

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education Operational Delivery Committee
DATE	12 November 2019
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Supporting Children's Learning in an Empowered System
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/19/415
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Eleanor Sheppard
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1, 5 and 6

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 In January 2019 the Education Operational Delivery Committee requested a report on how effectively schools are able to meet the needs of those with Additional Support Needs
- 1.2 This report provides Elected Members with an overview of a consultation undertaken with staff to determine the effectiveness of current approaches and makes recommendations on how to further strengthen the system as we work towards an empowered system.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee:-

- 2.1 note the consultation undertaken with staff and the broad messages fed back as part of this consultation exercise, and instruct the Chief Operating Officer to work with staff in schools and Trade Unions to address the key themes emerging from the consultation in order to build a stronger universal, targeted and specialist provision; and
- 2.2 as part of the above engagement with colleagues, instruct the Chief Operating Officer to review the current provision of targeted and specialist support to

ensure that it is reshaped to meet current and future demand; and report on progress at the March meeting of this Committee.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 A presumption of mainstreaming was fully implemented across Aberdeen City from August 2014. In keeping with the national best practice at the time, this led to a presumption that all schools would work to ensure that appropriate provision was made for those in need of additional support. A consequence of this was that more children continued to access their local school rather than be transported to other settings unless their needs were of a particularly complex nature.
- 3.1.2 The policy change came as difficulties in recruitment were escalating. Recruitment challenges saw some Support for Learning staff having to be deployed as mainstream class teachers to provide a universal service in keeping with the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers' requirements. This decision, although necessary at the time, undoubtedly impacted on the advice and guidance available to class teachers to build teacher agency and empower the system.
- 3.1.3 Levels of vacancy are now reducing and it is a timely opportunity to review the impact of current approaches on the strength of our universal, targeted and specialist provision and plan next steps.

3.2.1 Current Demand

- 3.2.1 There have been significant changes in the needs of children and young people across the City. The changes are seen nationally and are not limited to Aberdeen.
- 3.2.2 In 2014 most children in need of additional support may have had a diagnosis including Autism Spectrum Disorder, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, English as a Second Language, or mild to moderate learning difficulties. This list is not comprehensive but gives an indication of the needs being met by schools and services at the time. A relatively small number of children were recognised as having Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder and other needs associated with past trauma.
- 3.2.3 As childhood mental health and the impact of trauma have become better understood, an increasing number of children and young people who are recognised as having very different needs present requiring a very different type of adaptation to be successful in school.
- 3.2.4 The Aspire Service was developed to help schools respond positively to children and young people with mental health needs but colleagues don't feel that the service is yet ideally placed to meet their needs. Work is currently underway to align the work of Aspire with that of Craigielea and Westburn to ensure that similar services across Integrated Children and Family Services are aligned to maximise their impact. Completion of this will allow the service to consider unmet needs and plan accordingly. Central to this work is working

with Community Planning Partners to consider how best to respond as a whole system to mental health needs.

3.2.5 This disconnect between demand and provision provides clear evidence that there are improvements to be made in how we support the full range of additional support needs. This is reinforced by the marginal increase in the number of Tribunal Cases.

3.2.6 It is important that we rectify this gap in provision quickly to ensure that children and young people have access to the right support at the right time and that we fully comply with our legal and statutory duties, in particular The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.

3.3.1 Consultation with Staff

3.3.2 In collaboration with Teaching Trade Unions and our Educational Psychology Service, a survey was developed for all staff in schools entitled *Supporting Children's Learning in Aberdeen City*. This approach is important as we work towards an empowered system where those supporting children and young people take a leading role in shaping improvement and Authority responses.

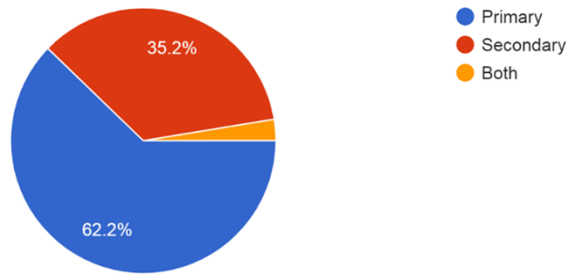
3.3.3 For clarity, staff were asked to respond with how confident they felt in meeting the needs of children at a universal, targeted or specialist level and to provide a justification for their answer. This open approach to consultation was thought to be best to elicit detailed responses from staff and give us a sound indication of how effectively our current system meets the needs of a wide range of learning needs.

3.3.4 In addition feedback was sought around the use of the SEEMiS wellbeing App which aims to support staff in monitoring and planning the wellbeing of those with an additional support needs. Comments were invited on the effectiveness of current approaches to planning through the App.

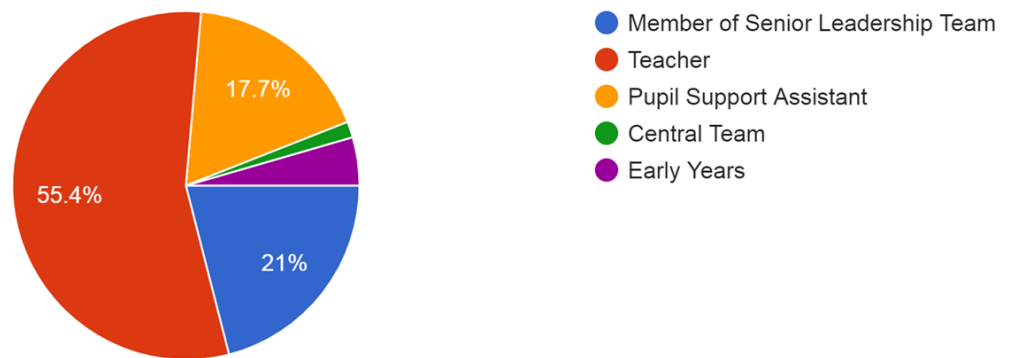
3.3.5 An electronic survey was disseminated with responses invited from Senior Leaders, teaching staff, Pupil Support Assistants, the Central Team, Senior Early Years Practitioners and Early Years Practitioners. Trade Unions helpfully also encouraged participation in the survey.

3.4.1 Responses to the survey

In total 540 responses were received with the majority (336 responses) being from staff in primary schools. 35% (190) responses came from the secondary sector with 14 responses (3%) from colleagues representing both sectors. Around a quarter of all staff working in Aberdeen City Council schools responded.



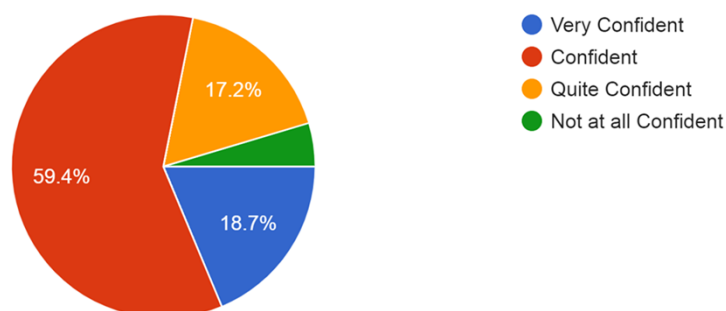
3.4.2 Responses were received from the full range of staff working across the Education Service.



3.4.3 Responses illustrated a strong desire from all staff to get it right for the children and young people of Aberdeen City but acknowledged that the needs of children are changing and that our current provision is not shaped around current need.

UNIVERSAL SUPPORT

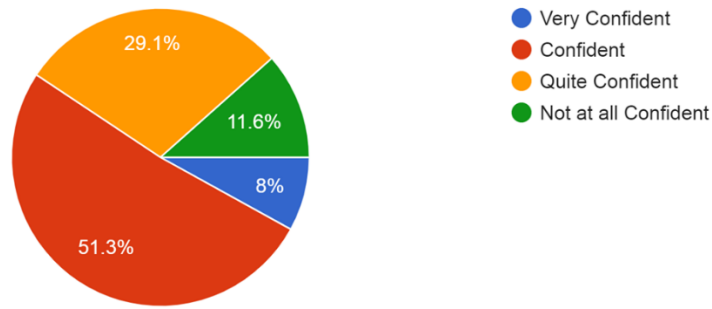
3.4.4 When asked how confident they felt about meeting the needs of children and young people at the universal stage, most staff expressed confidence. Given that universal support is the responsibility of individual teachers this is an encouraging response.



- 3.4.5 Staff who responded that they did not feel confident were asked to provide more information and some valuable learning can be elicited from these responses. Staff expressed frustration at not being consistently able to access professional learning due to staff shortages and expressed a desire to access training on a number of conditions and impairments. Many respondents expressed a need to tighten up approaches to differentiation whilst also seeking to reduce levels of bureaucracy to enable staff to invest time in developing resources appropriate to need.
- 3.4.6 Concerns were raised about the levels of literacy of some children entering S1 and the need to address this area as a partnership, interestingly this need can be tracked back to levels of literacy on entry to pre-school and primary education. Lack of engagement from some agencies was noted as unhelpful and limited the ability of staff to effectively support with one member of staff reporting that, ***'the right people in the right place at the right time is not always possible.'*** A planned partnership event in October designed to explore how best to work as a partnership Integrated Children's Service should support this area.
- 3.4.7 In light of this feedback it is proposed to:
- Review processes to minimise bureaucracy in keeping with the National Improvement Framework Plan;
 - Continue to embed robust Quality Improvement approaches to provide rigour around curriculum, learning and teaching and wellbeing;
 - Work with the partnership to explore how best to integrate Children's Services to maximise outcomes for children and young people;
 - Clarify expectations of staff through the development of a Learning and Teaching policy supported by professional learning;
 - Build leadership capacity to drive and support teacher agency;
 - Develop and deliver professional learning on differentiation to clarify expectations; and
 - Develop a programme of professional learning on the conditions and impairments noted in the survey.

TARGETED SUPPORT

- 3.5.1 Staff confidence decreased slightly when working with children in need of targeted support, this support can be delivered by school staff but could also include working with other colleagues across the education service and may include a number of professionals working with children. 11.6% of staff reported that they are not at all confident and 29% noting that they are quite confident

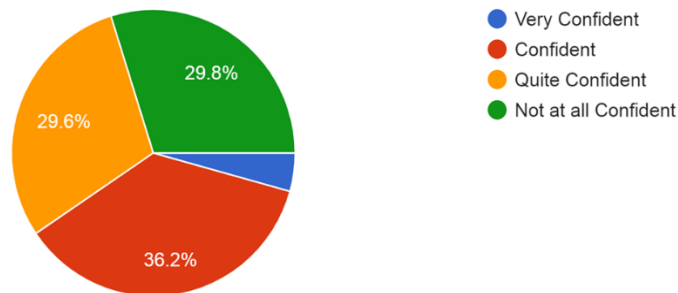


- 3.5.2 Staff were again asked to provide the rationale for their response and again, there is key learning for the service. Many references were made to a lack of staff and difficulties accessing services due in part to complex processes but also to the availability of staff to support particular cohorts of learners. Easy access to information on appropriate strategies for different groups was noted as an action for the Local Authority.
- 3.5.3 The lack of Support for Learning staff was identified as a vulnerability as well as a feeling that there was a need for a preventative social work support. This supports plans to reshape the working practices of the team of Educational Social Workers. Advice and guidance in developing plans (Individual Education Plans and Child's Plans) was a consistent theme for development and our Microsoft partner is currently working with us on this area.
- 3.5.4 There were references to how staff with low resilience find it hard to support children and young people who are complex and a request for advice and guidance on how to support learners who are operating many years out with expected levels of attainment.
- 3.5.5 In light of this feedback the Service intends to build a stronger targeted provision by:
- Reviewing the GIRFEC multi-agency guidance to address areas of vulnerability with regard to our partnership working and consider a consistent approach to the provision of family support so that we maximise our collective partnership offering;
 - Continue to work with People and Organisation to support staff to develop personal resilience;
 - Ensure the review of the Devolved School Management scheme enables schools to flexibly use resource to meet local need;
 - Further develop Partnership Forums to widen the supports immediately available across a locality;
 - Develop clear information on the services available and how to access them and determine any gaps in provision to inform planning;
 - Develop a comprehensive professional learning programme for staff working in Support for Learning to supplement the programme being made available to support staff this year
 - Ensure that both learning and wellbeing needs are planned for within the school estate strategy;
 - Review the role and remit of the Education Social Work team to ensure they help offer preventative support to children, young people and families; and

- Develop training materials to support the development of plans for children and continue to work with Microsoft to develop a streamlined and digital solution.

SPECIALIST SUPPORT

3.6.1 When asked about levels of confidence in supporting those with the most complex needs, confidence levels dropped further with nearly 30% reporting that they don't feel at all confident. Many children and young people with very complex needs have a significant multi-agency package of support and a learning pathway which may look very different to their peers.



3.6.2 Staff reported that there is a need for further training in specific conditions and coordination of more complex plans like Coordinated Support Plans and a need for specialist services to support the changing needs of our children and young people. One colleague noted that, '**the expertise is within schools but the manpower is not**' and a desire for more flexibility in finance to enable schools and localities to more effectively meet needs.

3.6.3 Behaviours associated with trauma were noted as the most challenging to support and staff are keen for further advice, guidance and intervention in this area.

3.6.4 Staff who use the Wellbeing App were generally happy with being asked to use the App but feel that the approach could be simplified. A number of staff commented that it can be cumbersome and asked that we review advice and guidance to improve the staff experience.

3.6.5 In light of this feedback it is important to now look to:

- Develop staff understanding of trauma;
- Continue to develop specialist learning pathways by working with a range of partners to offer a comprehensive senior phase with clearly understood roles and remits and governance framework;
- Review the current structure of targeted and specialist services to ensure that the needs of all children can be adequately and effectively supported at the earliest opportunity and within current budget; and
- Consider further devolvement of resource to local partnerships to empower multi-agency partners to take action as soon as needs escalate where appropriate.

3.7.1 General learning

Responses show the level of commitment shown to children and young people with additional support needs and a strong desire to get it right.

3.7.2 Staff have provided a clear agenda to drive forward with regard to improving their ability to meet the needs of children and young people in need of a strong universal or targeted offer. Central officers agree that the proposals are necessary and likely to strengthen and empower the system.

3.7.2 The provision of specialist support is more complex and will require close partnership working to maximise impact. Historical approaches have involved requesting additional resource in order to meet the needs of new groups but this approach is unsustainable given the level of financial commitment in this area. There is a need to look at where current resource is allocated and review these allocations based on current and future demand.

3.7.3 The approach to determining the improvements necessary was welcomed by colleagues. This transparent approach to service planning should be replicated when key strategic developments are being shaped.

3.8.1 Proposal for moving forward

It is proposed that a group comprising members of the central team, teaching staff, school leaders and Trade Union representatives be established to consider and implement the necessary actions from the consultation. The group would be empowered to make the changes deemed necessary to ensure that we have a system well placed to support the current and future range learning and wellbeing needs. It is proposed that progress be shared with Elected Members within two committee cycles.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Any redesign will make use of existing budgets.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Local Authority has many legal duties including those of:

- The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004
- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Financial	Risk of not having sufficient resource to meet the costs of OOA Placements	L	Mitigated by realigning services to better meet the needs of our young people in Aberdeen City today.
Legal	Non-compliance with legislation, financial claims and legal challenge (tribunals)	M	Mitigated by services being realigned to better meet the needs of our young people in Aberdeen City and prevent escalation of need
Employee	Staff are overwhelmed which leads to low morale as staff feel unable to meet the needs of vulnerable young people.	L	Mitigated by offering high quality professional learning for staff to ensure that they meet their statutory duties under The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004
Customer	Risk of not achieving outcomes for children and young people.	L	Potential changes to our provision will enable primary prevention and early intervention thereby reducing potential risk.
Reputational	Risk of not effectively meeting the needs of all learners.	L	Services realigned to better meet the needs of our young people in Aberdeen City.

7. OUTCOMES

Local Outcome Improvement Plan Themes	
	Impact of Report
Prosperous Economy	Ensuring the children and young people realise their potential will help achieve the two stretch aims: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% increase in employment across priority and volume growth sectors by 2026. • 90% of working age people in Living Wage employment by 2026.
Prosperous People	Four of the children's stretch aims are particularly relevant to this report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% of children (0-5years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% of children and young people will report that they feel mentally well by 2026. • 95% of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026.95% of children living in our priority localities will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026.
Prosperous Place	90% of the population in Aberdeen will feel environmentally and socially resilient in their communities by 2026.

Design Principles of Target Operating Model	
	Impact of Report
Customer Service Design	The activities undertaken to date and the planned next steps promote an understanding of the circumstances of individual children and young people to ensure that personalised support is available to them.
Organisational Design	Improved use of resource in the system.
Governance	Overseen by Chief Officers and by the Education Operational Delivery Committee.
Workforce	Ongoing clarity of expectations and statutory duties.
Process Design	Monitoring arrangements ensure that any vulnerabilities in the system are quickly addressed.
Technology	The plan includes improvement in the use of technology to deliver the most effective service and makes use of wider partnership support when appropriate.
Partnerships and Alliances	Significant partnership work is key to addressing the needs of our learners and the team is committed to building on existing relationships.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Equality & Human Rights Impact Assessment	Not required

Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Duty of Due Regard / Fairer Scotland Duty	Not applicable

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

10. APPENDICES

None

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Eleanor Sheppard
Chief Education Officer
esheppard@aberdeencity.gov.uk
01224 522707