feedback, express joy and contentment and, in some cases, can articulate what contributes to that feeling. Sensory plans and regulation supports have significantly enhanced daily experiences for most children. Communication strategies have been tailored to individual needs; for example, one child now uses Makaton signing, with their family recently completing an introductory course provided by Orchard Brae's Makaton tutor. This development has reduced frustration, as the child feels heard and understood across Bridge, School and home.
- 3.39 Evidence gathered notes that for the majority of learners, both the intensity and frequency of behaviours of concern have decreased across settings, and the time required to return to a regulated state has reduced. Co-regulation strategies are proving effective. One child demonstrated self-regulation skills being generalised by requesting a proprioceptive "squeeze" from their speech and language therapist for the first time.
- 3.40 Families report improved regulation in community settings, enabling greater participation and confidence. For instance, one child successfully completed their first long-distance train journey, broadening their experiences. Evidence also shows that parents feel more confident in supporting their child's regulation—one parent noted they now communicate better and remain more contained during challenging situations, while others expressed feeling less guilty and more proactive. Many parents voiced concerns about maintaining progress post-Bridge supports, stating, "*We don't want all hard work to unravel,*" and seek reassurance that the Bridge community will sustain contact.
- 3.41 Schools have acknowledged The Bridge Service's support as beneficial, strengthening staff knowledge, skills, confidence, and trust. However, some schools have requested clearer information on interventions and expressed concerns about The Bridge Service's understanding of home school contexts and expectations.
- 3.42 Next Steps under the Pillar of 'Supported' include:
- **Enhance System Integration:** Explore school needs further and adjust plans to ensure Bridge staff spend more time in home schools earlier in the intervention process.
 - **Embed Transactional Support:** Further share and implement planned transactional support strategies within home schools in the new year; monitor confidence levels among key adults.
 - **Alignment Meetings:** Establish bi-weekly meetings to ensure consistent communication and alignment between The Bridge Service, home schools, and families.

- **Improve Communication Platforms:** Review home school diaries and See-Saw platform to ensure information clearly reflects the impact of interventions and transactional support.
 - **Post-Bridge Family Support:** Develop strategies to maintain family engagement and sustain progress beyond placement.
- 3.43 **‘Participating’ Impact at Midpoint:** All learners accessing The Bridge Service have demonstrated consistent levels of participation and engagement in learning activities offered both across the Bridge learning environment (in/out - side) and in their home school. These experiences are built on learner interests and delivered through a play-based pedagogy, making learning irresistible for many children. As a result, learners are experiencing success and joy in their educational journey, which was identified as a priority back in the design phase. This approach provides Bridge staff with numerous opportunities for in-depth observation and quality interactions, enabling a deeper understanding of each child. These insights inform learner preferences and guide the development of effective transactional support strategies.
- 3.44 Schools that have visited The Bridge Service report that observing their pupils in this environment has been valuable in gaining further understanding of need. Similarly, parents have had opportunities to observe their children in the learning space.
- 3.45 All children have formed positive relationships with key adults, engaging in meaningful social communication at their own Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, Transactional Support (SCERTS) level. A few learners have even begun forming friendships with peers—one child proudly shared with his family that he had a “best friend at the Bridge.” For The Bridge Service staff, this milestone provided an opportunity to further support friendship development, an area that had been identified as being tricky for this learner.
- 3.46 Next Steps under the Pillar of ‘Participating’ include:
- **Strengthen Home-School Alignment**
 - Share participation data and insights with home schools to inform classroom approaches.
 - Begin phased integration of successful Bridge strategies into home school routines.
 - Create further resource packs for families and schools to replicate engagement strategies.
 - **Embed Play-Based Pedagogy Beyond The Bridge Service**
 - Provide training for home school staff on play-based learning strategies that have proven effective.
 - **Monitor and Extend Participation Gains**
 - Continue tracking Leuven Scale scores and compare progress across settings.
 - Identify learners who show increased group participation and gradually extend these experiences in home schools.

3.47 **'Achieving' Impact at Midpoint**

Experiencing success was identified as a key outcome of The Bridge Service interventions during initial family consultations within the design phase. Evidence gathered to date confirms that all learners have experienced success—within The Bridge Service, at home, and, for the majority, in their home schools. Success looks different for each learner and is highly personalised. For many, it includes significant “firsts.” For example, one father proudly shared that his child demonstrated the actions to “*Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*” for the first time, bringing joy and hope to the entire family. This moment fostered a renewed sense of trust and optimism that had not previously existed.

3.48 Data indicates that all learners have built on previous skills and there is evidence of generalising these skills across home and school settings. One school leader described how a learner successfully applied new regulation strategies, now joining group activities with greater social confidence and energy alignment than ever before.

3.49 The majority of parents report feeling hopeful after witnessing their children achieve meaningful progress. The Bridge Service staff also express pride in being part of this journey, while noting that they are working with patience to support key adults to fully recognise the importance of their role in providing consistent transactional supports so that learners can achieve their potential – recognising that adults hold different values and have different experiences.

3.50 Next Steps under the Pillar of 'Achieving' include:

1. **Strengthen Home-School Collaboration**

- Share evidence of learner success and provide practical guidance on embedding transactional supports in busy home school classroom environments – use See- Saw and the Lens on Learning program to greater effect
- Monitor and review their effectiveness through regular feedback loops with staff and families.

2. **Support Skill Generalisation**

- Create opportunities for learners to practice new skills in varied contexts (home, school, community).
- Collect and analyse data on skill transfer and achievement in home schools.

3. **Plan for Sustained Support**

- Develop a post-Bridge Service support plan for each learner in collaboration with other services to maintain progress after Bridge staff step back.
- Offer family workshops and check-ins to reinforce strategies and reduce anxiety about transition

3.51 **CHALLENGES/CONCERNS VOICED**

A few schools remain uncertain whether the range of transactional supports will be sufficient within the busy home school environment, given the differences between The Bridge Service and school contexts. The Bridge Service provides children with opportunities to develop new skills, practice them repeatedly in a predictable environment, and then generalise these skills. We hope to address

these concerns as we work closely with primary Head Teachers to further clarify and agree our partnership arrangements and have taken the decision to extend the current Bridge Intervention Cycle to allow additional time to cohort 1 to practice their skills in their home school. This should increase our effectiveness and impact with cohort 2.

3.52 While there is a general shared understanding of expectations, some schools have expressed ambiguity and identified a mismatch between anticipated support and the reality of lived experience. Adjustments have been made to communication and planning processes to ensure expectations are clarified and agreed upon and that the testing of interventions is undertaken in the home school as well as within The Bridge. The details of the interface with the home school will be explored through our planned work with Head Teachers as outlined at para 3.50.

3.53 Families have voiced concerns about sustaining progress without the level of support currently provided. It is essential that other services collaborate with The Bridge Service staff to ensure ongoing support as Bridge involvement gradually reduces. The extension of the intervention cycle for cohort 1 will afford time to address this.

3.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Bridge Service is demonstrating initial evidence of impact for some of Aberdeen's most complex mainstream learners. It is helping Aberdeen City respond to a need both local and national as detailed with the Educational Psychology Service's Exploration of Learners' Needs with an innovative local solution.

3.6.1 Early evidence is showing improving outcomes for learners and their families, and strengthening inclusive practice across the schools involved. Further evaluation with all parties being carried out by the Educational Psychology Service will help illustrate this. Ongoing refinement of communication, alignment, and sustainability planning will further enhance its long-term effectiveness and improve outcomes for this and future cohorts.

3.6.2 The encouraging progress from the beginning of this test of change demonstrates merit in exploring a Secondary Support Service based on the learning from The Bridge Service. With Member approval, a secondary model will now be explored with a proposed Operating Model presented to Committee for approval later in the year.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 every education authority must make adequate and efficient provision for the additional support required by each child or young person having additional

needs and monitor and review that support. This Report addresses how these duties can be fulfilled more effectively.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Risk of young people not being appropriately supported and unable to achieve positive destinations	Training for staff and appropriate supports in place for young people. Test of change will reduce potential risk	L	Yes
Compliance	Risk of not complying with legislation and legal challenge (tribunals)	Mitigated by young people receiving the appropriate level of support	M	Yes
Operational	Staff feeling overwhelmed leading to low morale	Mitigated by offering high quality professional learning to ensure staff can meet their statutory duties under The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 and the Equality Act 2010.	L	Yes
Financial	Risk of not having sufficient resource	Mitigated by realigning current services to better meet the needs of our young people in Aberdeen City today.	L	Yes
Reputational	Risk of not effectively meeting the needs of all learners	Services realigned to better meet the needs of our young people in Aberdeen City.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	Risk of environmental factors inhibiting positive outcomes for learners	Single service realignment will strengthen universal/targeted support and sharing of	L	Yes

		best practice, thus preventing escalation of need through strengthened practice and reasonable adjustment.		
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8. OUTCOMES

Council Delivery Plan 2024	
Impact of Report	
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following ACC Priorities:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise attainment and achievement • Support improvement in the health and wellbeing of children and young people • Maximise the impact Of Early Learning and Childcare
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026</u>	
<p>Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The proposals support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 3 - 95% of all children will reach their expected developmental milestones by their 27-30 month review by 2026. Through offering support to all parents and sharing parenting opportunities we will create networks of support for families of children with additional support needs.</p> <p>The proposals within this report also support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 6 – 95% of children living in our priority neighbourhoods (Quintiles 1 & 2) will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026. Through developing partnerships and working with families to ensure all young people have access to a positive destination</p> <p>The proposals within this report also support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 8– 100% of children with Additional Support Needs/Disabilities will experience a positive destination by 2026. Through developing partnerships and working with families to ensure all young people have access to a positive destination. Through improving support for parents and supporting young people with an early intervention model.</p>
<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The proposals in this report seek to ensure the best use of resource in the system, promoting an understanding of the circumstances of individual children and young people to ensure that appropriate and timely personalised support is available to them.</p> <p>Effective use of resources will help to ensure all initiatives and interventions impact positively on all children and young people and are particularly targeted at those who are adversely affected by poverty.</p>

	<p>Specific links to:</p> <p>Stretch Outcome 4 90% of children and young people report they feel listened to all of the time by 2026</p> <p>Stretch Outcome 6 95% of children living in our priority localities will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026</p> <p>Stretch Outcome 7 83.5% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026.</p>
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	Underpinning the work of all schools in Aberdeen City is reducing the poverty related attainment gap and achieving excellence and equity for all.
Community Empowerment Stretch Outcomes	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 16 – 50% of people report they feel able to participate in decisions that help change things for the better by 2026.</p> <p>There will be consultation with parents as part of the process for allocating additional support through the early intervention setting</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed. Integrated Impact Assessment
Data Protection Impact Assessment	
Other	

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 [Early Intervention Service \(April 2025 Report\)](#)

11. APPENDICES

None

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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