Appendix B – Exploration of Learners' Needs

INTRODUCTION

To help gain a deep understanding of how the learning needs of children and young people are met across schools in Aberdeen City, the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning instructed the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) to undertake an Exploration of Learners' Needs. Six strands of exploration were undertaken by the Educational Psychology Service:

- Questionnaires and Semi-structured Interviews with Secondary Senior Leadership Teams
- Questionnaires and Semi-structured Interviews with Primary Senior Leadership Teams
- Staff Survey Questionnaire
- Focus Groups with those not covered by the above questionnaires:
  - Trade Union Groups
  - Parents of Children with Additional Support Needs
  - Quality Improvement Team including Educational Psychology Service
  - Additional Support Needs & Outreach Service
- Learners' Voice
  - Learners across a range of ages and provisions indicated their feelings about school related areas by using 'School Wellbeing Cards'
- Case Study approach
  - In-depth look at good practice in four educational settings

More information on each of these six strands and the themes arising from this exploration can be found below.

EXPLORATION OF LEARNING NEEDS - SECONDARY

Qualitative data was collected from secondary school Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) across Aberdeen City Council (ACC). Data was collected via a questionnaire using Microsoft Forms. The questionnaires were followed up with a semi-structured interview with the Educational Psychology Service (EPS). 12 secondary schools (inclusive of specialist provision) completed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire and interview were separated into three sections: Current Picture; Staff Support; and Use of Resource.

Section 1: Current Picture

Confidence in meeting current learners' needs adequately:

Senior leaders were asked to rate their level of confidence in meeting current learners' needs adequately. A 6-point scale was used where 1 means not at all, and 6 means very confident. The average score was 3.9.
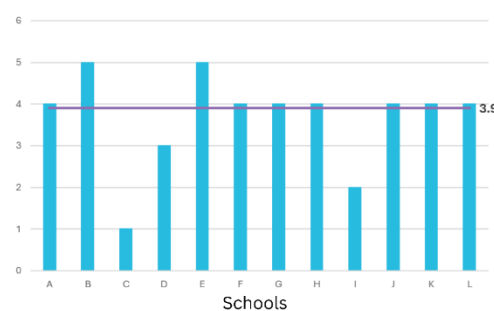

Qualitative analysis indicates that secondary schools are striving to develop inclusion within their contexts and are implementing changes to meet the growing range of needs. Most schools indicated that their current offer can sometimes be challenging due to staffing vacancies or absences. Senior Leaders are

appreciative of staff flexibility at these times. There is some variance seen, but the average score was 3.9, expressing confidence overall as over the halfway line. Two schools rated lower than the average, and one just below average; the Quality Improvement Team will follow-up with these schools around next steps and opportunities to explore further support.
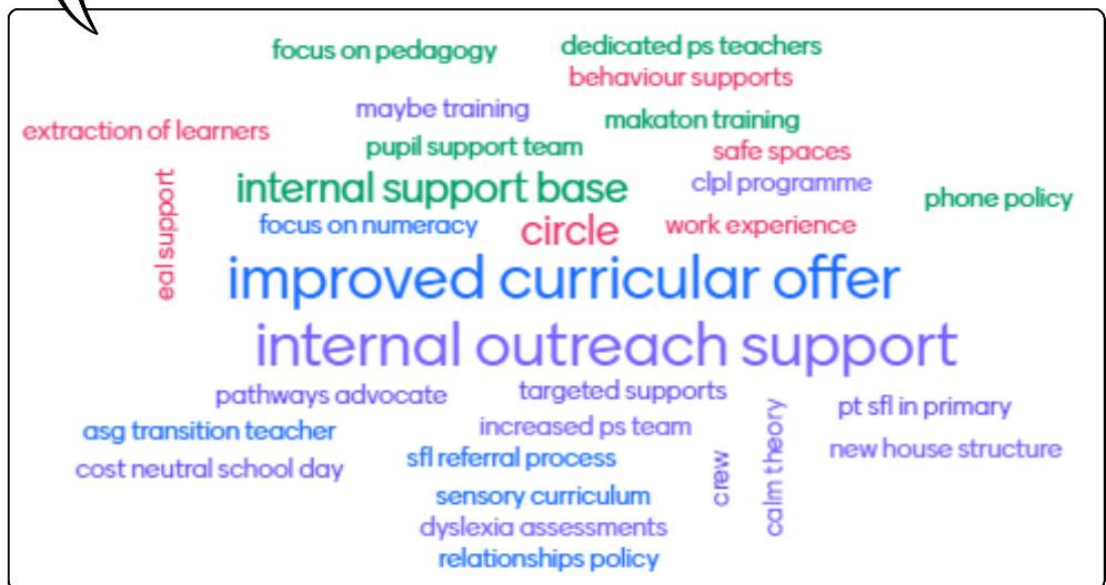
SECTION 2: Staff Support

Senior leaders were presented with a range of multiple-choice options on how staff are supported. Staff wellbeing and capacity were areas of consideration for most schools. Arrangements for supporting staff varied in terms of methods and effectiveness.
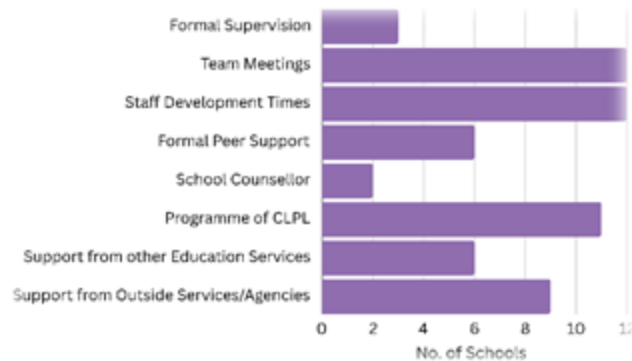
SECTION 3: Use of Resource

(The larger the word in the image above, the more times it was listed by Senior Leaders as their top 3 most effective)

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW DATA ANALYSIS – SECONDARY

This section contains Qualitative data collected from secondary school Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) across Aberdeen City Council. Data was collected via a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with the Educational Psychology Service. 11 secondary schools (inclusive of specialist provision) took part in the interviews. Educational Psychologists then applied the six-step approach of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to the qualitative data. CoPilot was used to verify the themes generated.

The questionnaire and interview were separated into three sections: Current Picture; Staff Support; and Use of Resource.

Section 1: Current Picture

Many schools discussed the rise in mental health needs, and the impact this is having on attendance (of both school and mainstream classes):

> "The growing amount of emotional based school avoidance, coupled with limited resource makes it challenging to respond to these complex cases in a way that brings about desired levels of improvement."
>
> Secondary Interview

> "The next step is really understanding the different themes of non-attendance and that is why I'm really interested in Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance [EBSNA: training with the EPS] because that is a key factor in some of our non-attendance."

The impact of Covid was suggested by some schools as a contributing factor for an increase in both Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance and learners requiring support with their emotional and physical regulation needs in secondary education.

Some Senior Leaders described experiencing challenges with learners' engagement with and willingness to accept intervention. However, most Senior Leaders described the various ways in which learners are included in the decisions and planning around their own assessments and packages of support.

> "We've just recently added pupil voice more explicitly into [our recording system] saying what the pupils themselves feel that they need in order to access their learning."

Some schools detailed how the voice of learners is used more systemically to shape the school environment and the experiences of education for all learners in their secondary schools:

> "I think our LGBT community would feel included. They still feel that there are issues but we are actively supporting them. We've got a BME group as well and they're a really loud pupil voice group, which is really good."

One Head Teacher shared that learners influence the professional learning of staff in their school:

> "We have involved young people in delivering professional learning."

Many schools emphasised the importance of ensuring that all learners were able to access the curriculum with a focus on inclusive practice and pedagogy. Supporting pupils to achieve qualifications and positive destinations was discussed frequently. There was creativity demonstrated through school staff exploring options with a range of providers to diversify and extend their curricular offer, particularly for learners with Additional Support Needs:

> "If we think about how we meet the needs of learners, I think of the curriculum as your skeleton, your backbone. So you've got to make sure that your curriculum offer meets the needs of all young people [and] we've made a lot of adaptations to [and] extension of the curriculum."

Section 2: Staff Support

A range of external services were accessed by schools to support and upskill staff as detailed in the list below. Some examples are described here:

"I took part in a six week coaching programme [with the EPS] about helping to get your priorities, filter things out, how are you coping? I found it really helpful."

Secondary Interview

"We've got quite a lot of involvement from the EAL service. With us having quite a significant cohort of Ukrainian people, we did get capacity from the [Central Team] for a temporary post where somebody came in and was able to work specifically with that group of young people."

Strong links with the Quality Improvement Team were seen as a valuable support for Senior Leadership Teams:

"We've got a good link with our QIO. As a Senior Leadership Team, we often ask him things, and we have that relationship and that culture with him and then filter [the information] to staff."

Relational approaches create a positive school climate amongst staff and for young people. This was key to encouraging staff to support each other. In addition to this, an accessible Senior Leadership Team was important to help staff to feel supported:

"We [in SLT] have a very open-door policy and are accessible at all times to discuss and advise teachers [and] share information."

"The Head Teachers that we've had in succession have always had an open door policy so when you have that at the top and you've got a Head Teacher that has a 'come and speak to me' approach, and that's encouraged, that filters down. I think the SLT is supportive here and you would always be able to go and speak to someone. There might not always be a solution, but you know they would do their best. You can support staff to find new ways of doing things."

External Agencies/ Trainings providing support valued by Secondary Schools:

- ACIS (Aberdeen Counselling in Action) Counsellor
- ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) Training
- LIAM (Let's Introduce Anxiety Management) Training
- CCC (Connected & Compassionate Classrooms) Training
- EPS (Educational Psychology Service) Coaching
- Autism Outreach
- Dyslexia Outreach
- EAL (English as an Additional Language) Support
- Emotion Coaching Training
- SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) Training
- Education Scotland Training

Section 3: Use of Resource

With a growing number of pupils and level of need, many schools discussed the lack of adequate physical space - particularly for schools who had an older building:

"For those breakout spaces, that's probably a gap within our provision. We don't have dedicated space because we're over capacity [and] any space we've got is a classroom. We have got little nooks… that we're trying to make the best use of. [Head of SfL] has done a great job, with fresh eyes coming in, and looked at the best use of space but, by and large, if there's a space in this building, it's got to be a classroom because we're over capacity."

Some Senior Leadership Teams made reference to their school buildings and the barriers that they can create for learners with Additional Support Needs due to the challenges of adapting the physical environment and the inadequate space:

"I am really concerned that some of the challenges that we have are because of the environment that the young people are in and how contained they are."

A range of approaches and interventions are being implemented successfully throughout the secondary schools in Aberdeen. Many are taking a whole-school approach through interventions such as cost-neutral school days, relational approaches, and phone policies. The challenges with implementing whole-school approaches such as CIRCLE (The CIRCLE Framework is a way of organising and supporting input using a staged system of support, beginning with setting up an inclusive classroom) were discussed however, the framework was viewed positively by many:

> A key area for improvement discussed was the need for increased collaboration and support from other agencies and the need for more of a 'community approach' to meeting the needs of learners

"The explicit nature of the [CIRCLE] Framework has made [class teachers] really focus on what the classroom looks like, how they speak, what they teach."

Some schools were opting for developing targeted support bases (such as for Autistic learners) while others were hesitant to extract learners from mainstream classes as this was not viewed as aligning with their view of inclusion. The approach to the inclusion of learners with Additional Support Needs was not consistent across the City. Some Senior Leaders indicated that they operated a more traditional model of using Support for Learning (SfL) to provide support for learners with Additional Support Needs (ASN). However, most Senior Leaders discussed the change in their approach and higher expectations on mainstream Class Teachers to provide support through their inclusive pedagogy:

"Before, kids would go into SfL… they were then kept in a bubble and that's not inclusion... So it needs to be a blended approach."

Many schools described the benefits of improving and extending their curricular offer internally and by exploring external resources:

> **"Consulting with [neighbouring secondary school] just gives a wider curricular choice for young people... and many with ASN learners will now access that. So that's quite good."**
> *Secondary Interview*

> *"When I first came here, there were very few opportunities, particularly beyond S4. So going into the Senior Phase - if you weren't at Higher, [you] didn't stay. So we've changed that. There are opportunities at Level 3, level 4, level 5 for S5 and S6."*

Having effective systems in place for supporting learners enabled Senior Leaders to deploy their resources across their secondary schools more efficiently:

> *"We've got a more robust referral procedure in place [to SfL]. Teachers can access [this] to refer to us and can then approach us."*

Senior Leaders reported that staff had to resort to more reactive approaches to meeting needs in the absence of effective internal systems.

Staffing changes in Senior Leadership Teams appeared to have an influence on how imbedded and efficient systems were. The increasing level of need of learners, in some cases, has impacted on some staffs' ability to adhere to or adapt their systems appropriately:

> *"I think the systems and processes worked before because of the level of need we had and the number of pupil support assistants - what we had by all accounts worked then. But as our roll has gone up really quite quickly [and] as our demographic has changed, our level of need has changed, we've not been able to keep up."*

Staff having a lack of time was discussed frequently and this impacted negatively on their ability to develop more effective systems to improve the way they meet the needs of learners.

Schools discussed the importance of having good information sharing processes at the primary transition stage and the benefits of having a dedicated Principal Teacher for this role:

> *"Having the Principal Teacher SfL in the primary and the Principal Teacher SfL S1 and S2 working really closely together is a good thing. We have got a really good knowledge of the primary sevens coming up this year."*

Senior Leaders believed that using a variety of methods to measure the impact of support and interventions that were being implemented was important for evaluating the effectiveness of resource deployment and allocation:

> "Those pupils that probably started off being maybe quite upset and dysregulated in classes and weren't able to cope are now in all mainstream classes. Their attendance has increased."
>
> Secondary Interview

> "The impact it's had on learners is they've got the confidence in terms of literacy and numeracy and they're also getting the SCQF level qualification as a result of that, which then builds up their confidence."

However, the evaluation of interventions was more effective in some secondary schools compared to others. According to Senior Leaders, some approaches (such as relational approaches), which many schools across ACC are implementing, were difficult to measure:

> "It's difficult to show the impact of what you're doing because the staff don't see the impact yet. We know that there is a positive relationship being built one-to-one but you don't always see that in the classroom."

With an increased number of individual plans for learners, it was deemed important for staff to have the knowledge and skills to effectively support effective reviewing processes and individual target setting:

> "Making sure that everyone is trained up on how to use the wellbeing indicators effectively and how that then feeds into Single Agency Plans. I think we're better at that and then that feeds into Person Centred Risk Assessments (PCRAs)."

Summary from Analysis of Secondary

- There is a growing level of need in mainstream education. This was described in terms of an increase in the numbers of learners with Additional Support Needs (ASNs) as well as an increase in the complexity of learners' needs.

- This changing landscape of mainstream education and a perceived reduction in support from multiagency partners external to Education is changing the role of educators.

- Experiencing a perception of services external to Education 'closing the door' on support could lead to increased feelings of responsibility and separation for secondary mainstream education staff.

- There was demonstration of creativity and flexibility in meeting a range of learners' needs through maximising limited internal resource (including physical resource given the increase in school rolls) and exploring alternative options (e.g., to increase curricular offer).

- Strengths were identified in placing learners at the centre and using relational approaches in supporting learners.

- In secondary schools across Aberdeen there is an appreciation for the many school staff that go above and beyond their remit to support the needs of learners.

- The sustainability of the current support offered by secondary schools is dependent on continued adequate resourcing (e.g., financial, staffing, physical environments).

EXPLORATION OF LEARNING NEEDS – PRIMARY

Qualitative data was collected from primary school Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) across Aberdeen City Council. Data were collected via a questionnaire using Microsoft Forms. The questionnaires were followed up with a semi-structured interview with the Educational Psychology Service. 34 primary schools (inclusive of specialist provision) completed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire and interview were separated into three sections: Current Picture; Staff Support; and Use of Resource. Further exploration of these key areas can be found by looking at the qualitative data below.

Section 1: Current Picture

Confidence in meeting current learners' needs adequately:

Senior leaders were asked to rate their level of confidence in meeting current learners' needs adequately. A 6-point scale was used where 1 means not at all, and 6 means very confident. The average rating per ASG was 3.4

Qualitative analysis indicated that many primary schools are creating enhanced areas out of existing resource to meet the growing range of needs. Primary Senior Leadership Teams emphasised that having an adequate number of skilled Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) was essential to the provision of their current offer.
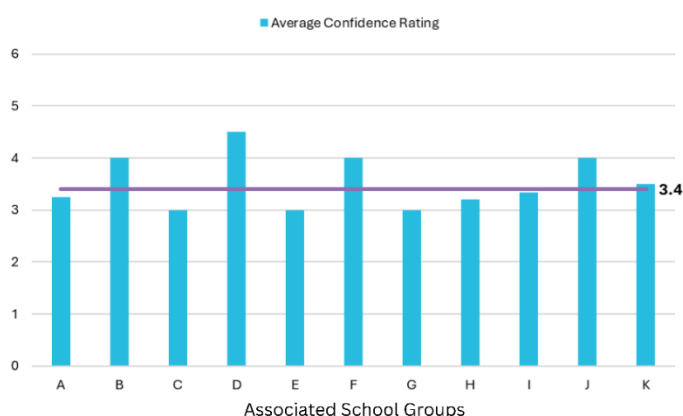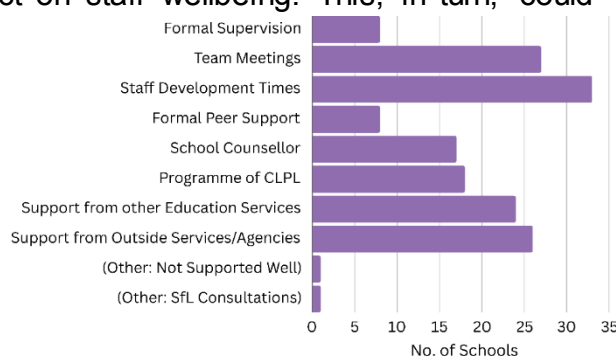

Section 2: Staff Support

Methods used to Support Staff

Multiple choice options were provided with space for other methods used. Qualitative analysis explored data from section two in more detail.

Qualitative analysis indicated that most Senior Leadership Teams are concerned that the current education context could impact on staff wellbeing. This, in turn, could impact negatively on the wellbeing of Senior Leaders themselves. The ethos and approach of the Senior Leadership Team was key and a supportive factor in supporting their staff. However, there were some barriers in supporting and upskilling Pupil Support Assistants due to the nature of their contracted hours leaving reduced opportunity for professional learning and meetings.

Section 3: Use of Resource

Three most effective interventions/approaches?

(The larger the word in the picture, the more times it was listed by Senior Leaders as their top 3 most effective interventions/approaches)

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW ANALYSIS - PRIMARY

Qualitative data was collected from primary school Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) across Aberdeen City Council (ACC). Data were collected via a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with the Educational Psychology Service (EPS). 25 primary schools (inclusive of specialist provision) took part in the interviews with most being represented by their Head Teacher (HT). Educational Psychologists applied the six-step approach of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to the qualitative data. CoPilot was used to verify the themes generated.

SECTION 1: Current Picture

Senior Leaders from across the city reported that learners' needs in schools have changed significantly over the past few years. All schools reported a growing level of complexity of need in mainstream schools and discussed the challenges of meeting these needs:

"The main challenge is the significant amount of ASN that we've got across the school. We're now up to 54.5% of our school community having an identified ASN."

In addition to reporting a growing number of learners with Additional Support Needs, many Senior Leaders discussed the difficulties they can face in meeting the wide range of needs, with increased range of learning levels seen across each stage:

"Across every class you've got a diversity [range] from pre-early or even foundation milestones, right through to 3rd level."

Some Senior Leaders discussed how limitations in their physical environments could at times be barriers to supporting increased needs in relation to regulation and personal care:

"Personal care is a significant issue where we are staffing a large amount of nappy changes daily in P1-3 and the numbers requiring personal care is rising significantly."

Universal approaches for inclusive practice are embedded in schools including dyslexia interventions such as Dyslexia Passports and tools for learning trolleys in classes. Schools across the city are at various stages of implementing the CIRCLE framework (The CIRCLE Framework is a way of organising and supporting input using a staged system of support, beginning with setting up an inclusive classroom) to support inclusive practice. Many schools believed the framework to be beneficial in helping staff to meet the needs of learners:

"CIRCLE has definitely helped along with the support from the [Central Team] in implementing it. [ESO] is consistently reaching out to the leaders and we have an identified lead who is amazing… our SfL Teacher has really embraced it and is helping staff to use that as a tool to support."

"We've got our positive relationship policy embedded in the classrooms and the use of this and appropriate language and restorative conversations with children."

Primary School Interview

Positive relationships in schools were crucial for creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Most Head Teachers discussed the value of implementing relationships policies to support with this:

Having an inclusive school ethos was important for many Head Teachers. Some schools discussed how assemblies and whole-school initiatives were used to celebrate a variety of cultures and languages and to raise awareness of

different Additional Support Needs (ASN). These positively contributed to the development of their school ethos.

The way schools assess need was discussed including how they involve learners and their parents/carers in the assessment and planning. Well-embedded child's planning processes were supported by having clear expectations of staff. These processes supported flexible and responsive approaches to targeted interventions:

"I think there's certain individuals that we're not getting it right for. One size doesn't fit all and it's trying to work out actually what can we do."

Senior Leaders discussed staged approaches to interventions and how they strive to meet learners' needs within their settings. The implementation of CIRCLE has supported this:

"[CIRCLE] has been really useful in terms of helping staff to refresh their understanding of what lies within the scope of the class teacher and PSA staff, what lies within targeted [support], and what lies within the scope of specialist services."

Most Senior Leaders described the various ways in which they are striving to promote inclusion and develop staff's skills in inclusive practice. This was supported by the implementation of the CIRCLE Framework and relationships policies:

"The positive relationships policy has had a big effect on the understanding of restorative conversations and compassion. Teachers [are] becoming more trauma informed. I think that has helped a lot of our PSAs to not jump to conclusions, to understand that there's no behaviour out of the blue."

Effective implementation was important to seeing the success and value of interventions and approaches.

Many Senior Leaders described how they had already adapted their approaches for parent/carer engagement to improve communication, understanding, and to include them in their processes:

"We add on 10 minutes to the parents night appointment to share the IEP and to have discussions. We then invite the parent to have a longer meeting."

"Some [learners have been] working at early level for four years…. so breaking that down for parents and helping them understand that your child is making progress."

Many schools discussed the challenges faced by parents of learners with Additional Support Needs. One school described their approach to supporting parents:

"We decided that we were trying to stop the families feeling isolated and feeling alone, we were going to start a parental support group… My depute led that [and] the thinking behind it was [to] get a network of parents who could work together."

Senior Leaders across the city reported that they have different tracking systems in place to ensure transparency and clear understanding amongst staff of learners' needs. This allowed for higher levels of support to be offered to staff in relation to meeting learners' needs:

"We are trying to be more data-driven so when we get that data we can then work as a team…"

Primary Interview

"We've got our internal referral system that the staff know about and we regularly remind staff of that."

These systems and processes were supporting a staged approach to intervention:

"Everybody has a clear idea and process that we follow and don't just suddenly start working with the Support for Learning teacher. There is a staged procedure before that."

"We have a targeted support referral form that staff complete if they want to raise a concern or are looking for more support for children in their class. It outlines the universal support that they currently provide in the class and then specifically what they're looking for and what will make a difference."

Many Senior Leaders spoke about offering staff different avenues to raise and discuss their concerns:

"We meet with staff every term and look at [how they] meet learners' needs, so there's the support there where they've got a team and we discuss what could possibly be done within school."

"It's a joined-up approach. If staff have a concern or something they're worried about they can discuss it at a planning and tracking meeting and then come and find a solution."

Most schools also recognised the importance of having regular meetings with staff. This was supportive to consistency, developing shared understandings, and ensuring staff views are taken into account:

"PSAs have weekly meetings where part of the agenda is discussing child protection concerns, but also concerns or queries for learners."

Many schools also reported having internal quality assurance systems, involving school staff. Involvement in these systems can support staff confidence and increase understanding around different learners' needs:

"[As] part of our quality assurance calendar we would go in and have individual observations of class teachers, we do jotter sampling, we'd use HGIOS and we get the learners opinions of what's going on in class."
Primary School Interview

"We've got robust tracking, so we look at that. With our tracking meetings, management are all part of that. We report to the [central team] about [our tracking]. The data is shared with teachers and we're building up their confidence in analysing the data. So, there's a whole quality assurance programme around the data."

Having adequate internal resource was important to Senior Leaders to provide opportunities for all learners to succeed and develop by offering alternative options, opportunities, and pathways for their learning:

"It's lovely to see them because what you see in them is untapped talent. And you know that if you have the resources to give them baking, if you have the resources to do woodwork you could ...give them that sense of pride."

Schools are currently striving to meet the needs of learners by adapting their environments and resources to provide appropriate learning spaces and support. For example, some schools have adapted ancillary spaces into sensory areas and used library spaces as breakout areas to accommodate learners with Additional Support Needs. Many Senior Leaders described increasing their use of outdoor space:

"We've got lot [of space] and we've adapted [spaces]. We've released staff to develop outdoor learning because we recognise that children's behaviours change in the outdoors. So we've done that as a school, there's a big focus on outdoor learning."

Additionally, flexible and creative use of resource was important for meeting the needs of all learners.

The deployment of Pupil Support Assistants (PSA) was varied depending on the needs of the setting and whether or not the school had created an enhanced area. Some schools were using their Pupil Support Assistants to provide individualised support, but most Senior Leaders discussed the importance of flexible staffing to target learners effectively. This was difficult to achieve with an increase in needs that require staff support:

"Very tight timetabling of PSAs to allow for growing personal care needs, behavioural needs, and learning needs, significant prioritisation of personal care and behavioural needs over learning needs as H&S requirements dictate this."

Many emphasised that this was a challenge due to complexity of need across the school, and a finite staffing budget:

"Again, that goes back to the support and never feeling that you have that delicate balance of prioritising your PSAs and support staff as best you can."

Much of the discussion with Senior Leaders was focused on how school systems were adapted to meet the growing level of need and promote inclusion whilst empowering and supporting staff. Staff having a shared understanding and clear roles and responsibilities was important:

"We've really developed that so that teaching staff are a bit more empowered as well, so that they're coming and saying I think we need to explore this or I would like to try this."

"We've asked them to go down the route of doing the CIRCLE Participation Scale for individuals and then they use that to refer to an internal system, so that [SLT] then go and check in and then we decide together what the best intervention needs to be put in place."

Embedded effective systems for supporting learners with Additional Support Needs were crucial for learners and staff. Additionally, many Head Teachers discussed how they have adapted school systems to increase support for staff and promote collaborative working:

"We've put ourselves [into] critical friend trios… so everybody's got somebody that can go to in a buddy. I've built in extra time to the working time agreement… we've tried to create a system where staff feel empowered that they're the agents of change as well."

"We're adapting our procedures so that, for example, our staff sign-in sheet has different colours that they can sign in on. So if they're feeling nervous about something or they're apprehensive about something there's a little speech bubble so that we know as management, we've got to go and check in on them."

SECTION 2: Staff Support

Supporting Staff Internal & External, Getting the Values Right:

Internal:

The majority of Senior Leaders talked about having an open-door policy, where staff can come to speak to management at any time about their emerging concerns:

"We also just naturally have an open-door policy where staff can pop in, as well as [staff] surveys."

"We have an absolute open door policy in the school where staff can come at any time to talk about situations."

Many Senior Leaders spoke about the importance of their Support for Learning (SfL) Teacher in helping to support staff members and to develop their knowledge around different resources:

"Our Support for Learning Teacher goes absolutely above and beyond to work with staff, to make time out with the school day to meet, to source and resource for staff, to engage them with the CIRCLE framework, but also then do a bit of more in-depth work herself to support the class teachers with what they are either struggling with or want a bit of support or advice on."

Some Senior Leaders also highlighted the importance of practice sharing, collaboration and praise in building staff knowledge and confidence:

"We try and buddy them up, always with somebody more experienced. I try carefully within stages to make sure there's somebody who's got a bit more experience to try and help build that kind of confidence."

"At the end of last term, which was quite nice, everybody had a sheet and they had to put positive comments about each staff member on it. And then they got presented with that at the end of term. And it was actually really nice, it was nice to see their smiles."

Primary Interview

"We also offered staff opportunities to have their practice observed. About half took us up on that and it was simple feedback of two stars and a wish. They chose what they wanted feedback on, so we gave them nine comments of what do you want to be looking at using your initiative communication, relationship, anything. They then put it into a diamond nine and then from that chose two that they wanted feedback on."

The role of Senior Leadership Teams in developing a supportive, collaborative and inclusive ethos was highlighted. This was an important support for staff wellbeing:

"I'd like to give them the understanding that is really important and I think that school ethos is really vital and it's probably going to become more and more important as the challenges on wellbeing continue."

"I feel as a leader that I try really hard to make sure that support network is there for each other. And I think that goes a long, long way. If staff have it modelled that there is kindness and support, I think if they are encouraged to be supportive of each other, we have a really collegiate way of working across the school."

Importance was also placed on establishing positive, trusting relationships between staff, as well as between school and families. This was seen as an important part of Senior Leadership Team's role in supporting staff:

"I did say to them genuinely that actually as a team, they are really, really supportive of each other and to keep that going."

"Prioritising collaboration is part of our values… it's making time for staff to come together to speak about needs."

"I am very, very fortunate that I have a fantastic leadership team. They are amazing people. They're very kind and thoughtful about my own remit, as well as their own remit. I think it's a kind of mutual respect."

"I think just supporting staff to build those relationships with our families. It does feel like a family here. We do say that the minute you come in the door, parents and children, you're part of that. That helps with rapport. If you are having to support that child and they know that no matter what the behaviour is that you're seeing, it doesn't make you think any less. We think of them as ours as well as they're your child. I think supporting and prioritising parent and teacher relationships is really important."

Having a caring and supportive Senior Leadership Team was seen as important for supporting staff:

"I think there's this real strength of that within our school. It matters to me that my staff are all doing OK. I think my Deputes do a really good job and check in every day."

As previously discussed, most Senior Leaders emphasised the importance of them being visible and approachable to staff. Additionally, having clear roles and responsibilities for Senior Leadership Teams was positively viewed:

I guess it's about continuing to value people and try and really show that what we're doing is making a big difference."

School Z Interview

"We try and be as present as possible and we try and have open-door policies. I would say that probably almost all staff feel that they can come and speak to us."

"We have really clear rules and remits in terms of SLT, but we also absolutely have an open-door policy."

"One of our Deputes has the specific remit for personalised support, so tries to keep a strategic oversight of what that looks like across school."

"We need to look after our staff first to be able to look after the young people."

School D Interview

Some Senior Leaders also spoke of the importance of ensuring that staff's views are sought and heard meaningfully:

"I'd like to think that people will come and tell me there's a problem, and that you know that all SLT will listen."

"Obviously anything I'm doing, I bring the staff along on the journey with me... and then they tweak it before we agree on it."

- **External Agencies/Trainings providing Support valued by Primary Schools:** ACIS (Aberdeen Counselling in Action) Counsellor
- ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) Training
- LIAM (Let's Introduce Anxiety Management) Training
- CCC (Connected & Compassionate Classrooms) Training
- EPS (Educational Psychology Service) EICs (Early Intervention Consultation)
- Autism Outreach
- Dyslexia Outreach
- EAL (English as an Additional Language) Support
- Head Teacher Book Group
- AFC (Aberdeen Footbal Club) Community Trust

Many Senior Leaders also spoke about ensuring staff awareness around accessing services that offer counselling or mindfulness to staff, ensuring the school's focus on staff wellbeing:

"Staff know that they can access counselling services from Aberdeen City Council."

"We've had third sector coming in and doing mindfulness and things with the children and the staff… modelling it to the staff."

SECTION 3: Use of Resource

Creation of enhanced areas:

Creation of enhanced areas using existing internal resources was deemed necessary by many Head Teachers to better meet the needs of learners with Additional Support Needs who were finding mainstream classes challenging. These areas are used differently across the settings, with some learners accessing them all of the time, and others accessing the areas for some parts of the day. Many discussed the benefit of this for deploying support staff for the learners with Additional Support Needs but this has pulled support staff away from the rest of the school:

"We have had to make our own ASN classroom … These are children that were not accessing [the] mainstream classroom at all. We allocate [PEF funded PT SfL] full time and two PSAs are allocated to that room. It works successfully, but it is to the detriment of our support across the school."

However, the structure and organization of enhanced areas can be challenging due to the variety of need amongst learners:

"The problem with that is that children have clashes in their needs which result in them not being able to access the room. So because one child's accessing it, another child can't access it because not just the needs clash, but their personalities clash."

External Supports:

Amongst the Senior Leaders, there was a general feeling of positivity about the support received. Many Senior Leaders reported that they have worked closely with different Aberdeen City's Outreach services, establishing positive relationships:

"We'll work really closely with Autism Outreach and that's had a real impact, particularly around the modelling of practice."

"When we have very difficult situations in school, [the Central Team] were phenomenal and you know the EPS were absolutely superb and we had staff training."

"All the services we've worked with, it's not a judgmental process... It's what are the unmet needs and how could we work together to support them."

"We've got good relationships with outreach services and we try and use the benefit of their knowledge in our setting."
Primary Interview

Senior Leaders also spoke about external agencies helping to build capacity within the school by providing support and increasing staff's knowledge around different approaches:

"Last year we had a huge number of learners that are EAL [English as an Additional Language] here. So we worked with our EAL colleagues. They came and delivered a staff meeting, they worked 2 1/2 days here so there's opportunities for staff to collaborate with them."

"[The EPS] support that was provided to our [Enhanced Area] team was really, really important because they were genuinely dealing with something that was brand new, setting up a whole new model."

"Barnardo's did some input and... they've got phenomenal knowledge about supporting children with need and nurture approaches, so they've done some training work with staff."

Some Senior Leaders also spoke about the benefit of collaboration with other schools, having book clubs, inputs from specialist provisions or allowing staff to observe other provisions:

"… allowing some staff to go and observe other schools as well was really effective."

"A really amazing piece of professional development I did was the book group with a staff member from another school around good Autism practice for teachers."

While the overall perception of support provided by external agencies was positive, there were some challenges identified that some schools highlighted, including capacity issues and changes to service delivery models.

The effective deployment of staff and ensuring clear roles and responsibilities was important for supporting staff to meet the needs of learners:

"We've changed remits to make sure that the staff have got a clear line manager, and areas to go for support. One Depute is very closely working with Nursery and P1 and looking at early level, our other Depute is looking at first level and I'm second level along with the PT who does P7."

Additionally, many Senior Leaders emphasized the importance of staff working collaboratively and explained the ways in which they promote this:

"Our staff are our biggest asset."
School 1 Interview

"Our support for learning teacher will work with staff on how to use that resource in their classroom or how to support them in the classroom setting."

"Prioritising collaboration which is part of our values, so it's making time for staff to come together to speak about needs."

Achieving staff buy-in was seen as the most important factor in achieving successful implementation and the embedding of approaches:

"It's staff buy-in first and foremost, and that comes from a shared understanding and that staff feel they've had an input into decision making."

"CIRCLE - upskilling the staff, building staff confidence and building staff autonomy to get that buy-in from them. So it's not me standing at the front of a staff session going right, we're going to do this, this and this. It's about discussion...and if there's no discussion around it you're met with a brick wall."

A range of targeted interventions are used across primary schools in Aberdeen for learning needs and some Senior Leaders explained how they were using technology in universal and targeted ways to support learners:

"We're using technology to try and plug those gaps for the daily practice, for children who are not reaching expectations in terms of decoding."

Many Senior Leaders discussed the use of programmes such as Let's Introduce Anxiety Management (LIAM) and Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) to meet the social and emotional needs of learners:

"ELSA is huge for us. We're really, really proud of our ELSA work, [we have a] fully embedded full time ELSA in our school."

Primary Interview

A range of interventions and approaches are being used and valued across Aberdeen's primary schools:

"Messy play, which is not really a programme, but it's been the most successful thing by a country mile."

"LIAM [has had] a big impact because that filled in a huge gap that we maybe weren't supporting as well before.... and that's something that we can offer rather than a child going on a waiting list for with another agency."

"I think our biggest thing at [our school] that impacts everything we do is Emotion Works, to be honest. Just in how our staff communicate and also help to co-regulate children."

Senior Leaders discussed the importance of developing knowledge and practice in supporting sensory needs, as well as providing appropriate resources and spaces:

"Sensory can be really hard for some of our children and the resourcing around sensory is really important to make sure we're getting it right, particularly quiet spaces or having different resources that support the sensory needs of children."

Many Senior Leaders emphasised the importance of effective implementation of interventions and approaches to get the best results:

"The main thing wasn't having something fancy or twiddly, it was consistency and making sure that we all as a staff understood what that should look like and that it was consistent in each of the rooms."

"What I'm trying to do in my action plan this year is to do less things... I want to make sure that I don't do too many interventions, but that we're doing them really well."

"Being data-driven as well helps. Looking at the SHINE surveys, the Health and Wellbeing surveys of pupils. We do our own surveys in school as well that helps us to be more data-driven and to understand what our pupils are looking for."

Senior Leaders indicated varied Associated School Group (ASG) partnership practices across the city. Where this was more embedded, the collaboration and support within Associated School Groups was valued:

"We do look outwards. We talk about it at ASG meetings. Because what we are dealing with is quite similar as the ASG. So, I know the developments my ASG schools are doing."

Many Senior Leaders gave positive examples of engaging with external services to provide support and resource. These examples were mostly with other Aberdeen City Education Services:

"So a mitigation [of challenges in education] would be us supporting parents. So one of the ways around that we found is working with the Family Learning team."
Primary School Interview

"Working with some partners to look at what our provision looks like – [Autism Outreach staff member] has been outstanding at advising and supporting us."

Many Senior Leaders expressed hopes that the partnership working across Aberdeen could be further improved:

"I think it basically comes down to creativity and partnerships and just thinking outside the box."

This was discussed in relation to partnership working between schools:

"I think some people have that good practice in their schools, but either keep it to themselves or don't realise it's good practice or actually are worried that it's not good practice. So I'll keep it internally to myself... everyone's in their own bubble with their own problems and it can become really difficult to see the bigger picture."

"There are some real opportunities to work creatively within partner schools and within ASGs. I think people are scared to; I think."

Additionally, some Senior Leaders indicated a need to improve partnership working with and increased engagement from external agencies across the city:

"There might be opportunity for there to be more consistency across the city and within localities about when it might be appropriate to refer on a concern to other services and Education partners so that the resources available are most effectively used."

Improving relationships and communication with parents supported schools to implement changes and mitigate challenges:

Summary of Analysis of Primary

> "One of the mitigating factors is being us speaking to parents more and recognising that open communication supports. So definitely a mitigation or a way around some of the challenges is for us to keep working with parents to help them to understand where they can support and actually where their role lies as parents and what's within their scope and what's within our scope and capacity of the school to support."
>
> Primary School Interview

- The increase of learners with, and range of complexity of Additional Support Needs (ASNs), could impact on the ability to meet the needs of all learners. Most Senior Leadership Teams indicated that staff and other resources are being prioritised for supporting learners with regulation to promote safety. Many Senior Leaders were attempting to mitigate this challenge by creating enhanced areas.

- Primary schools across Aberdeen are adapting their environments, providing resources, and engaging in professional learning to better meet the growing levels of sensory needs amongst their learners.

- In primary schools across Aberdeen there is an appreciation for the many school staff that go above and beyond their remit to support the needs of learners

- Achieving staff buy-in was emphasised in factors influencing the successful implementation of interventions, approaches and changes.

- Having in place strong school systems, and a Senior Leadership Team who model good practice and approaches with staff was seen as a key factor in managing support needs.

- Most primary school Senior Leaders indicated some challenges with ensuring capacity of their support staff. Opportunities for supporting and upskilling them could be limited due to their contracted hours.

- Most Senior Leaders were concerned that increased levels of Additional Support Needs could impact on staff wellbeing.

- Across primary schools there was an appetite for increased opportunity for practice sharing and upskilling across Associated School Groups (ASGs) and the city.

- Partnership working with external partners, including families, was seen as fundamental by primary schools for supporting the Additional Support Needs of learners.

- The sustainability of the current offer that primary schools have is dependent on continuation of resourcing (e.g., financial, staffing, physical environments).
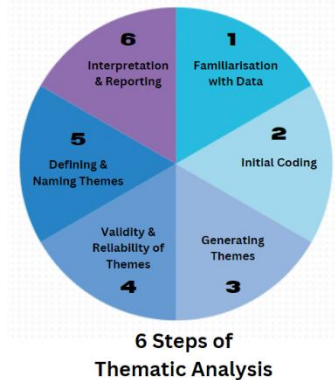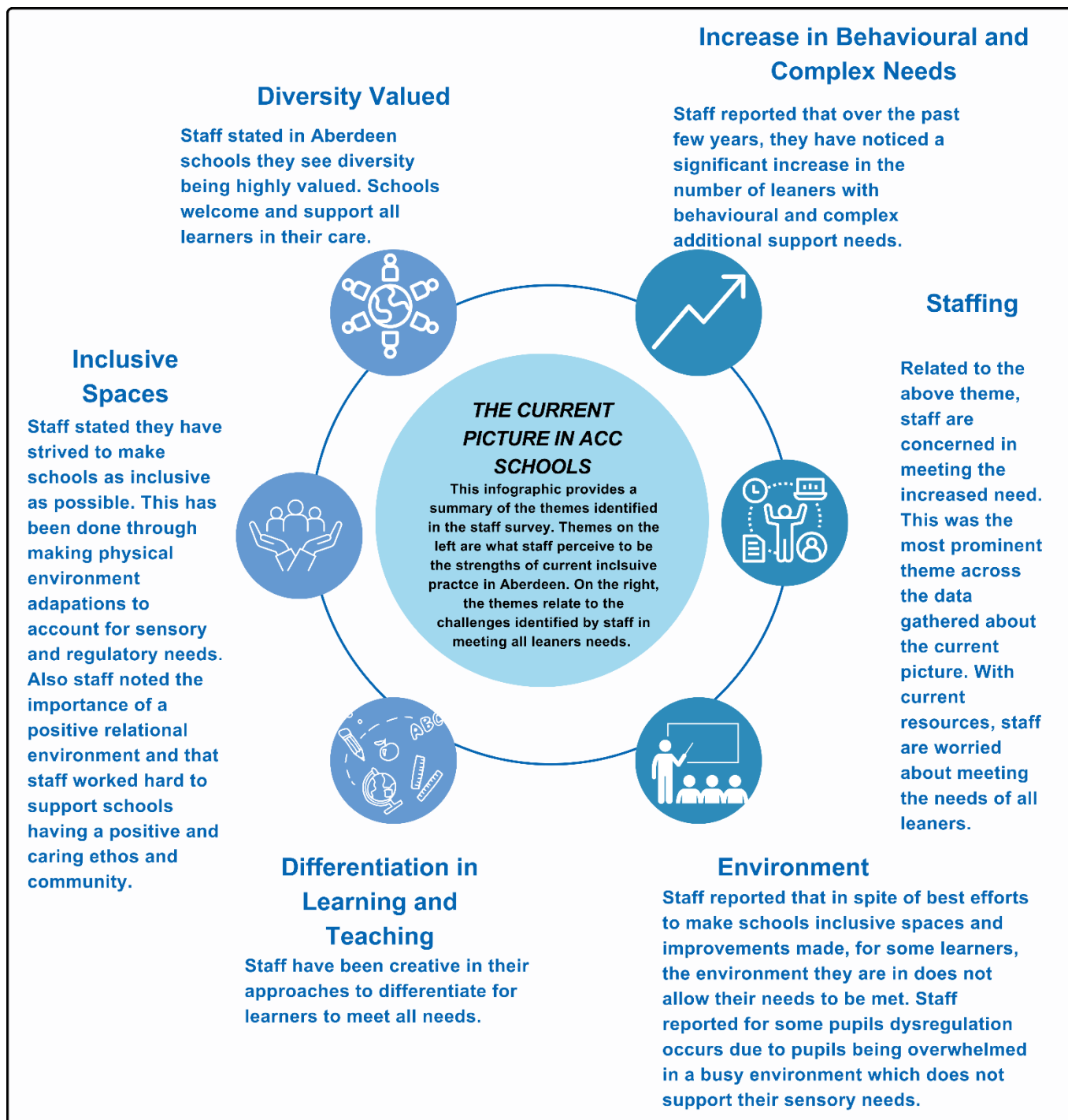
STAFF SURVEY

A Microsoft Forms Questionnaire Staff Survey was sent out to all Aberdeen City's Education staff. Trade Unions were encouraged to share with their local members. The purpose of the survey was to explore staff perceptions of learners' needs and support being met in Aberdeen's schools.

The data presented is based on the 54 responses gathered and was analysed using a six step process of Thematic Analysis.

The number of responses to the survey means that results should be interpreted with some caution in terms of representation of the wider population.

The questionnaire explored staff views on: The Current Picture, Staff Support and Effective use of Resource. Each of these topics has been thematically analysed and overarching themes included.

6 Steps of
Thematic Analysis

Diversity Valued

Staff stated in Aberdeen schools they see diversity being highly valued. Schools welcome and support all learners in their care.

Increase in Behavioural and Complex Needs

Staff reported that over the past few years, they have noticed a significant increase in the number of leaners with behavioural and complex additional support needs.

Inclusive Spaces

Staff stated they have strived to make schools as inclusive as possible. This has been done through making physical environment adapations to account for sensory and regulatory needs. Also staff noted the importance of a positive relational environment and that staff worked hard to support schools having a positive and caring ethos and community.

Staffing

Related to the above theme, staff are concerned in meeting the increased need. This was the most prominent theme across the data gathered about the current picture. With current resources, staff are worried about meeting the needs of all leaners.

THE CURRENT PICTURE IN ACC SCHOOLS

This infographic provides a summary of the themes identified in the staff survey. Themes on the left are what staff perceive to be the strengths of current inclsuive practce in Aberdeen. On the right, the themes relate to the challenges identified by staff in meeting all leaners needs.

Differentiation in Learning and Teaching

Staff have been creative in their approaches to differentiate for learners to meet all needs.

Environment

Staff reported that in spite of best efforts to make schools inclusive spaces and improvements made, for some learners, the environment they are in does not allow their needs to be met. Staff reported for some pupils dysregulation occurs due to pupils being overwhelmed in a busy environment which does not support their sensory needs.

Supportive Professional Learning & Leadership Opportunities

Respondents to the survey were asked to provide details of the types of professional learning they have accessed to support the needs of learners. Their responses have been organised into the following themes:

Professional Learning & Leadership Opportunities on Specific Additional Support Needs: Most frequently mentioned within this theme was training from the Dyslexia Outreach Team and staff also mentioned personal reading and webinars on specific Additional Support Needs.

Professional Learning and Leadership (PLL) Opportunities to support development of Inclusive Classroom Environment: Most frequently mentioned within this theme was Emotion Coaching training by the Educational Psychology Service and the CIRCLE framework.

Support from Outside Services/Agencies: Staff stated targeted and universal support from Educational Psychologists, Physiotherapists, Speech and Language therapists, and School Nurses were supportive. The Autism Outreach team were frequently mentioned and staff highly valued how this team came in and worked alongside staff, demonstrating strategies and getting to know the unique content of the school and learner's needs

It is important to mention that respondents, whilst being very positive about the opportunities for professional learning from Aberdeen City, expressed that a challenge with successfully implementing their learning to support inclusion was having the staffing to deliver the strategies and interventions with integrity.

Summary of Analysis of Staff Survey:

- Staff reported they see schools as welcoming of learners with Additional Support Needs and the diversity this brings, and that schools are adapting and changing practice with inclusive spaces and relational approaches.
- Staff have worries regarding the picture of increasing complexity and levels of Additional Support Needs in their schools, and impact of learning environments for some learners (e.g. sensory or dysregulation).
- Creativity of approaches, use of Professional Learning offers (such as Emotion Coaching & CIRCLE), and support from Education and Health partners all contribute to high quality differentiation of learning taking place which can mitigate some challenges across their schools.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were held to explore how learners' needs are met within Aberdeen City schools. Focus groups took place with groups of associated staff not already covered in the Questionnaires & Semi-Structured Interviews above. Focus groups were held with Trade Union Representatives, Parents & Carers, members of the Quality Improvement (QI) Team & Educational Psychology Services (EPS), and Additional Support Needs (ASN) Outreach Services. The latter group consisted of representatives from Vision and Hearing Support, Dyslexia Outreach, Autism Outreach, the Fit Like Hub, and the EAL (English as an Additional Language) Service. The lowest attendance at a focus group was the Additional Support Needs parents/carers group. Several dates were offered to various parental groups by the Quality Improvement Team, and spaces for up two different focus group sessions were available.

Each focus group consisted of 4-8 participants. Groups were facilitated separately, except for the Quality Improvement and Education Support Officers and Educational Psychology Service teams who partook in a joint Quality Improvement group. Focus Groups were hosted by a member of the Aberdeen City's Quality Improvement Team, with facilitation and scribing undertaken by two Educational Psychologists per focus group.

Discussion was structured using the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan 1954, as presented by Tombs 2019). The technique aims to explore and identify the common themes underpinning different "incidents", with a view to identifying the characteristics within them that may have led to positive or detrimental outcomes. The ask was for participants to describe at least two examples of practice over the last two years: one they would define as effective in terms of meeting learners' needs, and one they would define as ineffective.

The following questions were then posed for discussion within each focus group: "How are learners' needs met in schools? What is working well? What is not working well?"

Educational Psychologists used the Critical Incident Methodology to code and theme the different examples of practice shared within the discussions.

As is the case with all focus groups, the small number of participants enables the rich capture of information, at the expense of a broader overview. The analysis should be interpreted with this understanding and considered alongside the wider data gathered as part of the Exploration of Learners' Needs.

Despite the differences between the roles and perspectives of participants, there were similarities in some of the themes identified within multiple focus groups:

Practice is most effective when the following is taking place:

- Partnership Working
  - Between parent/carers & school
  - Between schools & external agencies
- Effective/transparent communication
- Embedded universal supports
- Staff capacity building
- Learner at the centre
- Flexible curricular offers

- Strong community links/connections

> It would be helpful to have a website specifying what different services do, what a child's plan is, what is realistic in terms of supports and what is not" - improving transparency and increasing clarity on who/where to ask for advice
>
> Focus Group Theme

> Taking a "team around" approach, as opposed to individuals working in silos" - improving disjointed communication and inter-agency working
>
> Focus Group Theme

Practice is least effective when the following happens:

- Ineffective partnership working
    - Between parents/carers & schools
    - Between schools & external agencies
    - Disjointed communication
- Inconsistency of practice
    - Between educational settings
    - Within educational settings
- Lack of clarity on who/where to ask for advice
- Lack of awareness of the role of external services
- Ineffective or lack of external service support
- Inflexibility of curricular offers and/or approach
- Detrimental impact on wellbeing

Summary of Analysis of Focus Groups :

- There was consensus across the various groups of what makes practice most effective in relation to supporting learners with Additional Support Needs.
- Effective collaboration and communication between schools, internal and external, and families supports successful educational experiences for learners with Additional Support Needs.
- There is still some inconsistency of practice/support across settings, including engagement with or support from external services.
- Embedding strong universal supports, alongside continued capacity building is key for success.
- Creative and adaptive solutions to challenges are required and valued across all groups.
- Intensive wrap-around support in partnership with key staff/settings can make the difference for some learners with complex Additional Support Needs.

CASE STUDY APPROACH

Case studies were held to explore how learners' needs are met within Aberdeen City schools. Four case studies were conducted in September-October 2024, lasting approximately 3.5 hours each; the case studies took place in two primary schools, a secondary school, and an early years centre. These settings were selected by members of the Quality Improvement team.

Two Educational Psychologists conducted each case study and employed naturalistic observations (observations in real-life settings with minimal intervention from the observer). It is common for naturalistic observations to be used in case studies relating to children and young people to better appreciate the role of real life context on their behaviours, thoughts and emotions (Coolican, 2017). Between 4-7 locations were observed in each case, e.g., classrooms, cloakroom, complex needs provision, and playroom.

An observation schedule was created from analysing Educational Psychologists' listing of good practice in schools that they had observed. It was felt that the case study would be a suitable technique to explore the current good practice in Aberdeen City schools and identify the strengths of its staff. Therefore, the observers recorded only good practice, and descriptions of moments which promoted inclusion, learning, and regulation. The observation schedule covered six areas: relationships, language, physical space, maximising supports, pedagogical approaches, and collaboration and belonging.

The case studies were analysed for each of these areas. Firstly, a list of codes was created which referred to items within an area. Secondly, these were ordered by frequency to acknowledge the good practice which was used across locations. Finally, themes were generated. To ensure that examples of good practice were not lost in generating overall themes, the thematic analysis was completed by area.

As with many qualitative methods of research, the case study approach enables the rich capture of information and offers deep insight into meeting learners' needs, but care should be taken when generalising conclusions to other schools that were not observed. The analysis summary should be interpreted with this understanding and considered alongside all the data gathered as part of the Exploration of Learners' Needs.

A summary of the applications that can be taken from the good practice observed and analysed is on the next page. This does not contain the 'how' as this will be unique for each setting and their context and will be based on other good practice and recommendations from throughout this Exploration.

Relationships

1. To establish emotionally secure environments, staff should employ open body language, demonstrate active listening and engage with learners through interactive and playful communication styles.
 Consistent check-ins are highlighted as important to support learners in feeling engaged, thereby fostering a supportive relational climate.
2. Emotional regulation strategies could be embedded into the daily structures and routines in classrooms and schools. Learners benefit from designated calming spaces which are supported by regulatory activities to support sensory modulation. Adults can best support learners' emotional regulation through empathetic and attuned responses.
3. Relational approaches are best supported by setting clear and co-constructed boundaries and expectations with learners, to support feelings of structure and psychological safety. Through adopting a curious approach to presenting behaviours, staff can support learners to provide insight into underlying needs.

Physical Space

1. Learning environments should be designed with a child-positioned perspective.
2. Regulation activities are most effective when pupils can access them without gatekeeping by adults. Staff reflect on the utility of the resources available & make changes.
3. Use of naturalness in colour scheme, lighting, sound, and outdoor access. Multiple sources of low lighting in class was used to support regulation.

Language

1. Curious questioning can be used in place of directive statements, when necessary, to open a non-confrontational dialogue with pupils or support their own reflection.
2. Adults can use their intonation dynamically; e.g., to emphasise empathy with pupils by matching their affect, or to encourage engagement in learning activities.
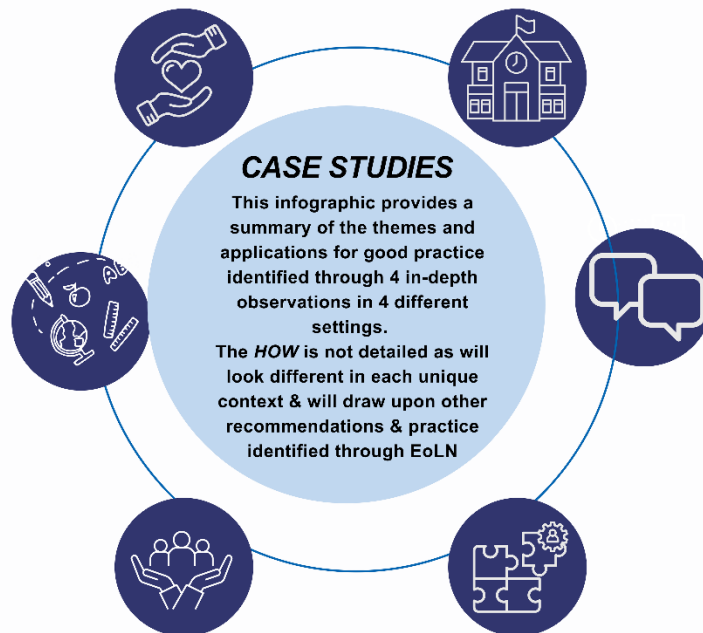3. Staff's verbal communication can be very effective during joint activities, such as learning tasks or play. When adults are involved in an activity with pupils, their language has greater meaning.

Pedagogical Approaches

1. positive verbal encouragement and routines are practices that should be used constantly as a foundation for other approaches.
2. Multiple strategies can be used at once to better promote pupil engagement. This is supports multi-modal learning as well.
3. Staff can effectively use questioning to bridge current learning to previous experiences, and possible future situations.

CASE STUDIES

This infographic provides a summary of the themes and applications for good practice identified through 4 in-depth observations in 4 different settings.
The *HOW* is not detailed as will look different in each unique context & will draw upon other recommendations & practice identified through EoLN

Collaboration and Belonging

1. Pupils benefit when staff have an opportunity to plan forward collaboratively, and can share their experiences and knowledge of pupils with each other, keeping everyone informed.
2. Promoting pupil belonging requires daily opportunities to participate in groups, such as in learning tasks, games, and break times. These opportunities need to be communicated and accessible.
3. Positive relationships and communication is modelled by every adult and child interaction.

Maximising Supports

1. Anticipating learners needs and applying early intervention strategies are essential to ensure that all learners are able to access the curriculum and to experience success. The sharing of information on individual learners and their needs is important to foster staff collaboration, and to ensure that practitioners can be responsive to individual needs.
2. Practitioners can support and enhance learner engagement through personalised strategies, differentiated materials and timely unconditional positive reinforcement. In doing so, staff support learners to remain engaged in learning and foster a sense of autonomy in learning.
3. Reinforcing familiar routines is a key aspect of fostering independence and psychological safety in classrooms.

Summary of Analysis of Case Studies:

- Rich examples of good practice were seen across Localities and across school stages in Aberdeen City Schools.
- Relational approaches, connections and collaborations with learners, and creation of a sense of belonging all contributed to the most effective learning.
- Creative and considered use of physical spaces to reinforce the above approaches supported learning and inclusion in these settings.
- All learning observed was grounded in strong pedagogical approaches which were firmly embedded in practice by teachers and support staff.

Learners' Voice

Data was collected from learners across Aberdeen City as part of the Exploration of Learners' Needs. 155 children and young people took part: 116 learners from primary settings and 39 learners from secondary settings (inclusive of specialist provisions).

Data was collected from an activity using the School Wellbeing Cards (Dr Jerricah Holder, Educational Psychologist, Horizon). This pack of 30 cards is grounded in resilience research and reflect common risk and protective factors that underpin connectedness, belonging and wellbeing. 18 cards specifically relevant to school experience were selected for the activity.

Each card shows an image, and a statement designed to explore learners' school experience. E.g. "I enjoy learning and new topics", "I worry about break times", "I feel included in school." Learners placed the cards to show whether each statement was "True About Me" or "Not True About Me" to indicate their own experience of school. The task was then repeated with the same cards, but this time learners selected whether the statements were "True About Others" or "Not True About Others" to reflect how they perceived other learners' experience of school.

Learners were invited to take part by a member of their school staff. Learners took part individually, with a known school adult who was supported in the task by an Educational Psychologist. Depending on learners' preferences and needs, they could read the cards for themselves or with adult support, or the adult could read or sign to them.

The results are below. Where findings were similar across primary and secondary stages, the overall finding is shown. Where findings differed, they are shown separately for primary and secondary stages.
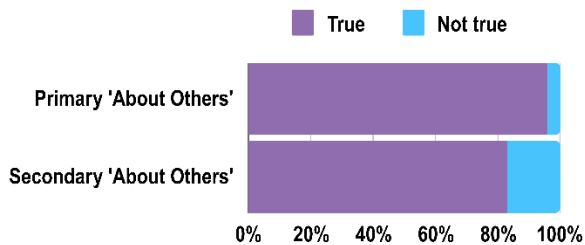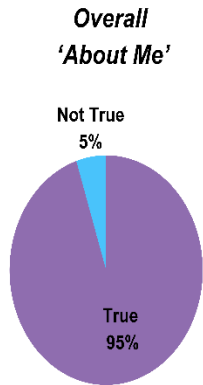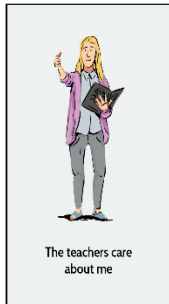
The data is quantitative and indicative only - the number of cards selected as true or not true was recorded. The adults often asked questions to increase engagement or check understanding. (e.g. *What does included mean? Who helps you in school?*) but this qualitative discussion was not recorded or analysed. The data should be interpreted with this understanding and considered alongside other data gathered as part of the Exploration of Learners' Needs.

Relationships with Adults

There was a strong message that most learners viewed relationships with adults positively. Almost all learners said that the teachers care about them. Almost all primary learners and most secondary learners thought others would also say that the teachers cared about them.

Almost all learners across both primary and secondary settings said that there are people to help them in school and that other learners would say there are people to help them too.

Almost all primary and most secondary school learners said there is at least one adult that they and others can talk to at school about their worries.

Card Statement: "The teachers care about me"

95% of learners indicated that the teachers care about them.

When asked about others' perceptions, 96% of primary learners and 83% of secondary learners thought other learners would say teachers cared about them.

The teachers care about me

Overall 'About Me'

Not True
5%

True
95%

True Not true

Primary 'About Others'

Secondary 'About Others'

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

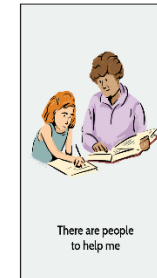## Card Statement: "There are people to help me"

Overall 'About Me'

Overall 'About Others'

97% of learners said that there are people to help them in school.

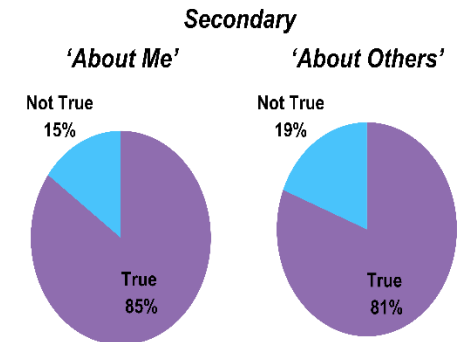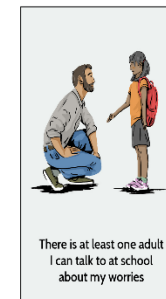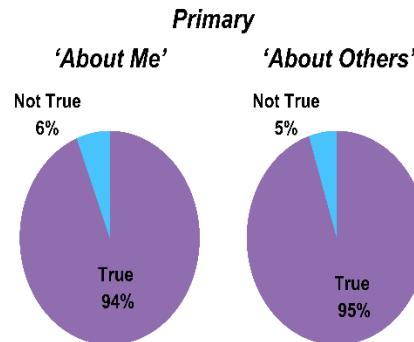*98% thought that others would say there are people to help them too.*

There are people to help me

Card Statement: "There is at least one adult I can talk to at school about my worries"

94% of primary learners thought it was true that there is at least one adult they can talk to about their worries and 95% perceived others would think so too.

This was lower in secondary settings, where 85% of learners reported that this was true for themselves and 81% indicated that others would say there is at least one adult they can talk to at school about their worries.

Primary

'About Me'

Not True
6%

True
94%

'About Others'

Not True
5%

True
95%

There is at least one adult I can talk to at school about my worries

Secondary

'About Me'

Not True
15%

True
85%
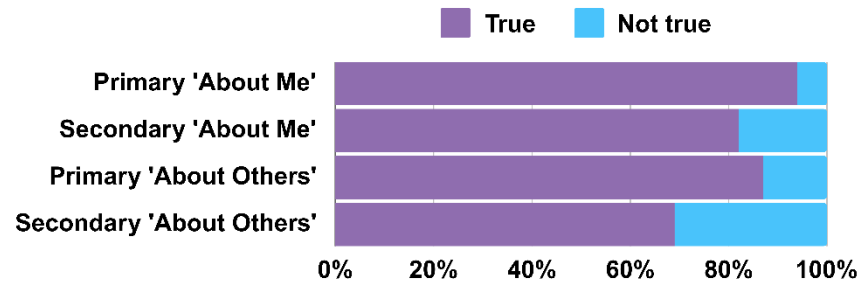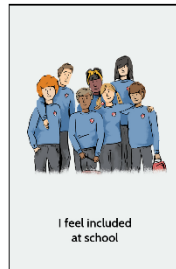
'About Others'

Not True
19%

True
81%

Sense of Belonging

In primary settings, almost all learners said they feel included in school, and most also thought that others feel included.

In secondary settings, most said they feel included in school, but some thought that other learners in their school might not feel included.

When considering if sometimes they feel like they don't belong, some learners indicated that that this is true for them, with many secondary learners thinking this might be true for others.

Card Statement: "I feel included in school"

I feel included at school

Legend: True | Not true

- Primary 'About Me'
- Secondary 'About Me'
- Primary 'About Others'
- Secondary 'About Others'
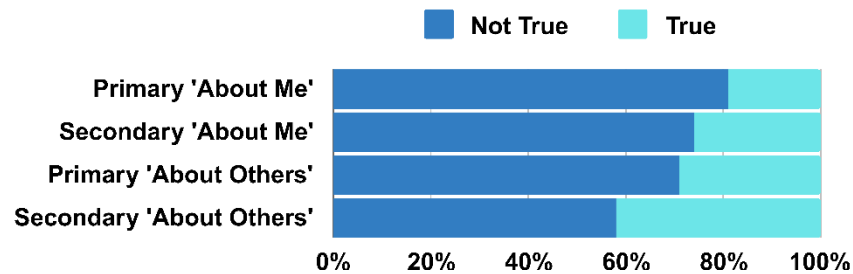
0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

In primary settings, 94% of learners indicated that they feel included in school; and 87% thought that others would also feel included in school.

In secondary settings, 82% of learners reported that they feel included; and 69% indicated that others would feel included in school.

Figure 6:
Card Statement: "Sometimes I feel like I don't belong"

Sometimes I feel like I don't belong

Legend: Not True | True

- Primary 'About Me'
- Secondary 'About Me'
- Primary 'About Others'
- Secondary 'About Others'

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

19% of primary learners and 26% of secondary learners indicated that sometimes they feel like they don't belong.

29% of primary and 42% of secondary learners perceived others may sometimes feel like they don't belong.

School

Most learners indicated that they want to come to school and that they and others feel safe in school.

Some learners thought there were other learners who do not want to come to school.

Figure 1:
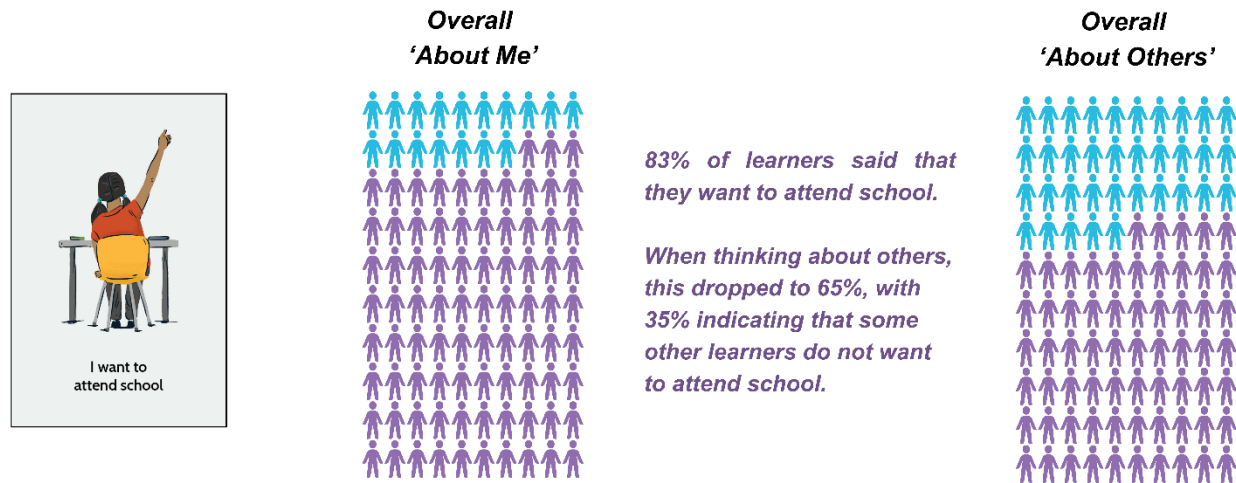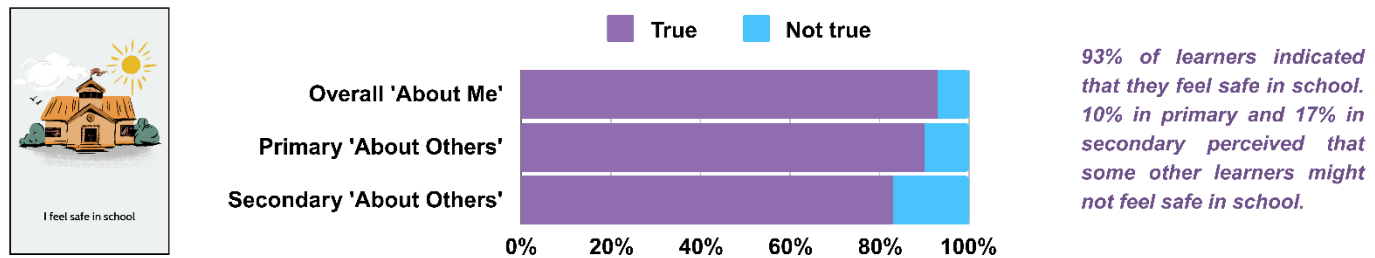
Card Statement: "I want to attend school"

I want to attend school

Overall 'About Me'

Overall 'About Others'

83% of learners said that they want to attend school.

When thinking about others, this dropped to 65%, with 35% indicating that some other learners do not want to attend school.

Figure 2:

Card Statement: "I feel safe in school"

I feel safe in school

■ True ■ Not true

Overall 'About Me'

Primary 'About Others'

Secondary 'About Others'

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

93% of learners indicated that they feel safe in school. 10% in primary and 17% in secondary perceived that some other learners might not feel safe in school.

Most learners in primary and secondary identified that they can show their true feelings at school. However, some learners were aware that this might not be the case for others.

Many learners reported the primary and secondary school environment can be overwhelming for themselves and others.

Only a few primary learners worry about coming into school, but more of them are aware that some other children worry about coming into school. Some secondary learners shared that they worry about coming into school and more thought that some other young people might worry about coming into school.

When considering how they feel while they are at school, some primary learners shared that they feel worried at school and more thought that others feel worried in school. Some secondary learners shared that they feel worried at school and when asked about others, many thought that some other learners feel worried at school.

When asked about breaktimes, almost all learners from primary and secondary shared that they don't worry about break times and most did not perceive others to worry about breaktimes either.

Figure 14:
Card Statement:
"I can show my true feelings in school"

Most learners in primary (87%) and secondary (83%) reported being able to show their true feelings in school. Some thought this was not true for everyone, particularly in secondary school where 33% of secondary learners thought some learners cannot show their true feelings in school.
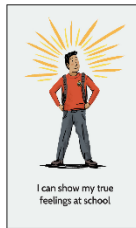

I can show my true feelings at school

Figure 17:
Card Statement: "I worry about break times"

I worry about break times

Overall 'About Me'

True 11%
Not True 89%

Overall 'About Others'

True 23%
Not True 77%

The results in primary and secondary settings were similar for this card.

When thinking about themselves 89% of learners said that they don't worry about break times. This dropped to 77% when thinking about others, leaving 23% of learners thinking that others could worry about break times.

Figure 18:
Card Statement: "I feel worried at school"

There were differences in the responses to this card for primary and secondary, as well as for view of self and others. 24% of primary learners and 37% of secondary learners shared that they can feel worried at school. This increased when thinking about others perpectives: 45% of primary learners and 61% of secondary learners thought that some other learners others might feel worried at school.

I feel worried at school

Figure 15:
Card Statement: "I find the school environment overwhelming (i.e. noise, crowds)"

Over 39% of primary learners and 44% of secondary learners shared that they sometimes find the school environment overwhelming. 74% of primary learners and 67% of secondary learners thought there are other learners who could find the school environment overwhelming (busy, noisy, crowded).

Percentage of learners who responded true about themselves or about others:
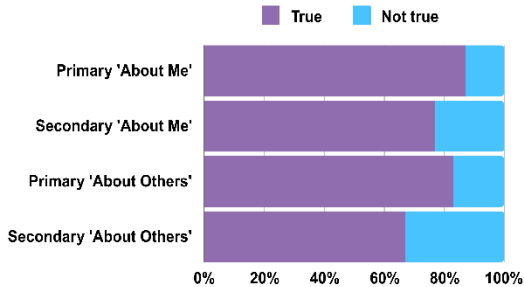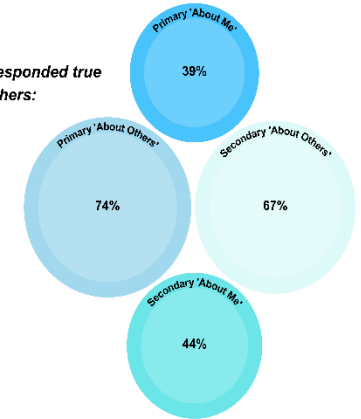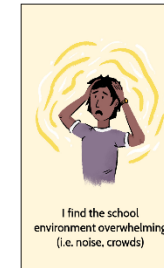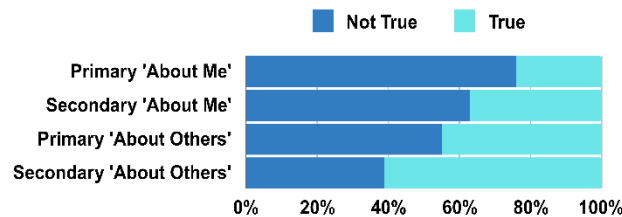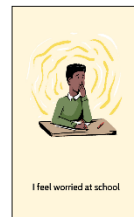

Primary 'About Me' 39%
Primary 'About Others' 74%
Secondary 'About Others' 67%
Secondary 'About Me' 44%

I find the school environment overwhelming (i.e. noise, crowds)

Figure 16:
Card Statement: "I worry about coming into school"

18% of primary learners sometimes worry about coming into school and 35% think some children could worry about coming into school.

26% of secondary learners sometimes worry about coming into school and this increased to 44% who said some other young people could worry about coming into school.

I worry about coming into school
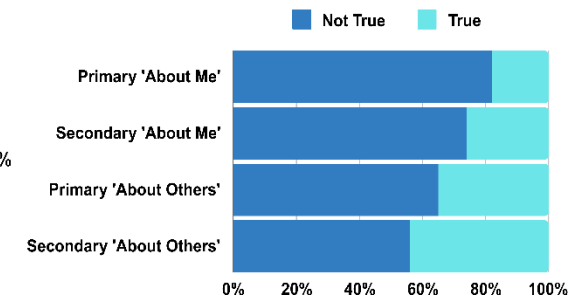
Summary from Analysis of Learners' Voice:

- Through the cards selected, learners across Aberdeen rated key aspects of school life positively.
- Through the cards selected, learners rated their own experiences more positively than their perceptions of how some of their peers might experience something – showing empathy and consideration for their peers.
- Within 'Wellbeing', through the cards they selected, more learners shared they sometimes find the school environment overwhelming (noise/crowds). But most learners rated they 'could show their true feelings in school' and did not 'worry about coming into school' or about break times.
- Learners, through the cards they selected, rated the themes of 'Sense of Belonging', 'Relationships with Adults', and 'School' the most highly.
- The cards selected indicated that most learners want to come to school, feel safe in school, enjoy learning and feel included.

Summary From Across the Exploration of Learners Needs:

Within the data above, there are multiple examples of good practice that can be built upon and developed to ensure more learners with Additional Support Needs receive the high standards of experience expected and ensure that the staff working in schools can have positive experiences within their work. Key aspects of approaches were identified, such as relational approaches, and approaches that develop and support emotional regulation, such as Emotional Literacy Supports Assistants (ELSA), Emotion Coaching or Emotion Works.

Effective systems and approaches are already in place across education settings in Aberdeen. The most effective systems give school staff meaningful involvement within the system that has strong supportive leadership at its core. Within these systems, strengths and learner-centred approaches are prioritised.

Continuing and greater partnership working emerges as a strong theme – between professionals who work to support schools, but also within Associated School Groups, and between schools and partner agencies. The opportunities for schools and school staff to work more closely alongside specialist services and external partners to build capacity and provide supportive collaborative working around a learner are positive and important.

Promoting the clear pathways for parents to access support and find the information they need will remove stress from that part of the system, and so reduce pressure that families of learners with Additional Support Needs may experience.