

SERVICE UPDATE

<u>Name of Function:</u>	Children and Family Services
<u>Date:</u>	01/08/24
<u>Title of Update:</u>	Northfield Advisory Group Meeting 21.06.24
<u>Report Author:</u>	Shona Milne
<u>Chief Officer:</u>	Shona Milne
<u>Contact Details:</u>	shmilne@aberdeencity.gov.uk

Members will recall the Advisory Group set up to support Northfield had committed to visit in June 2024. The service update below provides a summary of the visit

CURRENT SITUATION

The Education and Children's Services Committee of 30th March 2023 instructed the Executive Director Families and Communities to implement a governance framework, including the establishment of an Advisory Group, to help drive improvements at Northfield Academy in the longer term.

The Advisory Group spent 21 June 2024 at Northfield Academy. Craig McDermott (Headteacher, Northfield Academy) shared an overview of progress made under each of the HMle recommendations since the last formal meeting of the Group in June 2023.

The advisors noted that there had been a considerable move forward against some of the recommendations and felt that the school was tackling the right things by focussing on the bedrock issues. They noted that the Headteacher was driving improvement through consultation with stakeholders and using the Tactical Team to support when required. Advisors reflected that this approach was resulting in more sustainable progress being made.

Advisors were impressed with the approach taken by the Headteacher and commented positively on the systematic approach he is taking to improve the relationships and environment within the school.

The Group noted that the iterative and on-going informal relationship with an identified inspector from HMle was healthy and provided the Head Teacher with a professional sounding board. The benefits of this relationship had enabled the Head Teacher to move the school forward against the recommendations with greater confidence.

The Advisors shared contacts with another Scottish school where there has been significant success in implementing a restorative justice approach. The Head Teacher has already made contact with the school and a visit is planned in the new session to learn from the approach they have taken.

The Advisors spent time with a group of young people and explored what it was like to learn at Northfield Academy. The young people were able to describe the differences in the school over time and how these had impacted their learning journey. Young people who had experienced Crew talked with confidence about the support they received from their Crew teacher and the difference that the approach had made to them during transition, the residential and throughout the year. The advisors were impressed by all young people, however those who had experienced Crew, although the youngest, were by far the most confident in sharing their experiences.

The young people were open and honest. They shared that they would like to have more teacher-run clubs during lunch and after school to allow them to develop their interests further. There was particular interest in reinstating a climbing group and a member of staff has already volunteered to participate in a training course to allow this to happen.

On talking to staff the Advisory Group were struck by their openness and honesty. There was a clear feeling that the school now had a clear direction and purpose. Staff felt they knew where they were going and that the ethos within the school was more positive. They spoke about the Headteacher's strong presence in the school and the fact that he knows the staff and takes time to listen to their views. Staff could easily articulate where the Head Teacher had asked for, and acted on their views.

When asked what they would change, staff mirrored the priorities for action previously shared by the Head Teacher. Staff spoke about the need to support each other to have positive wellbeing. One member of staff described the support she had received from Able Futures, how impactful it had been, and how keen she was to ensure all staff knew this was available. Regular newsletters are sent to all staff sharing the supports available and central staff will highlight Able Futures here and at the next Head Teacher meeting.

Advisors commented that staff were realistic about the fact there was still a long way to go on the journey however they had confidence in the Headteacher and the fact they were being well led to make those incremental and planned changes feel more manageable.

Advisors commented on the change in the narrative coming through social media. The interview with the Headteacher following the most recent HMLe report had been well received and generated positive comments through social media feeds. Staff also spoke positively about the recent celebration event and the level of engagement from families.

Summary of areas highlighted for consideration by the Advisors

The group advise that they see change in the narrative from both young people and staff. They were particularly impressed with the confidence and interactions of the young people who had been part of the Crew model and would be keen to track the progress they make as they move through the school.

Advisors suggested that it would be helpful to consider how restorative practices could be used to support relationships in the school further and

provided the Headteacher with a contact in a school where this had been successfully achieved.

Advisors valued the opportunity to talk to the senior leadership team and were pleased to hear they felt supported by the Headteacher to implement change in their areas of responsibility. They felt that physically basing the senior leaders throughout the school would have a positive impact on staff and learners as senior leaders would be more accessible. This change will be implemented from August 2024.

Although the group of young people they met with were eloquent, advisors felt that there was still a need to capture the voices of those young people who become disillusioned with the system in order to review the offer available for them and keep them in the system for as long as possible. Regular pupil surveys capture the voice of the whole school community, however time will be spent gathering the voice of those who are more difficult to reach through guidance, year head staff and pathway advocates in order to ensure the school offer matches their needs.

Advisors are keen to be updated on the progress of the school and would welcome the chance to come back in 12 months to meet with focus groups and hear about the next stage in the journey. They were confident that under the leadership of the Headteacher the school would continue to improve.

The Advisors noted that many of the challenges facing young people at Northfield cannot be addressed by the school in isolation. The Advisory group are keen to offer support and challenge around the emerging model of Family Support.