



**Appendix A**

**Education Service**

**Self-Evaluation**

**2020/2021**



## Education Service Self-Evaluation 2020/2021

The pandemic has changed the lives of all children, young people and families across Aberdeen City forever. Given the gravity of our collective experience and the changed outlook for the city and the city's children and families, this self-evaluation will extend more widely than a review of the impact of our National Improvement Framework Plan (NIF) and:

- take stock of progress made over the last 2 or 3 years; and
- reflect on how the service adapted to face the demands of the pandemic and begin to consider areas that require continued acceleration or further improvement activity in order to 'build back better'.

This self-evaluation will inform the development of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan and the associated National Improvement Framework Plan by identifying areas where our improvement has been achieved and sustained and those areas which will require further single or multi-agency commitment and resource to drive improvement.



## Section 1 - Taking stock of progress

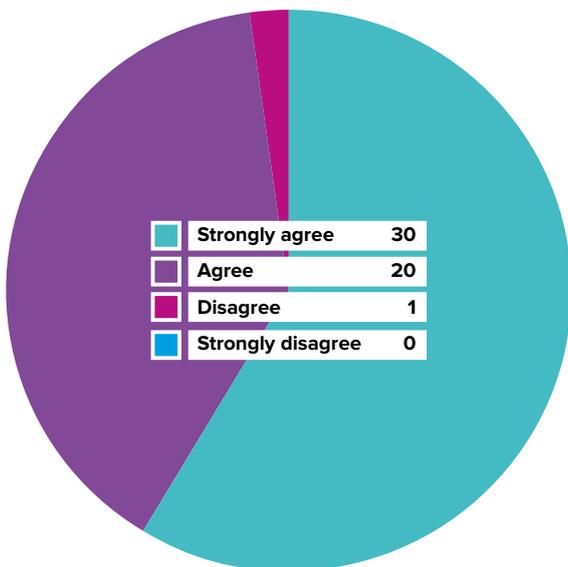
### a) ORGANISATIONAL DESIGN OF THE EDUCATION SERVICE and CULTURE WITHIN THE SERVICE

#### Organisational Design

The Education Service was restructured in late 2018 to align the education structure with the principles set out in the Target Operating Model, promote improved quality, foster closer internal and external working practices, appoint leaders with the capability to help shape the education service and align the roles and remits of the central team to key strategic priorities.

The disconnect that previously existed across the school, early years and inclusion central teams has been eradicated with all central staff now working to a shared agenda as set out in the LOIP and associated NIF. Progress and any emerging risks are shared openly at Service Manager meetings where plans are put in place to collaboratively address areas of concern. This approach is helping to ensure that cross cutting themes are led collaboratively by one single senior education team and that expertise is freely pooled. Third Tier leaders are credible and bring significant experience of leading improvement to the service. Their experience of, ‘walking the walk’ has helped eliminate a divide that existed between the central team and schools previously.

‘As a newly appointed HT I have felt hugely supported and clear on the ACC Education goals. The central team have clear roles and remits which enables leaders to approach the relevant person for support and guidance and make ongoing improvement’. HT feedback Feb 2021



Both the school and Early Years’ teams below Service Manager level were restructured to drive improved quality, efficiency and recognise the contribution of a range of Community Planning Partners in supporting a child’s life. As a result, teams now work with a range of internal and external partners to serve a locality. Working relationships with Community Planning Partners are starting to become embedded and will be critical as we build back better.

The structural changes made over the past few years have helped shape a highly flexible central team structure that can respond to change at pace although the appointment of the right people is recognised to be as important as appointing to the right structure.

The integrity of the current structure will be maintained. This position was endorsed by school leaders in February 2021 when asked if the new structure had improved our collective response. The Best Value Audit of Aberdeen noted the considerable works undertaken in this area.



The service has established a Supporting Learners workstream to drive and report progress in transforming services for children with additional support needs. Improved data collection and data monitoring is helping to inform the work of the group. Angela Morgan's national review of Additional Support Needs continues to be used to further shape the work of the group.

'The structure was certainly needing an overhaul and pleased that this has been actioned. Clear pathways and remits now exist. Huge improvement in supporting ASN in particular. Looking forward to seeing how this restructuring develops and what impact this will bring over time as folk settle into their roles'. HT feedback February 2021

'I think the flattened structure and the accessibility and clarity it provides has helped communication and the sharing of ideas. It has also brought a much more focused vision'. HT feedback February 2021

Resource alignment and active measurement for visibility and improvement were not sufficiently in place and this has been addressed in part through the establishment of a new management structure for ASN services. Recruitment to the HT (ASN Services) is currently underway and enable us to better monitor the impact of city wide services to help drive continuous improvement.

The group has fostered a collaborative approach with Trade Union colleagues to review health and safety data associated with incidents in schools and made an improved professional learning offer available at different levels and these have been well received. The pandemic requires work around ASN services to be accelerated to ensure that resource is well efficiently and effectively utilised to support the changed needs of learners post pandemic and to ensure the service is well placed to response to any legislative change resultant from Angela Morgan's review. This area of work and will be critical as we build back better.

### **Developing a Culture of Collaboration**

A culture of collaboration has been fostered where all opinions are welcomed and used to inform decision making. Longer term improvement is overseen by improvement groups comprising a mix of central offers and school leaders and short, twice weekly virtual Head Teacher meetings comprise a mix of formal and drop-in meetings to support operational practice. Attendance levels are high and opportunities to share learning are utilised to help spread best practice across the service. This area could be further developed now that a growing confidence is emerging as a result of our strong response to the pandemic. Collaboration has accelerated at pace over the last year and helped foster greater consistency, shared accountability, collective decision making and mutually supportive and respectful working across the service. A recent Thematic Review by Education Scotland highlighted that the positive culture and collective leadership were resulting in calmness across the service.

‘The sense of team work at all levels now is very evident. Communication and consultation has greatly improved. The different workstreams have been effective due to the involvement of both central team and Head Teachers and then fed back timely and effectively.’ HT feedback Feb 2021

‘It’s healthy and refreshing to have groups making decisions who are on the ground. Really grateful to colleagues who are part of the NIF groups who regularly feedback to the wider HT group.’ HT feedback 2021

‘This has improved, particularly during the pandemic, with increased voice for school leaders. We still require more time for consultation and for this to be seen as open and honest for all - sometimes it can appear that decisions have been fully made (admittedly with more collaboration) by groups’

HT feedback February 2021

Senior school leaders now work more collaboratively together and recognise their responsibilities in terms of the improvement of their own school and the schools of others. The implementation of the new Devolved School Management Scheme should bring greater empowerment to head teachers to use resource creatively to address the attainment and wellbeing needs of their community when fully implemented.

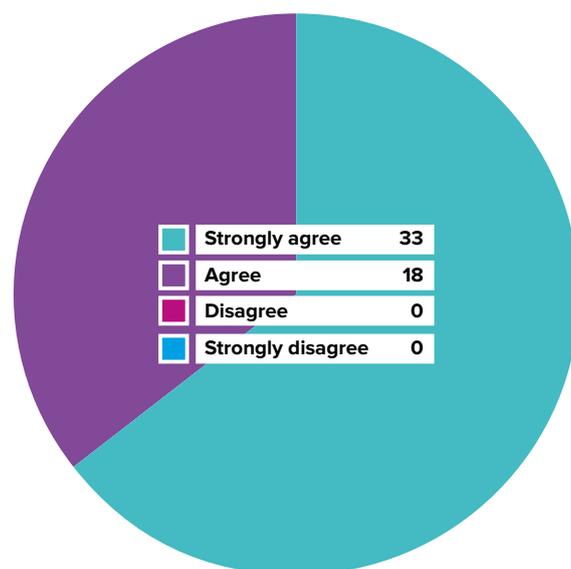
Collaboration with Trade Unions has been further extended over the last year as the pandemic triggered the establishment of weekly meetings between Trade Union representatives. Improved collaboration has extended to relationships between school leaders and Trade Union representatives at school level as staff teams have worked to develop and implement risk assessments. Respectful collaboration has helped the Education Service respond strongly to the pandemic and this approach will be maintained.

Work to improve collaboration across Children and Family Services has also accelerated with a key catalyst being the establishment of Hubs for children and young people in need of care and protection over the first period of lockdown. This saw practitioners come together and, having experience of the benefits of multi-disciplinary working, to champion and advocate for long term change. Joint work associated with the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare and the establishment of the Fit Like Hubs is driving the pooling of expertise and resource. This work is now being extended beyond children’s social work and education as we work to align further with health and other Community Planning Partners. This will help further drive efficiency and maximise our collective impact as we move forward.

Closer working across the Organisation has realised a number of benefits to both the service and individual schools with educationalists able to focus on driving improvements in attainment and wellbeing while benefiting from the expertise available across the organisation. The Health and Safety team, Facilities teams and Corporate Landlord have been instrumental in supporting preparations to re-open school buildings after the periods of lockdown. This closer working has enabled the education service to focus more exclusively on performance and on delivery against education legislation and this has removed risk to the organisation. Closer working across functions and between school and central staff has enabled the Service to benefit and learn from the experiences of others more readily. This will be further developed as we ‘build back better’.

As more collaborative working practices have become embedded, the service has been able to strengthen ‘the middle’, achieve higher levels of consistency and give the service the capacity and capability to improve quality across the system.

An improved culture of collaboration and shared accountability is helping to realise a slight improvement in attainment. The more collaborative approaches to improvement will be maintained. This positive evaluation was endorsed by school leaders.

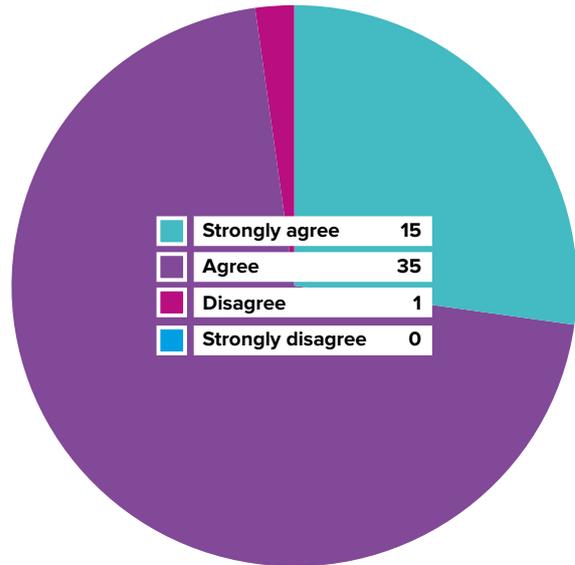


**b) OUR IMPROVEMENT MODEL FOR IMPROVING LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT**

**Leadership of Improvement**

The leadership of improvement is facilitated by Quality Improvement Managers/Service Managers in collaboration with senior leaders in schools. This has built a shared ownership and accountability for improvement and enabled the service to benefit from expertise across the wider system. Head teachers are increasingly driving improvement on behalf of the Local Authority. Stronger collaborative working practices have unleashed greater capacity for improvement and an accelerated pace of change. This approach would benefit from a regular opportunity for each improvement group having the opportunity to report to the wider HT body and this will be built into arrangements for next session.

As well as each Quality Improvement Manager/Service Manager facilitating improvement work on themes within our National Improvement Framework Plan, they oversee and support quality improvement in schools across a locality and set the scope of the work of Quality Improvement Officers and others. This approach ensures that those leading the strategic direction of the Education Service remain aware of emerging issues on the ground and has removed any disconnect experienced previously. School leaders agree that this approach is supporting service improvement.



### Quality Improvement Visits

The approach to quality improvement visits in schools has been refreshed with a key focus on the core Quality Indicators and areas of identified vulnerability, visits now comprise a balance of compliance and quality checks. The refreshed approach helps ensure that school self-evaluation judgements are more consistency applied across all schools and help prioritise the work of the central team.

‘Very useful to work across trios and have the opportunity to visit other schools and critically evaluate practice.’ HT feedback Feb 2021

Approaches were successfully adapted to take account of the operating environment during the pandemic and help elicit a city-wide overview of the changed situation on the ground to inform strategic planning and prioritisation. Approaches will continue to be regularly evaluated and refreshed to ensure that they add value to the service.

The establishment of Locality Leads to support improvement across Partner Provider and Local Authority Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings has enabled the service to ensure consistently high levels of support and challenge to all ELC settings and closer working with other partners serving a locality. The pattern of local authority settings being graded more poorly than funded provider settings has been fully addressed.

A disconnect and mixed messaging between quality improvement teams for schools and in ELC evident previously, has been addressed by quality improvement teams undertaking quality improvement visits together and this consistency will continue to be worked on. There is evidence that the work of Locality Leads and school Quality Improvement teams is supporting more positive gradings by the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland although the lack of recent inspections makes this hard to firmly evidence at this point. School/setting self-evaluation grades have improved.

Learning from quality improvement visits informs service plans and priorities. One cycle of school visits highlighted that the previous lack of cohesion across the central team had resulted in a lack of consistent understanding of the learning, teaching and assessment standards expected of schools. Resultant low staff confidence levels had limited creative and innovative practice. This was addressed through the development of an interactive digital Learning, Teaching and Assessment Standard and there are some innovative approaches now emerging digitally across the City. The Standard guides the work of practitioners and school leaders and is refreshed on a monthly basis to ensure that it continues to reflect best current practice and research. This work will continue as we continue to move between operating models.

‘Staff have hugely benefitted from the updated Learning and Teaching Standard.’ HT feedback February 2021

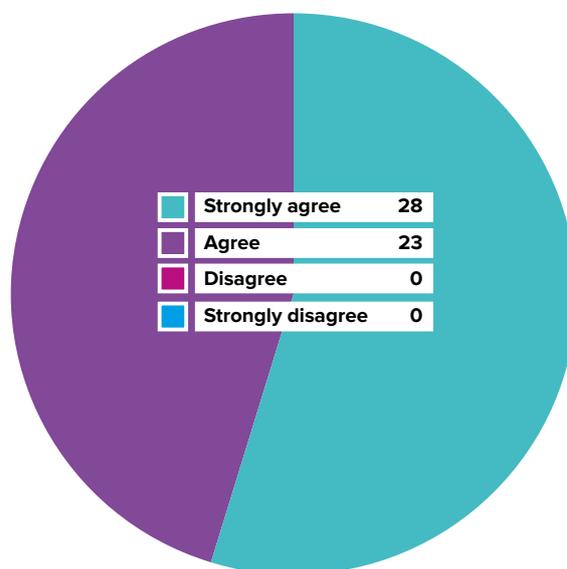
Refreshed approaches to Quality Improvement provide school senior leaders with opportunities to support quality improvement across the city through active participation in the quality improvement process in other schools. This allows school leaders to observe practice in other schools and engage in robust professional dialogue with other colleagues to help cement their understanding of standards against the core QIs. Our work with secondary colleagues to share the standard prior to implementation of the Alternative Certification Model was highlighted as best practice during a recent Education Scotland thematic review.

‘The new approach has built up a professional trust and relational leadership. It has been firmly based with the grounding that all leaders should have the opportunity to grow and develop and work towards a shared vision. Whilst the pandemic has in some way changed this work it has created further opportunities to improve approaches to learning and teaching delivery via an online platform. This leadership has been at all levels as all staff have worked collaboratively to support each other and improve standards within and across the education system.’

**HT feedback February 2021**

Qualitative feedback suggests that this approach is helping to further develop a shared understanding of ‘the standard’ and a mechanism for school leaders to collaborate for improvement.

Many of those who have had opportunities to engage in quality improvement visits out with their own settings have shown both capacity and eagerness to play a greater role and this enthusiasm will be harnessed as we continue to build capacity and develop sustainable and self-supporting approaches. This purposeful collaboration will now be extended beyond Head Teachers to formalise the arrangements in place for class teachers, subject specialists and middle managers; and will be a key priority for implementation as we build back better. School leaders feel that the changes to our quality improvement approaches and the development of the Learning and Teaching standard have supported our improvement, all staff who responded either agreed or strongly agreed.



There is now a need to use quality improvement visits to help determine how we support Children's Rights and any legislative changes resulting from the review of Additional Support for Learning and the Independent Care Review. There is also a need to consider approaches in light of any potential changes to governance (as suggested in the International Advisors report of December 2020) to ensure an uninterrupted focus on quality.

### **Planning for and Supporting Improvement**

The National Improvement Framework Plan is now better aligned with the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) and reflects areas of vulnerability across the service and those identified in the LOIP. School Plans evidence sufficient alignment with the service plan and, critically, take account of local circumstances. Plans are quality assured, with quality improvement visits offering an opportunity to check in on progress. The school and service plans have been wide ranging and ambitious, there is now a need to explore fewer key areas with more rigour to address some of the long-standing issues evident in the data and the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The systems established to support professional learning are more effectively addressing the needs of the service by being more effectively focussed.

The Northern Alliance provides a range of professional learning opportunities and networks for staff in areas identified by all 8 Local Authorities forming the Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC). Networking opportunities are considerable at Chief Education Officer and Third Tier level and some of these provide opportunities to share experiences and learn from each other. A wide range of support is currently allocated to each RIC by the 'support arm' of Education Scotland. The Education Scotland team works with RIC Officers to develop and deliver professional learning and offer further opportunities for collaboration. Engagement is not consistent across all schools, but opportunities are made available to all leading to highly variable evaluations of the impact of the Regional Improvement Collaborative. At times the wealth of opportunities available to staff can be hard to navigate and there can be duplication.

The service can experience challenges in monitoring progress against the many plans the service works to and there is a need to ensure that one Plan captures all improvement activity. One plan, which is inclusive of all statutory Plans and Reports will help streamline our approaches to monitoring and evaluation and improve visibility of deadlines across the service. The service will work to establish this alignment as the NIF for 2021/2022 is developed.

### **Partnerships for improvement – working with the Community Planning Partnership**

Children and families in many school communities, benefit from effective partnership working at locality level through their Partnership Forum. Around half of the Partnership Forums are able to demonstrate the impact of this joint working. The Covid-19 restrictions negatively impacted this work as all partners delivered an emergency response to the situation. The service should now work to better drive evidenced based collaboration with Community Planning Partners across each locality to ensure that resource and decision making is consistently driven by impact data.

The service works with Community Planning Partners on many of the stretch outcomes of the LOIP. Work driven by the improvement charters in the LOIP had led to an increase in the number of partners delivering courses across the Senior Phase, an increase in the uptake of Foundation Apprenticeships and a rise in the number of positive destinations for those living in the most deprived areas of the city.

The stretch outcomes remain very relevant to the work of the service and the re-refresh of the LOIP has provided an opportunity to reflect on how to further maximise the impact of our work. Moving forward we are likely to see a more limited number of improvement charters as this will enable Community Planning Partners to prioritise and ensure sufficient resource is available to drive and support the improvements.

Close collaboration across the Community Planning Partnership will be key as we build back better.

### **Partnership for improvement – Parents and Carers**

Head Teachers work in partnership with parents and carers to develop improvement plans and maintain regular channels of communication. Communication and engagement with parents and carers has looked quite different over the last 12 months as school staff have supported parents to enable their child to engage positively with Google Classroom. There is anecdotal evidence of increased numbers of parents and carers attending meetings when they are held virtually and evidence of closer collaboration over the last year. These changes and opportunities will be taken into account as the Parental Involvement & Engagement Plan is refreshed.



### **Partnership for improvement – children and young people**

All schools continue to have representative pupil groups who drive improvement and inform practice at school and community level with children and young people taking a leading role in delivering training and supporting their peers. The establishment of Young Leaders of Learning has helped children and young people have a clearer voice in improvement planning.

Over the last three years, the majority of Aberdeen City schools (73%) have engaged in the Right Respecting Schools Programme and the city now boasts 7 Gold RRSA award schools, 10 Silver RRSA award schools and 22 Bronze RRSA award schools.

Aberdeen City continues to liaise closely with Community Planning Partners to work towards achieving our ambition to becoming a UNICEF accredited 'Child Friendly City' (CFC). Significant work has been undertaken to evaluate our current practices and approaches and to inform the creation of a joint action plan which will be supported and delivered by a range of our Community Planning Partners. Through discussion with a range of professionals and young people, we will be prioritising a number of key areas in accordance with the award framework. These are:

- Culture
- Communication
- Co-operation and Leadership
- Place
- Participating and,
- Child-Friendly Services.

To ensure that the views of children and young people are genuinely considered when taking decisions which affect them, the Education Service will routinely adopt a child rights-based approach (CRBA) to the design, development and commissioning of services and approaches as we move forward. These approaches will support the service to continue to take an asset-based view of our children and young people.

Working within a Children's Rights based approach appropriate professional learning will be required for all adults who support children and young people. Awareness raising will also be required with school stakeholders and partners as well as an agreed approach to identifying and sharing best practice.

### Using data to drive improvement

The service has access to a wide range of data and has improved its use of data over the last 3 years. Most validated data sets are historical and this has impacted on the responsiveness of the service at times.

Spending on school provision has increased in cash terms from 13/14 but reduced in real terms by 0.9%. If Scottish Attainment Challenge monies are removed this reduction sits at 2.9%. Given that this year may be the last of Attainment Challenge resource there is a clear need to ensure that interventions are sustainable, and this will influence school plans. A steady reduction in spend is evident in trend data, with costs not increasing as quickly as the Scottish average. Primary school spend is at the lower end of Family Group Local Government Benchmarking data and ranked 11 out of the 32 Local Authorities for efficiency. Secondary spend is sitting in the middle of the Family Group and ranked 21 out of 32, this is an improvement of the ranking from last year. The proportionately higher spend in secondary is thought to be as a result of smaller, less efficient secondary schools.

Although attainment data from 2020 is not directly comparable with that of previous years (and only available for secondary) historical data shows a gradual improvement in the number of children and young people achieving CfE Levels in primary. There continues to be local and national evidence to suggest the need for a focus on literacy and numeracy.

Green shoots are evident in senior phase destinations data although the lack of direct data comparison with that of previous years presents challenges. The first Insight data release suggests that improved breadth is resulting in more positive outcomes for young people. The data shows a closing of the distance to national outcomes and notable improvement in vocational attainment. The poverty related attainment gap is reducing.

The percentage of school leavers achieving 1+ qualifications at SCQF level 5 or better has improved by 3.5% since 2013/2014. The percentage of school leavers achieving 5 awards or more at level 5 or better has improved by 5.9% over the same period. When looking at the percentage of school leavers achieving 5 awards or more the gap has reduced by 4.9% since 2014/2015. Young people in deprived areas are now more likely to achieve 5 awards at SCQF level 5 with the Local Authority now ranked 24th, a slight improvement from last year. Young people in deprived areas are now more likely to achieve 5 awards at SCQF level 6 with the Local Authority now ranked 22nd compared with the ranking of 26th from last session.

The number of young people achieving across all quintiles has improved with the Local Authority now ranked 23rd (as opposed to 26th last year) for achieving 5 at SCQF Level 5, and 22nd for achieving 5 awards at SCQF level 6 (as opposed to 26th last year).

The Local Authority is currently graded 21st for average Tariff points (compared to 22nd last year) but there are significant anomalies when looking at achievements of learners living in different quintiles. Ranking range from 31 (for those living in Q3) to 23rd for those living in Q5. This is worthy of further analysis to identify and address the issue.

Data evidences a need to understand and address levels of performance in literacy and numeracy now that recruitment is less challenging in these areas, although there are still shortages in these key staff in our priority areas. The national research suggests that the periods of lockdown are more likely to negatively impact oral language development.

We continue to have uptake of Early Talkboost and Talkboost Training, which is a structured programme for children aged 3-7 with delayed language designed to boost children's progress in literacy and communication. We now need to better understand the issues to develop a more robust plan to address this area at the earliest opportunity.

The central team has established mechanisms to regularly review participation measures with a weekly review of exclusion and attendance data currently in place. This approach will help to review the impact of the new policy and also give an indication of the emotional and self-regulation needs of children and young people to inform service planning. This may lead to further targeted improvement work being undertaken in this area.

The lack of a complete data set for senior phase data has been an issue and work with Data and Insight to use Power BI to explore data at individual, class, school and locality level will help us transform our use of data to drive improvement by helping identify issues more quickly so that remedial action can be taken. This critical work will ensure that we are no longer waiting for the publication of historical attainment data to measure success and will help us transform our practices.

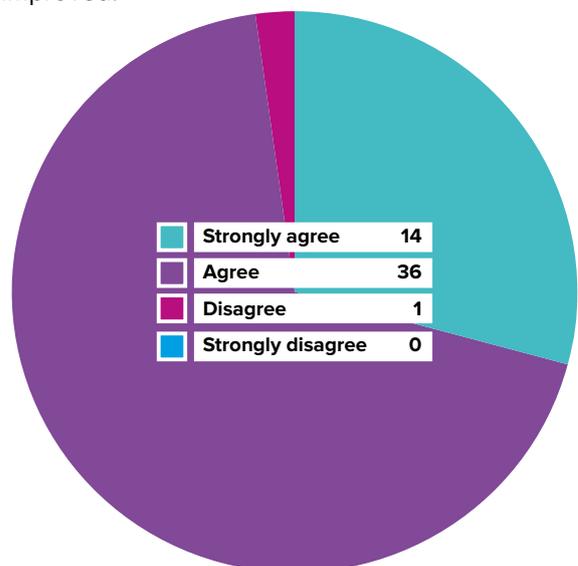




It is imperative that we continue to re-set our senior phase curriculum to ensure that we prepare our young people for changed opportunities post school. Ongoing consideration of delivery models for the City Campus and consortium arrangements which take account of the greater learner agency evident as a result of the periods of remote learning will be required.

Almost all senior leaders agree that our use of data has improved.

The pandemic has shone a sharp focus on the need to look at data sets across a partnership to understand the needs of families fully. Work to join up data sets will continue to be a key priority for the service and work to ensure that all staff across the service understand how performance data pertaining their pupils feeds into performance data at department, school and Local Authority level.



## c) **WORKFORCE**

### **Addressing levels of vacancy**

Over the last 5 years vacancy across primary and secondary schools has averaged around 100 teachers with resultant impacts on quality evident in some areas of the curriculum. The impact of this shortfall is apparent in literacy and numeracy trend data.

As a result of close working with colleagues in People and Organisation to refresh approaches to recruitment, the Local Authority began session 21/22 with all primary teaching posts filled and only a small number of secondary school vacancies in some hard to fill subject areas.

In 2018 we were aware of the potential shortage of highly qualified staff required to deliver on the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare. In collaboration with People and Organisation a range of approaches to recruitment were driven forward, including an in-house training programme for 90 ACC staff. This proactive approach and the recruitment to new posts in ELC established a clear progression pathway and has helped address the shortfall in staffing.

The work of the service and that of other functions has been highly effective in workforce planning and for the most part, work in this area will now be maintained. The single exception to this, is consideration of how to recruit/provide a curriculum in some hard to fill secondary subject areas where remote delivery or alternative delivery models may be advantageous.

### **Building leadership capacity**

Leadership development and professional learning have been key tenets of our work over the last 2 years. A wider range of pathways to leadership are now available within classrooms, school, ELC settings and across the local and national system. Opportunities are varied and are greatly enhanced by school leaders developing and leading programmes too. Despite the challenges of the past year, engagement with certificated Leadership development opportunities has increased with almost all completing these successfully and achieving high pass rates. Interest in this area continues to increase.

The approach taken has helped grow leadership capacity and reduce vacant leadership posts. Over each of the last 4 years up to a third of city primary schools have been led by Acting Head Teachers due to the limited number of quality applicants for leadership positions. This position has now considerably changed with a high number of internal and external applications received for both senior and middle leadership positions. All schools began session 21/22 with a permanent HT having been appointed and we can see the early positive impact of new school leaders.

Approaches to developing leadership capacity have been highly effective. Leadership will remain a key tenet of our work but now be maintained in our, 'business as usual' with no further improvement work thought necessary at this point. Ongoing dialogue and review of data will ensure that the offer remains suited to the needs and vulnerabilities of the service, but this ongoing review and routine re-set are now embedded in established systems and working practices.

### **Building capacity and capability across the system**

Professional learning opportunities are now fully aligned with the ACC capability framework and Learning Academy and comprise a more targeted mix of national, regional/local offers and supportive groups led by skilled senior leaders. There are clear indicators that this approach is building a more sustainable system and developing shared standards. Developing a structure which supports self-directed learning also provides practitioners with the opportunity to engage in professional development which suits their individual needs. All self-directed opportunities are shared through the ISEE Framework, allowing practitioners to select the appropriate professional learning at Informed, Skilled, Enhanced or Expert Level. In offering this model we are building capacity and professional agency and clear progression pathways for all.

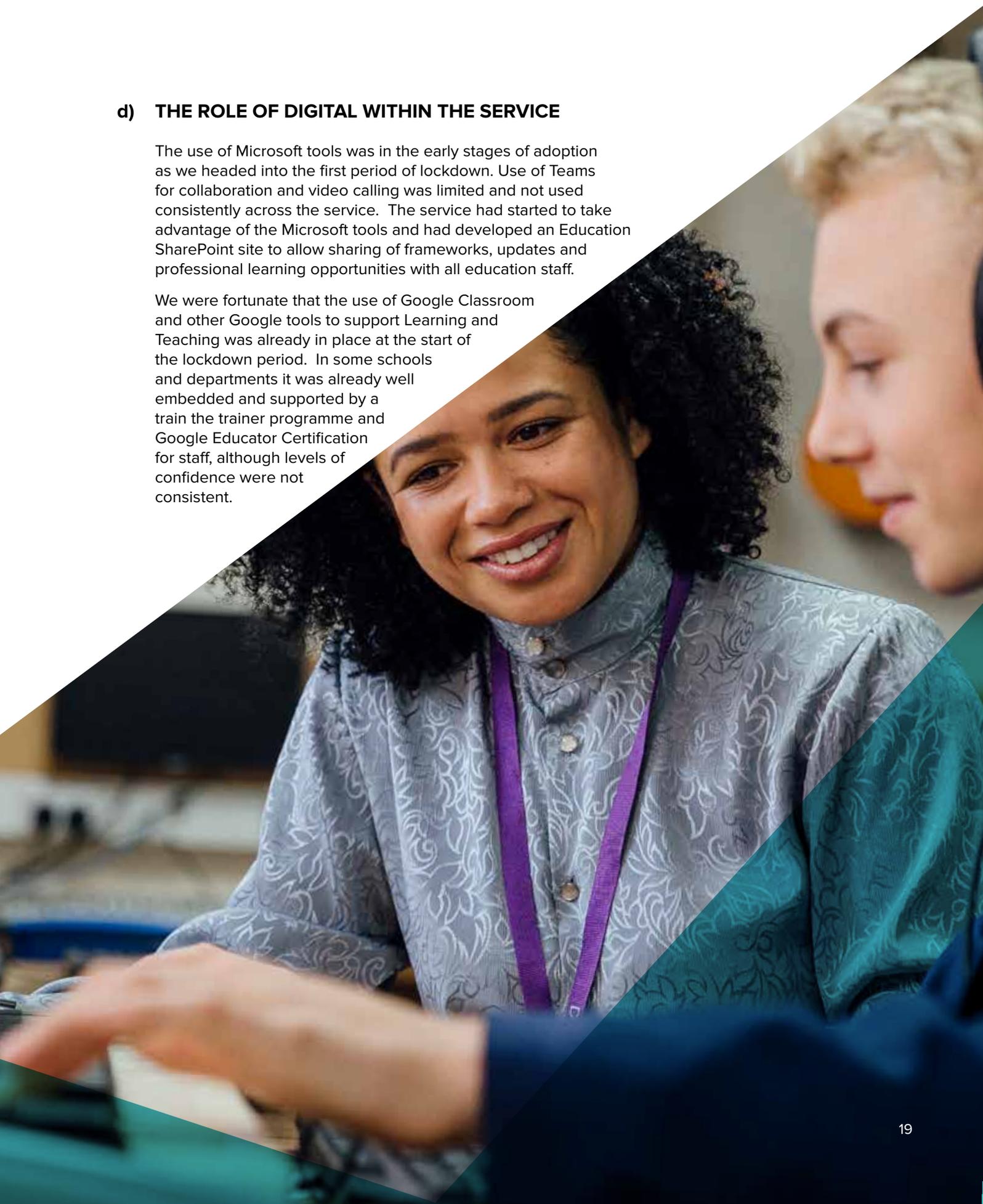
The Professional Learning offer for ELC provides a combination of accessible and flexible online materials that can be accessed independently/as a staff team via the ACC Learn portal, with virtual sessions delivered termly via Microsoft Teams. The materials include continuous reflective questions, prompts for further development and opportunities to link with other teams in the locality via the online discussion boards. Staff are encouraged to link with their Locality Lead Officer and reflect on their improvement plans and engage with content appropriate for their service development so that Locality Leads can tailor content to the needs of a locality.

Feedback regarding the professional learning sessions and activities on offer has been positive, detailing the benefits of ready access to a range of activities in one comprehensive resource. Staff report that the more targeted offer is better meeting their professional learning needs and appreciate the investment in high quality learning opportunities. Moving forward, evaluative measurement tools and digital collaboration spaces will be built into self-directed activities to further track and monitor impact and garner feedback for improvement. The return of in-school quality assurance visits will also help better triangulate impact data and inform offers. It will be important to carefully consider any new educational paradigms which may require additional knowledge, understanding and skills from our workforce as we move forward, but current systems are thought appropriate to ensure that our offer remains current and future focussed. This area will be maintained and closely monitored with careful attention given to the extent to which distributed leadership helps build capacity for improvement.

#### **d) THE ROLE OF DIGITAL WITHIN THE SERVICE**

The use of Microsoft tools was in the early stages of adoption as we headed into the first period of lockdown. Use of Teams for collaboration and video calling was limited and not used consistently across the service. The service had started to take advantage of the Microsoft tools and had developed an Education SharePoint site to allow sharing of frameworks, updates and professional learning opportunities with all education staff.

We were fortunate that the use of Google Classroom and other Google tools to support Learning and Teaching was already in place at the start of the lockdown period. In some schools and departments it was already well embedded and supported by a train the trainer programme and Google Educator Certification for staff, although levels of confidence were not consistent.



## Section 2 – How the Education Service responded to the pandemic and building back better

### a) THE EDUCATION SERVICE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic brought a range of challenges and opportunities to the Education Service. The unparalleled circumstances provided an opportunity to think more creatively around potential solutions without the constraints of what had always been. In real terms, this saw a huge acceleration of progress in some areas and some rapid escalations of needs which had to be prioritised for action.

#### How well placed was the service to respond to the pandemic?

Business continuity plans had been refreshed at the beginning of session 2019, although these didn't include the detail required to respond to the unparalleled situation we faced from February 2020. The establishment of emergency response arrangements across the Local Authority provided a means of the central team beginning the process of parallel planning to ensure readiness for any eventuality. The very regular access to Chief Officers enabled the Chief Education Officer to share thinking and learn from others across the organisation which supported stronger decision making.

The service sought support from school leaders to implement a range of actions at pace to ensure readiness for implementing a new operating model. Although this initial command and control approach was at odds with the culture fostered across the service, it was highly effective in supporting our immediate emergency response and staff worked tirelessly to ensure adequate preparation. Knowing that schools were well placed to implement change allowed the service time to predict the need for emergency childcare and undertake the preparatory work that supported delivery of an operational childcare service from the first day of Lockdown. Over 1000 families were supported during the first period of lockdown thanks to the flexibility of childcare and school staff.

The Education Service National Improvement Framework Plan of 2020/2021 reflected the dynamic working environment and associated national guidance. A themed approach to planning enabled the service to plan our immediate response around 5 key areas which were considered to be most important to realise a strong response: workforce, wellbeing of all, curriculum, the physical return and finance and equity. Each theme was driven and overseen by a Quality Improvement Manager (QIM) to maximise the impact of the Education Management Structure. Each QIM worked closely with key internal and external partners whose support and expertise in aiding and enabling the service cannot be overstated.

The structure and 5 themes provided sufficient flexibility to respond to the rapidly changing needs of all stakeholders and supported planning and delivery of the range of operating models required over the academic session. The service kept a keen eye on possible future scenarios resulting in routine parallel planning being undertaken over the year. This approach aided our ability to predict and be well prepared. This agility will be an on-going feature of our 'business as usual' with some software solutions being investigated to support our scenario planning.

### **Covid-19 Health and safety compliance**

Responding to a pandemic brought the need for confident risk assessment into sharp focus. School leaders effectively led teams to review approaches in keeping with national guidance to ensure that practice helped mitigate risk. School staff report that sufficient and helpful local guidance was made available to support in school planning. The strength of the control measures in City schools are frequently commended by Public Health and were endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive.

The service is very grateful for the excellent support afforded to them by the Corporate Health and Safety team and this close working relationship will be maintained. The pandemic cemented and improved the relationship with a number of teams across the organisation as our co-dependency in crisis became apparent. School leaders now report greater confidence in risk assessment practices. Progress in this area has been accelerated and will now be maintained.

### **Covid-19 Workforce Planning**

The service worked well with People and Organisation to establish effective systems to gather workforce data and this enabled the service to undertake effective contingency planning. The standard use of Core HR has enabled consistent reporting to Scottish Government, information sharing and proactive planning.

The use of Microsoft forms and Power BI has enabled the service to capture real time data following each incident of Covid-19 in schools. Analysis of the data has helped share best practice and strengthen control measures to mitigate risks to the workforce and stakeholders. This invaluable use of real time data will continue to be embedded in our 'business as usual'. Both approaches have helped prevent any risk to school operations due to insufficient staffing and led to an acceleration of the adoption of Core HR as a tool to support workforce planning.

### **A need to be more sophisticated with data**

The service was able to remain agile and responsive by making improved use of live data across all operations of the service. Close working with colleagues in Data and Insights enabled the service to collect and digest large amounts of data with ease. This approach enabled the service to predict demand whilst evaluating the impact of the Covid-19 controls in place.

The use of live data has transformed the work of the Education Service and progress has been rapid. This agile approach in response to live data has accelerated our approach to continuous improvement, transformed working practices and will be the backbone of our approach to continuous improvement as we move forward.

## b) ACCELERATING OUR USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The first period of school closure in March saw a rapid review of our approach to communication and engagement with school leaders. The service moved from regular e-mail updates and face to face meetings with senior leaders to the use of HT Teams site. Staff report more timely responses to queries. There is now a need to agree where to hold information so that everyone can access information timeously. There is growing evidence of colleagues sharing expertise and collaborating to maximise the impact of our collective endeavours by establishing Teams sites for colleagues with particular roles and responsibilities. The pandemic significantly accelerated levels of adoption of Teams.

Secondary school leaders have admirably led their school communities through uncertainty around SQA validation practices and have kept provisional plans under review. Colleagues have taken advantage of Power BI to support moderation practices and we will build on the use of this App more widely as we move forward. A recent HMIE Thematic Review highlighted communication as a key strength.

Officers will now move ahead with plans to offer bespoke support to each school to ensure that the technology is being fully harnessed to support school improvement and teacher agency.

### Digital delivery of the curriculum

Schools effectively used Google Classroom to deliver remote learning and teaching. Staff expertise increased significantly during lockdown and enabled the delivery of a strong remote learning offer. High numbers of staff accessed Google Educator Training at differing levels of complexity. Data shows that 93% of learners engaged with the digital offer during the first period of lockdown with 97% engaging through a further improved offer during the second period of school closure. Good use of lead in time to the second period of lockdown saw many staff re-engage with Google Educator training and the quality of remote offer has been improved as a result. The programme of Google Educator training will be maintained. Our repeated Learning at Distance survey highlighted that there has been a 9% increase (87% of staff who responded) in the number of staff reporting confidence in delivering remotely. This evidences that approaches to empowering staff has been effective. This is clear when reviewing Google Analytics data too. Schools now make improved use of Google Analytics to support quality improvement.

89% of staff reported that they have access to the guidance they require to deliver a curriculum remotely. This is an increase of nearly 5% from the 2020 survey. Most staff found the ACC developed guidance more helpful than nationally produced documents.

There has been a marginal increase in the number of children who report they feel safe on-line (92.5% in February 2021 compared to 92.25% in March 2020) but also a similar increase in those disagreeing with the statement. The reduction in the number stating that they don't know is possibly an indication of there being greater awareness of on-line risks. This area will continue to be monitored with Community Planning Partners and supported through the roll out of the Safer School App.

There has been a 0.59% reduction in the number of children and young people agreeing that other learners show kindness on-line and an increase in the number who strongly disagree. The high continued proportion of returns who report 'not knowing' if other learners are kind is of concern to the service and will be an area for further focus as we further develop PSHE programmes in the short and longer term.

The digital divide was clear over the first period of lockdown and over 5000 chromebooks were issued to families. The Council responded positively and continued to invest heavily in the provision of chromebooks. Over 12,000 devices were issued to children and young people over the second period of school closure and we continue to work with Digital and Technology to improve the digital experience for pupils, staff and parents.



A Northern Alliance funded DHT (digital) has been appointed to support work with the Northern Alliance and e-Sgoil to increase the digital offer for learners in the senior phase. Main grade staff trained as Google educators continue to develop webinars and offer one-to-one sessions to support staff development and new Apps are shared routinely with staff. This personalised approach has been well received and enables the local authority to further develop capacity for improvement. This model of support will be extended to other fields where possible.

The service has benefited from the extensive adoption of tools into our 'business as usual' including the use of Microsoft Forms, Power BI, Teams and One Note. The service is now engaging with Microsoft to help take our use of digital to the next level. Microsoft brings a wealth of resource from across the world to help shape our innovative future.

Our programme, Education Navigator, is harnessing the wealth of best digital practice from across the world with Microsoft Educational experts. We are also taking a collaborative approach with our local partners within colleges and universities to align our future plans and ensure the education journey of our young people continues in a cohesive manner, no matter where their learning takes place. As an authority we have already laid the foundations for digital transformation, but recognise that we need to go much further if we are to help our young people realise their full potential. Digital skills are identified as a key priority for all young people as they move into adulthood.

The Navigator programme is fundamentally about digital transformation within our learning environments and maximising the tools and intelligence we can gather to achieve the best outcomes. There are 4 core themes:

1. Leadership & Policy
2. Intelligent Environments
3. Teaching & Learning
4. Student & School Success

### Digital infrastructure

The digital infrastructure supporting our schools has some vulnerabilities. Feedback from all Head Teachers on current challenges highlighted poor connectivity as the single dominant issue. During the last 2 years there has been significant investment in chromebooks to support teaching and learning. We currently provide all learners in the senior phase, learners in P6 and P7 and all vulnerable learners with a personal device. As we continue to deploy devices the issue around connectivity will worsen, but we will continue to work towards every child having their own device in order to ensure that we are well placed to maximise our use of technology in the future. This has been highlighted as a priority area and investment has been planned in the current work for the Transformation Board.

Every learner who requested a device to support remote learning received one and this is evidenced through the levels of engagement with Google Classroom helping to build learner agency.



### c) **RETHINKING THE CURRICULUM**

Over the course of the pandemic the focus for learning has been on health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy. Schools were provided with scaffolds to support active collaboration within and across schools. School leaders shared practice on Interdisciplinary Learning which was recognised as best practice and shared nationally. Discussions to this point have been largely limited to those in the central team and in senior leadership positions and this should now be extended to include the whole system.

Central Officers and school leaders collaborated to provide guidance to colleagues on how to create and manage trauma informed classrooms whilst working remotely. This document was well received and influenced practice across the city.

The pandemic provided an opportunity to rethink and re-prioritise curriculum delivery and the service will now consider longer term planning around the entitlements and principles of Curriculum for Excellence as we move further through the recovery stage of the pandemic. There are various considerations including the report from the International Council of Education Advisors which will help shape longer term plans. In the immediate term we will consider the extent to which digital can support delivering of the curriculum as children and young people re-enter school buildings and how we maintain and promote the use of outdoor learning as well as being involved in the debate around different assessment models in the short and longer term

### **Covid-19 impacting on Growth Areas**

Over 2020/2021 the Education Service spent time reviewing the senior phase offer to determine how best to improve attainment, achievement and positive destinations. The pandemic, the downturn in Oil and Gas and Brexit are all likely to impact on the opportunities available to our children and young people the situation remains highly dynamic.

The most recent data produced by Skills Development Scotland indicates that within Aberdeen City the labour market is forecast to face challenges in the immediate term. The data suggests that within the region job losses are likely to have occurred in hospitality and engineering. The most recent jobs postings indicate that Nurses, Care Workers and Home Carers and Sales Occupations are the most numerous.

Employers within the region are seeking softer skills as well as technical skills, skills such as teamwork/ collaboration and customer service feature, as do job specific skills such as budgeting, teaching and sales. COVID-19 has also highlighted the importance of digital skills due to the uptake of homeworking and this is an area that will likely extend beyond COVID-19 and bring a number of societal and economic benefits to the region to reduce the carbon footprint.

The forecasts for the short term (2020-2023) suggest that there will be some job growth and opportunities created as of the need to replace workers. The greatest requirement for workers is expected to be in Human Health activities, Retail Trade and Education including Child Care.

Over the longer term (2023-2030) the Aberdeen city labour market is forecast to contract, but despite this the occupations to have greatest growth due to new job creation are Health and Social Care Professionals, Digital and Green Energy, Accommodation and Food services.

Skills Development Scotland continue to work in partnership with schools in providing Labour Market Information to inform schools of the growth job areas and to develop flexibility in the senior phase for young people to explore diverse pathways supported by taster courses and generic skills courses.

The on-going development of a central portal with current information for all stakeholders will continue to progress at pace as well as work to finalise a skills progression reflective of the current state to help guide young people into an appropriate learning pathway. Young people continue to be anxious and there are indications that we could see an additional 1000 young people who may have previously left school choose to stay on. It is imperative that we clarify the pathways available to support decision making and ensure we look at how the broad general education can best prepare our young people for the senior phase.

## d) WHAT ARE THE 'GAPS' POST PANDEMIC?

### Addressing food insecurity

The Community Planning Partnership effectively and swiftly joined forces to address food insecurity from March 2020. This saw partners come together to ensure that the provision of free school meals was considered within the wider context of support for families. Close collaborative working has continued over the course of the pandemic.

Research papers highlight the need to join up data sets and to wrap partners around children, young people and families and the work of the Aberdeen Together Group to collaborate to address food poverty has stood the service in good stead to continue to meet the needs of families. Hubs established over the first period of Lockdown provided food parcels and many schools serving areas of deprivation offer a food parcel service in collaboration with the Third Sector.

Local data on FSM registrations give a clear indication of the number of families with changed financial circumstances. The spread of free school meals is no longer focussed around the three priority areas, triggering a need to rethink approaches and consideration of the establishment of Food Pantries in each locality.

Given the economic impact of the pandemic on families it is of critical importance that we ensure that no costs are passed to any parent for the provision of education and consider how financial services can be better advertised or accessed through school communities. This work will be a key area of focus for the service.



### Supporting the health and wellbeing of children and families

Despite work to support positive health and wellbeing pre-pandemic, the crisis brought a need to accelerate the establishment of a systematic approach to Health & Wellbeing. As we entered the first lockdown period all schools identified how best to support children and young people deemed to be more vulnerable and made arrangements to keep in touch with families. Arrangements have continued to be developed and adapted based on feedback from families.

The Mental Health Foundation for Scotland reviewed the **Mental health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in Scotland on vulnerable groups**. Findings from this report included:

- A person-centred approach must be taken in understanding experiences, one which recognises the diversity of individual lived experience, rather than attempting to reduce each group into a single homogenous unit captured by terms such as 'shielding'.
- Many healthy coping mechanisms reported by the Scottish population were linked to outdoor activities and access to green space.
- Contact with friends and family and community support was vital for sustaining wellbeing with huge appreciation for the speed at which local organisations responded and adapted to the pandemic.

Within Aberdeen, we recognise many of these factors within our own professional and personal lives seeing a negative spiral of mental wellbeing across our schools and communities. The below report confirms this is a similar picture across Scotland and action must be taken to address it immediately.

Mental wellbeing has been a significant focus over the past year and the declining mental health of all has been recognised. '**Good Mental Health for All**' recognises the benefits of improving mental health which link with positive health and social outcomes for individuals and the broader community. Those who have positive mental and emotional wellbeing are more likely to have success within their lives.

We have worked with an external partner to develop and launch **The Resilience Alphabet** and **The Journey** to quickly establish a universal approach to building resilience in children and young people through the first period of lockdown.

Over 88% of children and young people who responded to our Learning at a Distance survey in March 2021 knew who to contact if they are upset and worried and this is a positive and improved picture from a similar survey undertaken in 2020. There has been a slight decline in the number disagreeing with the statement. A reduction in those who were not able to offer an opinion stating that they, 'don't know' has also reduced. There is undoubtedly a need to re-establish relationships to support wellbeing.

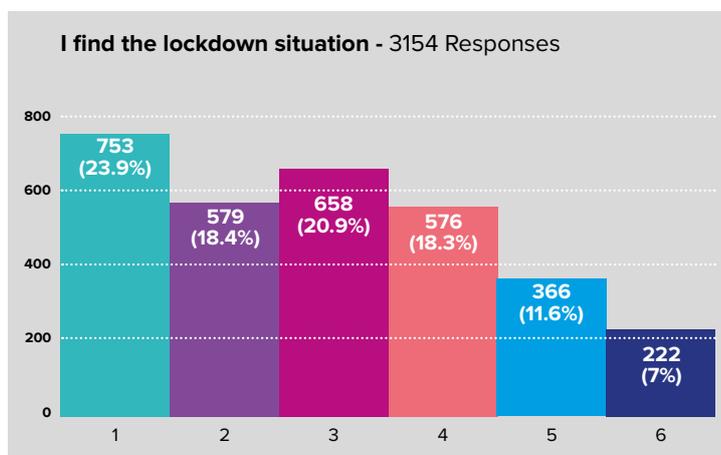
The survey also showed a significant reduction (14.6%) in the number of learners feeling confident in learning remotely (76.71% in 2020 and 62.14% in February 2021). It is thought that this is partially attributable to the timing of the survey and increasing levels of concern and anxiety felt by students in the senior phase. Further exploration of the data shows that 41% of those who strongly disagreed are in the senior phase, 37% in the S1-3 and the remaining 19% in primary schools further illustrating the level of anxiety present in older students. The service continues to provide as much certainty around certification arrangements as possible to address this.

23% less children and young people now report that they are enjoying distance learning now that we are a year on. This trend is strongly mirrored in responses by parents and carers. The more positive responses in 2020 could have reflected the novelty of a new operating environment but it is now clear that young people need to reconnect with friends in school.

Children and young people were asked to consider how they were finding this most recent period of lockdown on a sliding scale from 1 (difficult) to 6 (easy). 63.2% gave a negative response with 754 choosing the lowest possible grading.

Children and young people were also asked about their experience of managing school and home life. Responses were more evenly balanced with the majority (52%) providing a negative response. It is of critical importance that we fully understand and address the mental wellbeing of our children and young people.

Children have the right to play and learn, the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life.



Being outdoors has a positive impact on adults as well as children. **Out to Play – creating outdoor play experiences for children: practical guidance** suggests that there is strong and compelling evidence that playing and learning outdoors has many benefits for children. By focusing on this evidence and the impact for all, taking learning outside will build a stronger, more resilient learning community within Aberdeen.

Learning from one another and in partnership with Education Scotland we have identified an approach to supporting and developing community wellbeing which will strengthen our universal offer. Through the Compassionate and Connected Communities programme we have been able to develop a Train the Trainer model which over time should provide more consistent language and understanding within Aberdeen and support us in developing a more nurturing city.

Engagement with **SHINE** (Schools Health & Wellbeing Improvement Research Network) has helped schools prepare longer term interventions. SHINE provide regular Mental Health & Wellbeing Surveys and associated reports to enable schools more readily to understand and support the needs of young people within their individual settings. From this work we now hope to develop a system wide overview of data to help us meet the mental health needs of our children and young people.

As we respond to the high levels of distress and anxiety exhibited by some children and young people who have experienced significant change, school staff continue to undertake Let's Introduce Anxiety Management (LIAM) training and work with our Educational Psychology Team has supported wider mindfulness and resilience building. Two of our Secondary Schools will participate in Distress Brief Intervention Training in partnership with Penumbra and the University of Glasgow and this may be extended further if successful.

The lack of opportunity for face to face socialisation is impacting children and young people and it will be imperative that we continue to work with community planning partners to explore how best to provide safe opportunities in the immediate and longer term.

Close working with Community Planning Partners around the mental health agenda is critical. The mental health of families is likely to be considerably impacted by changes in economic circumstances and this will undoubtedly impact on children and young people. Ensuring easy access to employment support and financial inclusion services will be critical to support family wellbeing and the Education Service is working with others to explore models for the co-location of multi-disciplinary teams through the ELC Links Hub.

There is a growing body of evidence that children, young people and families have been less active during the second period of lockdown and that proactive planning will be required to address this area proactively. **‘Let’s Get Physical’** written by the Mental Health Foundation, highlights the benefits of physical activity on wellbeing. Research has shown that physical activity releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel good – boosting your self-esteem, helping you concentrate as well as sleep, look and feel better.

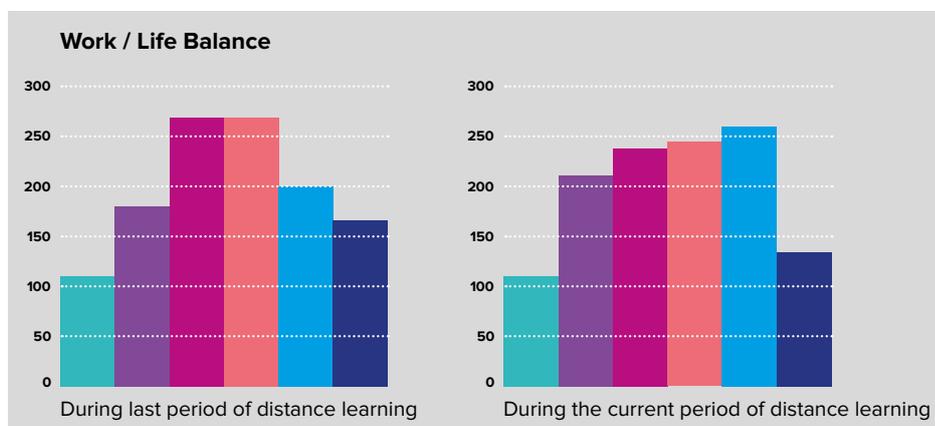
The limitations on the delivery of Physical Education place further pressure on this area. Many secondary schools have introduced staff v pupil running challenges in order to help address this area. Physical health will continue to be an important area of focus as we move forward.

**Supporting the health and wellbeing of staff**

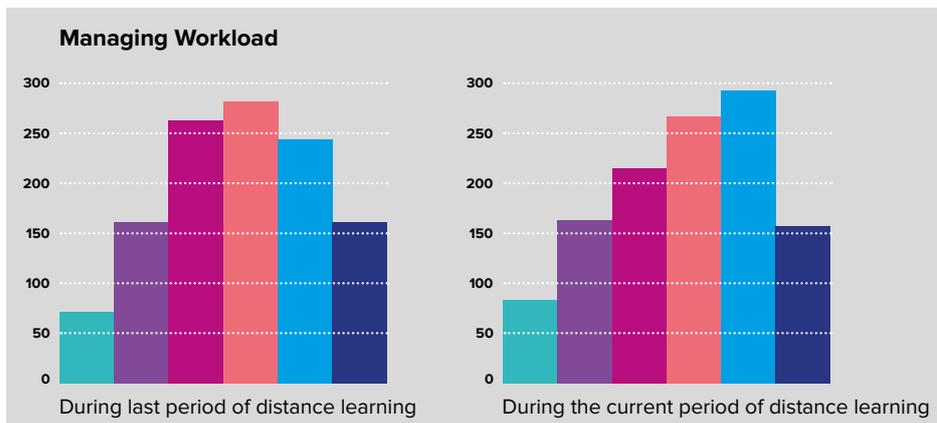
A range of approaches have been used to support staff wellbeing including the establishment of staff wellbeing sessions, peer support networks and wellbeing sessions for senior leaders. Initiatives such as Wellbeing Wednesdays have supported both learners and staff. The pressures on staff and learners have changed over time and the service remains agile and responsive. Resource within the central team has been allocated to this area to ensure that we can proactively respond.

In 2020 just under 95% of staff felt well supported to work remotely. This has dipped by 2% in 2021 but indicates that staff feel supported despite us being a year into the pandemic. This would suggest that approaches have been largely effective with staff reporting that they are more aware of opportunities available to them.

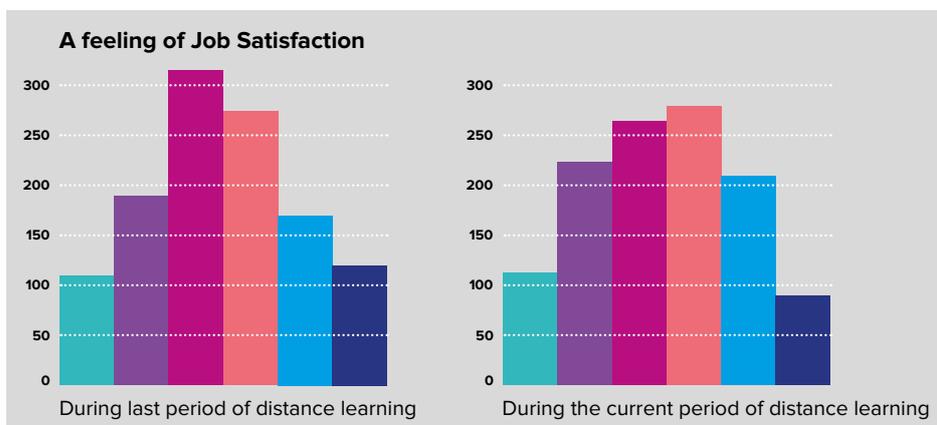
Staff are reporting that it is harder to separate school life from home life.



Staff are also finding it harder to manage workload.



Staff are placing very high expectations on their own performance and these aspirations are becoming harder to reach. However, job satisfaction has increased.



The wellbeing of staff will continue to be a significant priority for the service in collaboration with others. It is clear that a focus on the mental, emotional and physical health of all will be critical.

**Loss of learning**

Children and young people have engaged positively with their Google Classrooms and operating models are now allowing more frequent engagement with the small number of young people who are proving harder to reach. Our children and young people will return to school buildings with a range of skills they didn't develop prior to the lockdown period including increased learner agency. As children return to in school learning we will be able to assess the growth and gaps in children and young people and will work as a service to address any concerns whilst ensuring that we build upon the greater learner efficacy evident in learners.



#### **d) WORKING MORE CLOSELY WITH COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERS**

The first period of lockdown saw the establishment of wellbeing hubs which provided an invaluable means of supporting the wellbeing of some of our most vulnerable learners. Qualitative and quantitative data evidenced the positive impact of this multi-agency approach on families and the service has worked with partners to ensure their longevity through the establishment of three Fit Like Hubs. The provision of hubs combining education, social work, health, community, and social resources working effectively together has provided a more holistic model for families.

The Fit Like Hubs are underpinned by embracing a children’s rights approach. Active and meaningful communication and engagement between all stakeholders will continue to be essential in enabling the realisation of our agreed aims to:

- strengthen our preventative work to support family wellbeing at the universal level;
- improve awareness of mental health and wellbeing in order to address stigma and help address any cultural issues;
- build the capacity of the workforce through professional learning and a clarification of roles and responsibilities; and
- improve knowledge and communication of the continuum of mental health services.
- careful tracking of data to help adapt services in order to ensure timely access to the right support
- co-locate in multi-agency local hubs to support closer collaboration and encourage skills sharing and supporting professional development across disciplines.

This model aims to help individuals and families to set their own goals and take part in relationships and activities that are meaningful. The implementation of the Hubs and broader health and wellbeing continuum will be closely monitored to ensure that they meet the emotional and mental health needs of our children and young people.

Research suggests that the number of children identified as ‘vulnerable’ could increase by 20% and this will impact on all Community Planning Partners and close collaborative working to support families will be critical. The early establishment of the Fit Like Hubs, re-design of ASN services and response to ‘The Promise’ will be a key part of our approach to meet increased demand.

There is an on-going need to strengthen relationships across the partnership so that we can work with others to meet the demands of the next phase of recovery. This will take the expertise of all partners and we would anticipate establishing new partnerships (for example with Higher education) to tap into resource and expertise across the wider system.

### Planning the Implementation of ‘The Promise’ and Children’s Rights

Over the last 10 years partners have agreed, implemented and refined processes associated with GIRFEC policy to support children who require support beyond the universal services. The local system is likely to experience increased demand as a result of the pandemic and we need to work as a Community Planning Partnership to get ahead of this challenge.

The Independent Care Review’s Promise highlights *‘that Scotland must not aim to fix a broken system but set a higher collective ambition that enables loving, supportive and nurturing relationships as a basis on which to thrive’*.

This work dovetails with Angela Morgan’s review which stated that, *‘30.9% of a population is not marginal. The evidence is that fulfilling the vision of the Additional Support for Learning legislation through “tweaking” systems and provision around a baseline assumption of educating children who may have support needs, but not “additional” support needs is not workable. We need a different starting point: all our children and all their support needs.’*

A key focus on quality improvement activity in 2021/2022 will be the extent to which the Children’s Rights aspirations of The Promise and findings of Angela Morgan’s review are informing practice in schools and this work will inform our service response.

The Community Planning Partnership has committed to considering the structures required to enable a collective and rapid response to changing needs in order to prevent services from being overwhelmed with demand over the coming months and years and the Children’s Services Board will drive the following programmes of work:

- Primary prevention and early intervention
- Shared spaces and resources
- Shared thresholds, systems and customer access routes
- Improve whole life support and learning for life

As we look forward to the re-building phase it will be important to be less defined by job role and employer and build a stronger sense of the team around the child and family. There is also a need to ensure that all children have equal access to education and continue to monitor data on a weekly basis to help drive down levels of exclusion.



## e) EMPOWERING AND SUPPORTING PARENTS AND CARERS

COVID 19 has brought the engagement and involvement of parents supporting their children at home into sharp focus; most particularly the need to improve access to digital technology and connectivity, support for family health and wellbeing and strengthening parents' ability to support learning at home whilst in lockdown and beyond.

Microsoft SWAY has been successfully used to share our monthly online newsletter highlighting developments with parents and carers. This approach allows us to share learning from surveys and inform contributors of our next steps which has helped increase . Engagement with parent newsletters has been positive with our most recent newsletter reaching over 10,000 readers. Feedback through the Aberdeen City Council Parent Forum (ACPF) has been positive, as have the updates from Central Officers during monthly ACPF meetings which provide an opportunity for updates and direct support and guidance for parents.

The Educational Psychology Service has developed a number of resources which include themes such as bereavement support, managing behaviour and transition between home and school learning, practical ideas and considerations for wellbeing and training for staff. **The digital hub** was developed to host this and to provide focused information which offers support to all stakeholders.

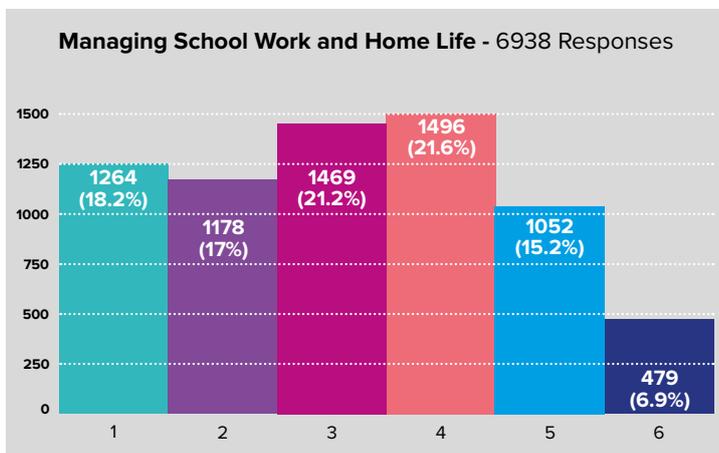
The learning of the last year has reinforced the importance and value of working together with parents to support children's learning – particularly around learning at home. A new digital **Parent Hub** was specifically designed to encourage and build parent's confidence and knowledge in supporting learning at home and to provide tips, links and ideas for learning, supporting parenting and family wellbeing. Learning from the most recent Learning at a Distance survey suggests that it is time to review these resources with parents and carers to ensure that they offer the support families will need as children return to school buildings.

All schools effectively ran virtual parents' evenings with many benefiting from the use of parent evening booking system (PEBs). Schools set up timetables for parent appointments, allowing families to select their own appointment based on availability. Feedback from staff and parents was positive with many families preferring the virtual meeting. The service will carefully consider our approaches as we move forward and not presume that things should return to pre-pandemic practices.

Google Guardian sessions were offered in almost all schools as well as opportunities for families to become familiar with Google Classroom. As families become more comfortable with the tools available some schools worked with partners to provide support for families such as Heathryburn School's collaboration with the Family Learning Team to provide, 'Canna Dine Oot' sessions. Many schools also took advantage of the ThingLink App to help parents directly influence the learning being offered remotely and this more collaborative approach was welcomed by families. The success of these approaches will be considered as we developed a refreshed Parental Engagement Plan.

Of the 6938 parents and carers who responded to a recent Learning at a Distance survey only 48% reported that their child enjoys distance learning (compared to 61% of learners). 66% of parents report that their child undertakes learning with confidence showing that confidence levels have reduced from the first period of lockdown. Confidence levels being reported by children and young people are broadly in keeping with those reported by parents and carers suggesting that as more has been expected and more structure introduced to Google Classroom we have seen decreasing levels of confidence.

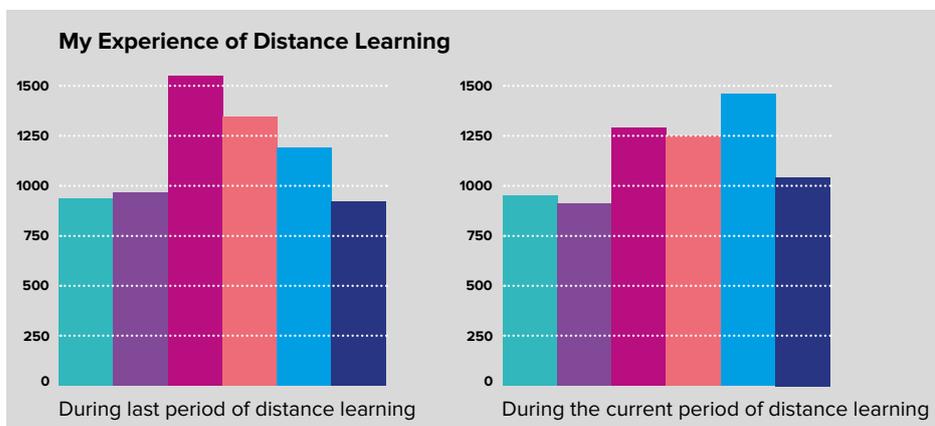
The majority of parents and carers report that they are finding balancing school work and home life difficult and much of the frustration being experienced by families is clear in the data. The pressure is felt more acutely by parents and carers than by children and young people and it will be important to work with Community Planning Partners to support families as we move out of the pandemic.



The refresh of the parental engagement plan is taking account of the very changed circumstances we all now face but will continue to focus on the key

themes of effective communication and information, learning (home, school and family learning), parental voice and further development to support parenting particularly around children’s health and wellbeing and learning.

Despite less families reporting that their child enjoys distance learning there is a positive shift in the quality values when comparing the experience of the first period of lockdown to the second. This feedback marries with Google Analytics data and helps evidence the increase in quality.



The number of parents who feel that the school has supported physical wellbeing (79%) is higher than those who feel that emotional wellbeing has been supported (57%). This chimes with other data sets from across the partnership and should be a clear and on-going focus for the service and wider partnership.

Parents as Early Education Partners (PEEP) will be made available to all families across the city from August and the service will carefully monitor the impact of this intervention. It is important that the service plays its part in the recovery of parents and carers and carefully considers the part it plays in Family Learning.

**f) EMPOWERING AND SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Our children and young people have shown incredible resilience over the last year. We are aware of the need to strongly support their health and wellbeing but need also to look at how they help us build a stronger and better system.

**g) RECOVERING FROM COVID AND BUILDING BACK BETTER**

**Themes emerging for 2021/2022**

The pandemic has impacted on the needs of children and families considerably and it is impossible to consider children in isolation from families and communities. The service has worked hard to understand and respond to these changing needs and will continue to be agile and respond to new learning.

Consideration of our progress over the last few years and reflection on our performance and learning from the last year has helped identify a number of priorities for action/improvement. The service intends to resist the desire to identify all of the solutions at this point in order to ensure that we continue to be guided by the data as we prioritise these areas for improvement over the next 12 months.

**Cross cutting service improvements**

- Build on the use of live data to diagnose and address vulnerability;
- Streamline improvement activity into one plan to improve monitoring arrangements;
- Further strengthen relationships across the Community Planning Partnership;
- Be future focused and work with Community Planning Partners to explore Community Campus models and new education paradigms;
- Work across the Community Planning Partnership to reshape wider children's services to address the changing needs of children, families and community in keeping with The Promise and ASN Review;

**Raising attainment and achievement**

- Improve connectivity to enable the exploration of new educational paradigms;
- Continue to address on-line safety;
- Further develop collaboration for improvement both at school senior leader level and below;
- Review the curriculum in light of the pandemic;
- Improve tracking and monitoring arrangements; and
- Improve the effectiveness of ASN services and accessibility in accordance with Supporting Learners, Accessibility Plan and Children's Rights.

- Empower schools to consider Children's Rights in all areas of work;
- Further develop learner agency and pupil participation;
- Empower parents and carers through implementation of the Parental Engagement Plan;
- Improve the physical wellbeing of children and young people;
- Improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of children, young people and families; and
- Reduce risk taking behaviour and poor self-regulation associated with experiences over the last 12 months; and
- Further monitor and support the positive wellbeing of staff.

#### **Closing the gap**

- Fully implement 1140 hours of ELC from August 2021 including the roll out of PEEP
- Improve attainment in literacy and address any gaps in core literacy skills;
- Improve attainment in numeracy and address any gaps in core numeracy skills;
- Work with internal and external partners on the development of a systemic approach to addressing food insecurity and poverty including the introduction of no costs to the school day; and
- Maximise the impact of Partnership Forums.

#### **Improving employability**

- Identify which hard to fill subject areas could be supported by a remote delivery or alternative delivery solution;
- Formalise a skills progression which takes account of growth areas;
- Improve tracking arrangements to inform the choices of young people and curricular offer;
- Work with partners to continue to re-set the senior phase offering in light of growth areas; and
- Improve visibility of growth areas and available learning pathways.

## References

International Council of Education Advisors report Dec'20

National Improvement Framework Plan 2021

