

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	2 July 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Approaches to Quality Improvement
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/24/195
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
REPORT AUTHOR	Shona Milne
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report details how Aberdeen City schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings will be supported to improve performance against the Core Quality Indicators used by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) and The Care Inspectorate.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 notes the content of this report;
- 2.2 instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to immediately implement the approach detailed in the Aberdeen City Council Early Learning and Childcare Quality Improvement Framework;
- 2.3 instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to implement the approach detailed in the Aberdeen City Council Quality Improvement Framework across all schools from August 2024; and
- 2.4 instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to review the impact of arrangements on evaluations of core Quality Indicators over school session 2024/5, amending approaches as required, and report back to Committee with any proposed changes to arrangements in advance of the 2025/6 school session.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

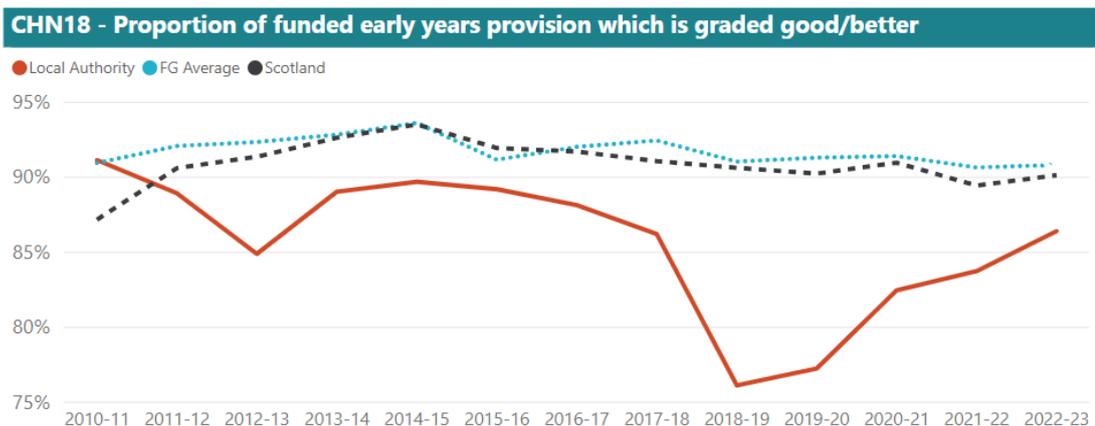
- 3.1 The Quality Improvement Frameworks (QIF) established for the 2023/24 school session were put in place to help drive improvement across all sectors (ELC, primary and secondary). The frameworks have provided a helpful scaffold to support central officers and head teachers to deliver more proportionate quality improvement support.

- 3.2 The impact of the QIF on inspection outcomes for each sector (ELC, primary and secondary) and on positive movement up the categories of support has been reviewed to inform the design of frameworks for the 2024/25 academic session.
- 3.3 **Early Learning and Childcare**
Early Learning and Childcare is currently assessed against two inspection frameworks, HMIE inspect against How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare with the Care Inspectorate inspecting against the Health and Social Care Standards. Work continues nationally to develop one combined framework and this development is welcomed and will go some way to addressing uncertainty around expectations. As a result of the two inspection frameworks, the themes from the inspection activity of each agency differs.
- 3.4 Over the last year, HMIE reports into ELC provision have highlighted a need to continue to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. In some cases, reports are also highlighting a need to strengthen the leadership of change which relies on all staff having a very clear understanding of their role in driving improvement and working together to realise a common purpose.
- 3.5 As a result of these vulnerabilities, a programme of mandatory professional learning was developed and ran from August to December 2023. The training brought together managers and seniors, reinforcing roles and responsibilities. A learning festival also ran for all practitioners on the February Inservice day bringing staff from both local authority and funded providers together to hear key messages. The learning festival was also shaped by the insight gleaned from the Collaborative Improvement Visits earlier this year. Training will continue to be offered to managers next session to further develop practice in these two areas.
- 3.6 Care Inspectorate reports have moved to a mix of risk based and routine inspections, this can make it harder to elicit a balanced view of performance against the Health and Social Care Standards. Areas for improvement identified both locally and nationally include personal planning, self-evaluation and safe environments. Bespoke support is offered to settings based on the recommendations received and key themes are used to design the training programme for practitioners.
- 3.7 The 6 ELC Locality Leads support approximately 200 ELC settings (including childminders). The team regularly visit settings to offer support and guidance to ensure improvement. Regular meetings with the schools quality improvement team allows Locality Leads to share intelligence and ensure all messaging from the central team is aligned. This way of working has resulted in an incremental improvement in gradings from care inspectorate.

	Quality of Care		Quality of Environment		Quality of staff		Quality of Management and Leadership	
	22/23	23/24	22/23	23/24	22/23	23/24	22/23	23/24
Excellent	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Very Good	4	5	5	5	6	5	3	4
Good	2	1	2	2	0	0	2	1
Adequate	1	3	1	3	2	3	1	3
Weak	3	1	2	0	2	1	3	1
Unsatisfactory	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average Gradings	3.7	4.0	4	4.2	4	4.2	3.8	4.1

3.8 The average gradings have increased for all QIs. The increase in average grading for Quality of Leadership and Management suggests that the additional professional learning in this area has had impact. The number of weak gradings has decreased across all QIs, this suggests that the support being provided to Category 3 settings is realising improvement and should be maintained. Quality of care combines gradings from care, and play and learning. Individual grades, shared at feedback but not published, evidence the quality of play and learning requires to be improved in order to increase the overall grade for Quality of Care.

3.9 Some recent Care Inspectorate inspection outcomes are exceptionally positive. Leaders from high performing ELC settings have welcomed staff from settings with less positive evaluations to help exemplify standards further and they have also been used as part of tactical teams to support others through modelling. Opportunities to share and support will continue to be developed. It is thought that further gains will be made against both our Local Government Family Group and national averages when published later in the year.



3.10 Support offered to Category 3 ELC settings has enabled 50% of Category 3 settings to move to at least Category 2 in the last 12 months. As a result of the changes witnessed over the last academic year, the ELC Quality Improvement Framework will remain largely unchanged. The associated Quality Improvement Calendar has been slightly amended to reflect an increased focus

professional learning to build capacity around play and learning. Focussing on this area should realise improvement in Quality of Care and the quality of HMLe gradings in Learning, Teaching and Assessment. Appendix A contains the proposed ELC Quality Improvement Framework for 2024/5. The Framework will require to be further updated when the joint inspection framework is published.

3.11 Primary Schools

Primary schools are assessed by HMLe against How Good is Our School (4). There are two types of inspection model. The short inspection model which involves a team visiting the school for 2 days and focusing on Quality Indicator(QI) 2.3 (Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment) and 3.2 (Raising Attainment and Achievement) and the full inspection model where the team are in school for 5 days and cover all 5 quality indicators.

- 3.12 The Framework has guided a far more proportionate approach to quality improvement, however, capacity issues have impacted on the consistency of application across localities. Currently, 2 members of the team have responsibility for each of the 3 localities (Dee, Don and West). Vacant Head Teacher posts often have to be covered by the locality team and this can reduce central team capacity, vacancies in the central team and a high volume of inspections to prepare for can further impact on the team's ability to fully deliver against the framework. These challenges had a disproportionate impact on one locality and this has triggered a review of the working arrangements. Consideration has also been given to how to further prioritise those who most need support to improve.
- 3.13 The service will move to a model where officers spend more time working across localities to ensure consistency. It is thought that this more holistic approach will better enable the team to support primary schools through the range of activity outlined in the Quality Improvement Framework.
- 3.14 The professional learning offer has been reviewed to be more focussed on the areas of vulnerability identified through quality improvement visits and inspections. There is a need to focus on the leadership of change, planning, curriculum and learning, teaching and assessment next session. In addition to this, there is a commitment to focus on supporting relationships through the agreed Behaviour Action Plan and associated actions have been added to the framework for 2024/25.
- 3.15 The primary Quality Improvement Team of 3 Quality Improvement Managers and 3 Quality Improvement Officers carried out 55 full quality improvement visits in primary schools this session. All 48 primary headteachers have been part of the evaluation team in at least one other school and almost all DHTs have had the opportunity to participate in a visit, increasing the capacity of our middle leaders. In addition to this, each primary school has received 3 formal data discussions providing support and challenge around attainment. Some schools will have received very regular contact to check progress against actions for improvement depending upon their classification of need, with mechanisms in place to check that agreed actions are completed timeously. Taking this approach has realised positive movement in inspection outcomes.

Primary HMle	Leadership of Change			Learning Teaching and Assessment			Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion			Raising attainment and achievement		
	18/19	22/23	23/24	18/19	22/23	23/24	18/19	22/23	23/24	18/19	22/23	23/24
Gradings												
Excellent												
Very Good		1			1			1	1		1	
Good		1	1		2	3			1		2	3
Satisfactory			1	4	2	2		1		3	1	2
Weak	3				0	1	3			1	1	1
Unsatisfactory												
Average	2	4.5	3.5	3	3.8	3.8	2	4	4.5	2.75	3.6	3.8

- 3.16 It is worth noting that the sample size is small and looking at this data in isolation doesn't give a complete overview. However, in the last 12 months there is evidence of improvement in QI 3.1 (Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion) and QI 3.2 (Raising attainment and achievement). The increase in raising attainment and achievement could indicate that training in data literacy and accountability is beginning to have impact. If we look at the pre-pandemic baseline, there is a significant positive shift across all core QIs, however there are still some schools who require support to achieve gradings of good or better and this has to be prioritised.
- 3.17 6 schools have moved up a category of support over the year. 9 Primary schools are now in Category 1 (2 more than in June 2023) and able to contribute to the self-improving system. Schools across the West Locality are not making as much positive progress as those in the other two localities and as a result, 9 schools remain in Category 3 (compared to 10 in June 2023). Working city wide will allow resource and expertise to be better targeted to support category 3 schools across the city. It is thought that there is sufficient evidence of improvement across the 2 localities less impacted by reduced capacity to demonstrate that the more proportionate approach to supporting schools is beginning to realise improvements. Schools and central staff evaluations continue to align leading to agreement on the support category the school requires to be in to make required improvements. Appendix B provides an overview of the categories in place for schools for the start of the 2024/5 academic session.
- 3.18 The Quality Improvement Framework for 2024/25 will be complemented by a professional learning programme focussed on:
- Planning
 - Curriculum
 - Learning teaching and assessment
 - Relationships and actions from the behaviour plan
- 3.19 Quality Improvement visits will continue to be supported by Trios of Head Teachers and this will be widened out to include other senior leaders in schools to help build capacity in our Deputy Head Teachers and Principal Teachers in keeping with our approach of growing the Head Teachers of the future. Schools

have been in the same Trios for 4 years now and some HTs have expressed a desire to change Trios in order to expand opportunities to share practice. The membership of Trios will be reviewed at the start of session 24/25. There is a need to ensure that the Trios offer further challenge.

3.20 The Quality Improvement Framework (Appendix C) has been amended to reflect changes to working practices as outlined in paragraphs 3.11 and 3.12, more intensive contact with schools not yet achieving evaluations of good or better and the agreed Behaviour Plan.

3.21 **Secondary Schools**

There continues to be variability across secondary schools with some schools performing at the highest levels and being sector leading in some areas, whilst a small number require considerable on-going support through support at Category 3. This wide range requires us to think quite differently about how we use the expertise available to us in our schools to support improvement across all schools, including for example through the establishment of Tactical Teams, supports from other Local Authority schools, access to high quality mentors or supports in particular areas from national agencies.

3.22 The Quality Improvement Manager for secondary and two Quality Improvement Officers have worked in collaboration with other senior Officers and Secondary Head Teachers to test a range of support mechanisms based on the individual circumstances of the schools. These bespoke arrangements are only required where a school self-evaluates as requiring support in Category 2 or 3 (see Appendix B). The kind of support required can change over time, possibly best exemplified by how the role of the Northfield Tactical Team has changed over the last year.

3.23 During session 23/24 the secondary team undertook 11 Quality Improvement visits. 6 visits focussed on (QI 2.3) Learning, Teaching and Assessment, 1 focussed on QI2.3 and QI3.1 and the remaining 4 provided detailed feedback on all Quality Indicators. Over the course of the visits, teams visited a total of 438 classes and schools were left with a clear set of next steps to progress.

3.24 Each of the visits had a team comprising central team and senior leaders from schools. 9 of our secondary HTs and 31 DHTs have been part of a team visiting another school in the city over session 23/24. The model provides valuable professional development for team members and has been received positively by schools and staff involved in the visits.

3.25 50% more secondary schools are now classified as being Category 1 (four in total now compared to only two in June 2023), with 4 more making good progress with the supports available at Category 2. The remaining schools (3) remain in Category 3 and continue to receive bespoke support aligned to their particular circumstances. There is very clear evidence that Category 3 schools make most progress when school leaders fully drive improvement at school level.

3.26 There is emerging evidence of the impact of involving members of school senior leadership teams in quality improvement activities beyond their own schools. Widening the visit team to include a wide cross section of senior leaders not

only benefits the school being visited but also the individual team members and their home school. This approach also ensures a shared understanding of what high quality looks like building capacity across our schools.

3.27 Secondary schools and the central team introduced a programme of professional learning during session 2023-24. The central team delivered professional learning in:

- Curriculum Rationale (Sep 2023)
- Pathway Planning (Sep 2023)
- ABZ Campus (Jan 2024)
- Timetabling (Dec 2023)
- Attainment (Statistical Summary Report & INSIGHT) - Various Across Year (e.g. Sep 2023, May 2024)
- Timetabling Software (Mar 2024)
- Tracking & Monitoring (HT Input) (Feb 2024)
- Attendance (HT Input) (Feb 2024)

3.28 The timetabling course received positive feedback and we are exploring how this can be offered to neighbouring authorities as all other courses are centrally based. Professional learning inputs for session 24/25 will cover each of the core quality indicators set out by Education Scotland.

3.29 **Quality Improvement Framework for 2024/25**

Having reached out to a high performing local authority and comparing Quality Improvement Frameworks, our processes and procedures are similar. As a result, only small changes have been made in advance of the new school session and these are highlighted in red in Appendix C. These include:

- changes to the range of evidence gathered and the information reviewed during visits to reflect the agreed Behaviour Plan
- changed city wide primary working arrangements
- more intensive arrangements for those who are yet to evaluate as good or better by providing minimal levels of support for those in Category 1

3.30 In order to address vulnerabilities around QI1.3 (Leadership of Change), the team are developing a Headteacher Induction programme which consists of a 4 day programme providing introductions to key policies, procedures and personnel. In addition to this there will be a buddy system to provide new headteachers with a mentor.

3.31 The work led by the Executive Director of Families and Communities, in her capacity as Lead of the Northern Alliance, has led to the appointment of officers from each of the 8 northern local authorities to develop a learning and teaching toolkit. This will help increase capacity to support this important area.

3.32 Many other Local Authorities have areas of vulnerability similar to those identified in Aberdeen. We have begun discussions with other local authority colleagues to discuss how we might work more closely together to secure improvement with an initial focus on sharing the approaches to preparing schools for inspection given that the volume of inspections being experienced

hampers general quality assurance and improvement work as resource is redirected to support schools.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The recommendations in this Report will assist the Authority to fulfil its duty under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education which is provided in the schools managed by the Authority; and to exercise its functions in relation to such provision with a view to raising standards of education.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 No negative environmental impacts have been identified.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Risk of not improving outcomes for learners	Positive engagement with Inspection agencies and sharing learning across the system where appropriate.	L	Yes
Compliance	Risk of not complying with national guidance	Positive engagement with Inspection agencies and sharing learning across the system where appropriate.	L	Yes
Operational	Risk that schools/ELC settings do not accurately identify the areas for improvement that will make the greatest difference to learners	Quality assurance arrangements in place to validate self-evaluation gradings	L	Yes

Financial	No risks identified			
Reputational	Risk that poor quality of provision will present a reputational risk to the Council	High levels of assurance are taken Quality Improvement and Inspection visits	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No risks identified			

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p>Commit to realising the potential of each individual, by seeking to widen curriculum choice and implement progressive choices.</p> <p>Commit to closing the attainment gap in education while working with partners across the city.</p>	<p>External scrutiny provides helpful assurance that there is sufficient focus on helping young people recover from the pandemic and that the school self-evaluation and improvement plan is well positioned to support a closing of the poverty related attainment gap.</p>
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
<p>Prosperous People - 95% of all our children, including those living in our priority neighbourhoods, will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026</p>	<p>Engagement with inspectors provides an opportunity to learn from national best practice and validate self-evaluation evidence available in schools. The support and challenge received by Inspectors helps to shape improvement plans for the coming sessions in keeping with the LOIP stretch aims.</p>
<p>Regional and City Strategies</p> <p>Regional Cultural Strategy</p> <p>Prevention Strategy</p> <p>Children's Services Plan</p> <p>National Improvement Framework Plan</p>	<p>Engagement with the Inspectorate is fully aligned to the city prevention strategy. Work to address poverty and improvement in the Children's services plan, the Child Poverty Action Plan and the National Improvement Framework Plan is also supported through external scrutiny.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	I confirm an impact assessment is not required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

11. APPENDICES

Appendix A – ELC Quality Improvement Framework

Appendix B – School Support Categories

Appendix C – Quality Improvement Framework for schools

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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