

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	29 April 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Inspection Reporting
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/25/081
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne/Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Shona Milne/Graeme Simpson
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.6

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report details the outcome of inspection reports published by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIe) and The Care Inspectorate since the last meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

- 2.1 Notes the content of this report;
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to continue to support Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings and schools to implement continuous improvement in keeping with agreed Quality Improvement Frameworks approved at committee in July 2024; and
- 2.3 Instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to utilise learning from the National Thematic Report: Local authority approaches to support school improvement to inform the development of the Aberdeen City Council National Improvement Plan and Quality Improvement Framework for 2025/26.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Education Service utilises a Quality Improvement Framework (QIF) to support schools and ELC settings to achieve the standards expected by external inspection agencies. The QIF categorises schools/ELC settings as needing different levels of support based on internal self-evaluation and external scrutiny from the central team:
- Category 1/Universal includes schools/settings who have self and external evaluation identifying all core Quality Indicators (QIs) as good or better.

- Category 2 /Targeted includes schools/settings with external and or self-evaluation which has identified one or more of the core QIs as *satisfactory* or *below*.
- Category 3/Intensive includes schools/settings with external and or self-evaluation which has identified one or more of the core Quality Indicators as *weak* or *unsatisfactory*.

3.2 **Joint Quality Improvement Framework**

HMIE and the Care Inspectorate have worked together to develop a combined self-evaluation framework to support quality improvement in all early learning and childcare (ELC) settings. The new framework was designed to provide a more integrated approach to assessing care, play and education rather than both inspection agencies utilising separate documentation. The new combined framework contains quality indicators(QIs) to support reflection and help settings to identify practices that are going well and those areas which require improvement.

Bright Horizons Tree House Early Learning and Childcare provision, based at Robert Gordon's University, has agreed to be part of the pilot inspection using the new framework. A member of the local authority quality improvement team will join the Tree House inspection to gain an understanding of how the new framework will be implemented.

The two inspection bodies have committed to using the framework during all inspections from September 2025. Information on the new framework can be found [here](#). The Local Authority Quality Improvement Framework will be refreshed to take account of this updated national resource.

3.3 **National Thematic Inspection: Local authority approaches to support school improvement**

In September 2024, a team of 3 Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Aberdeen City Council to help assess the strength of Local Authority arrangements in place to support school improvement. Inspectors gathered evidence under 4 key themes:

- The implementation of effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting
- Self-evaluation and quality assurance
- Professional learning
- Universal and targeted support and challenge

Findings under each theme are summarised below, the full Local Authority report is available in Appendix A.

Effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting

Inspectors noted that the school Quality Improvement Framework (QIF) provides clear exemplification of expected and appropriate processes, standards of self-evaluation, improvement planning and standards and quality reporting at school and local authority level. Aberdeen City Council sets clear expectations of overall standards.

The ethos of trust and strong connection between central staff and school-based staff was noted to be a strength, enabling collaborative improvement to take place. As a result, headteachers see themselves as leaders of change across the local authority. Stronger partnerships across secondary school have helped to deliver ABZ Campus.

Inspectors could clearly identify how the data gathered through self-evaluation and improvement planning was used to inform priorities for the service and the wider council.

From discussions with Inspectors and written feedback, there is now a need to:

- Evaluate the impact of improvement planning formats and consider a consistent format across all sectors.
- Continue to evaluate the impact of systems and processes on improvement across the city, with a particular focus on schools in Category 3.

Self-evaluation and quality assurance

Inspectors noted that quality improvement visits, including the use of Trios, Quads and Associate Assessors, are helping to build leadership capacity and capability across the local authority and to develop a shared understanding of standards.

Clearer roles and responsibilities for the central team are supporting greater levels of challenge. Inspectors noted the local authority quality assurance calendar has the capacity to be a key driver for improvement.

The reliability of data has improved, and data is accessible. Local authority data is showing greater alignment between self-evaluation and inspection gradings, with levels of accountability increasing. The introduction of engagement trackers and regular discussions at service manager and one-to-one meetings ensure the Chief Officer has oversight of improvement activity across all schools.

The Northern Alliance Learning and Teaching Toolkit is supporting the exemplification of highly effective practice and supporting schools with focused staff self-evaluation.

Discussion with Inspectors and written feedback indicates there is need to continue to extend opportunities to participate in quality improvement visits to middle managers, and to continue to monitor the impact of these arrangements.

Professional learning

Inspectors noted that the ACC professional learning offer is informed by key themes from schools' self-evaluation and standards and quality reports. It is responsive, varied and agile, and as a result meets the needs of individual school contexts.

Staff at all levels are empowered to share areas of strong practice across the authority. Headteachers utilise established mechanisms to share practice and to work collaboratively on local and national priorities.

Good use is made of the local authority Lead Teacher and Northern Alliance Learning and Teaching leads. City wide priorities are well supported by central officers to ensure implementation.

Discussions with Inspectors and written feedback indicate there is now a need to:

- Track the impact of sharing practice on improvement.
- Monitor the impact of middle leadership work on the secondary middle leadership pipeline.

Universal and targeted support and challenge

The targeted approach to supporting schools has resulted in schools moving from category 2 to category 1. Central officers and headteachers recognise that the challenge is more significant for schools to move from category 3 to category 2. Inspectors recognised the use of bespoke support for individual schools who require a more targeted approach, and the need to focus on improved outcomes for children and young people.

The recent increase in the number of Associate Assessors in the city was highlighted as a strength, which will impact positively on the structure of the Trios and Quads, quality improvement visits and the offer of targeted support for schools in category 3.

Discussion with Inspectors and written feedback indicates there is now a need to think further about how to evidence the impact of positive movement for schools in lower categories.

Key successes: A clear QIF has been established and is scrutinised by Committee on a yearly basis. The level of support each school is being afforded is also presented to Committee. Reporting the service's progress in moving forward published service priorities to Committee has increased accountability across the service.

There is a culture of collective responsibility, and this is supporting the drive for greater consistency. Involving secondary Associate Assessors in quality improvement visits has helped improve the accuracy of self-evaluation against national standards. Training to improve the use of evaluative language is beginning to improve the quality of writing in reports.

Key challenges: Staffing is more consistent now. However, the Local Authority continues to find it hard to recruit high quality school leaders, high quality middle leaders, and some secondary specialisms and supply staff. Challenges remain when leadership capacity is a concern. A number of factors continue to impact on the local authority's capacity to deliver their agreed programme. These include:

- Changes in school leadership
- The skills of middle leaders
- Conflicting demands and unaligned national policies
- Variable national professional learning offer
- The volume of inspections or unanticipated tasks

Officers believe the feedback on Local Authority approaches accurately reflects work locally, with some of the areas identified for improvement also featuring in the national report.

Key learning from the visit, alongside recommendations from the National Report will be considered as we refresh our Quality Improvement Framework and develop the National Improvement Framework Plan for 2025/26. The local report can be found at Appendix A and the national report found [here](#).

3.4 Education Scotland Inspection of Manor Park School and Nursery Class

During the week beginning 9 December 2024, a team of Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Manor Park School and Nursery Class to undertake a short model inspection. During the visit, they talked to parents/carers and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff.

The inspection team found the following strengths in the school's work.

- The headteacher and staff across the school and nursery know children and families very well. They are caring and supportive of children and each other.
- Practitioners in the nursery offer high-quality learning experiences for children. They actively seek and act upon children's views and interests to develop and plan for relevant and meaningful learning. As a result, children in the nursery are highly motivated, engaged and make very good progress in their learning.
- Staff in the school and nursery work well with partner agencies to support children's emotional wellbeing. As a result, children's readiness for learning is improving.

The following areas for improvement were identified and discussed with the headteacher and a representative from Aberdeen City Council.

- School leaders and teachers must review and improve their approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. They should ensure all children experience high-quality, well-planned learning and teaching, that is matched appropriately to their learning needs.
- Senior leaders and staff across the school need to improve attainment in literacy and numeracy.
- Senior leaders need to continue to support teachers to develop confidence in making accurate professional judgements about children's progress and attainment. Teachers need to develop a deeper understanding of national standards.
- All staff must work together to agree shared expectations and approaches to improve the behaviour and engagement of all learners across the school.
- Senior leaders need to improve how they measure the progress that children at the primary stages make over time.

Manor Park School was evaluated as Weak across the quality indicators

Primary School Quality Indicators	Evaluation
Learning, teaching and assessment	Weak (2)
Raising attainment and achievement	Weak (2)

The inspection team felt that there were strong and positive relationships between children and staff reflecting the school values and it was clear staff ensure children's wellbeing is at the heart of all they do. Inspectors noted that learning experiences were not consistent across the school resulting in tasks not consistently being matched to the needs of all children.

Inspectors noted that the recent focus on attainment in writing has meant children are making satisfactory progress from prior levels of attainment. Attainment in reading, listening and talking and numeracy was weaker and there is a need for increased opportunities for children to practise skills along with more structured learning and teaching.

In the week before the inspection members of the school Senior Leadership Team (SLT) experienced significant events in their personal lives but were keen for the inspection to go ahead as planned. Officers tend to be steered by Senior Leaders in such cases, but there is potentially learning for the Local Authority on when to request a delay to planned inspections.

Prior to the visit the school was sitting at Category 2 of the Quality Improvement Framework, and this had been validated during a Quality Improvement Visit on 6th November. Following the inspection, the school will be moved to Category 3.

Inspectors plan to return within 1 year of the publication of the letter to carry out a further inspection. The quality improvement team will regularly review progress against the areas for improvement before HMle return. The school will also be supported by trio headteachers and Associate Assessors. An action plan to address the areas for improvement in the school can be found at Appendix B - Learning Teaching and Assessment and Appendix C - Raising Attainment and Achievement.

Manor Park ELC was evaluated as Very Good across the quality indicators by HMle.

Nursery Class Quality Indicators	Evaluation
Learning, teaching and assessment	Very Good (5)
Securing children's progress	Very Good (5)

The warm, welcoming, positive and nurturing environment was also reflected in the ELC. Practitioners know the learners and families well. Children have opportunities to learn life skills such as preparing snacks. Inspectors observed them developing social skills and good manners in the dining hall where they enjoyed having lunch together. The team were delighted with the evaluation as it highlighted how they work well together using their knowledge of child

development and learning, to model high quality interactions with children. The interactions help to consolidate and extend children's learning.

Manor Park ELC was sitting in Category 1 prior to the inspection and will remain in Category 1. Staff will be given the opportunity to share their practice with other settings through planned visits and open sessions.

The full report can be found [here](#)

3.5 Education Scotland Return Inspection to Westpark School and Nursery

In December 2023, HM inspectors visited Westpark School and Nursery Class. Following the visit a letter was issued outlining a number of areas for improvement. Inspectors returned to school in February 2025 and reviewed progress against the original areas for improvement.

Area for improvement 1: Staff in school and nursery need to develop their approaches to gathering information from observations or assessments of children's progress. They need to use this information more effectively so that children can build on what they can already do.

Inspectors found that staff had increased confidence in planning and assessing children's learning resulting in the gathering of more accurate information to support learning experiences which better meet the needs of children and young people. Senior leaders recognise that new approaches will take time to embed, and inspectors were confident that senior leaders had the capacity to support staff to ensure approaches were consistent across the school.

Area for improvement 2: All staff, including senior leaders, should deliver consistently high-quality learning and teaching which provides children with increased pace and challenge. They need to ensure lessons have a clear focus on children making greater progress.

Senior leaders and staff have developed guidelines for effective learning and teaching, which most staff confidently apply. Regular monitoring is recommended to ensure high-quality learning experiences for all children. Teachers are enhancing their skills in questioning and feedback. Practitioners are improving their knowledge of play-based learning, aiming for a balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. Children now have more opportunities to learn in differentiated groups, with appropriate challenges in literacy and numeracy.

Area for improvement 3: Senior leaders and teachers need to ensure that regular checks of children's progress lead to improvements in their attainment.

Inspectors noted that senior leaders and teachers now make use of the wide range of data on children's progress to identify children who are not making appropriate progress. Senior leaders track and monitor children's attendance regularly and work well with partners to support children who struggle to attend school on a regular basis.

The inspection team could see that some progress had been made against each of the areas for improvement however felt that the staff and SLT required time to allow the new systems and approaches to embed fully. As a result, the

team have asked the local authority to provide a report on further progress within one year of the return inspection.

The action plan to overtake recommendations can be found at Appendix D – ELC and Appendix E - School. The letter sent to the school community can be found [here](#).

3.6 **Care Inspectorate Inspections**

Where a setting has been subject to a return visit from the Care Inspectorate, we have included the date of their previous visit and the gradings for reference.

- 3.7 **Great Western @ Great Western Road**, a funded provider on Great Western Road, received an unannounced inspection in February 2025. Inspectors noted that children experienced warm, caring, and nurturing approaches from staff who knew them well. Children were happy, confident and having fun in a warm and homely environment that was very well resourced. This contributed to them having high quality play and learning experiences. Children and families benefitted from a service committed to continuous improvement. Effective staff deployment ensured that the needs of children were well met throughout their day.

Aspect being inspected	Evaluation
How good is our care, play and learning?	Very Good (5)
How good is our setting?	Very Good (5)
How good is our leadership?	Very Good (5)
How good is our staff team?	Very Good (5)

The team at Great Western are delighted with the very good evaluations across all areas. Great Western @ Great Western Road was sitting in Category 1 prior to the inspection and will remain in Category 1.

A link to the full report can be found [here](#)

- 3.8 **Queenswellies Nursery**, a recently opened funded provider in the Hazlehead area of Aberdeen, received an unannounced inspection in February 2025. The inspectors noted that children’s wellbeing benefitted from warm and nurturing interactions. Their interests and preferences were recognised and used to inform planning. Staff felt well supported and were beginning to work well together as a team. Quality assurance and improvement processes were in place, to ensure progression they should ensure that these refer to specific areas of this nursery.

Aspect being inspected	Evaluation
How good is our care, play and learning?	Good (4)
How good is our setting?	Very Good (5)
How good is our leadership?	Good (4)
How good is our staff team?	Good (4)

The team are delighted that the first inspection of the service is positive. They will continue to work towards their goals. Queenswellies will sit in Category 1 of the Quality Improvement Framework.

A link to the full report can be found [Here](#)

- 3.9 **Albyn ELC**, a funded provider setting in Albyn School, received an unannounced inspection in February 2025. Inspectors noted that children experienced warm and caring interactions from staff, supporting them to feel loved and cared for. They were meaningfully and actively involved in leading their play and learning. Children and families enjoyed a relaxed and welcoming environment. Staff worked well together to meet children's needs throughout the day. Children's play and learning was enhanced through connections with the local community.

Aspect being inspected	Evaluation
How good is our care, play and learning?	Good (4)
How good is our setting?	Good (4)
How good is our leadership?	Good (4)
How good is our staff team?	Good (4)

Staff will now work on the areas for development around how children access outdoor play and they will continue to develop and embed quality assurance systems to support continuous improvement of the service.

Albyn sat in Category 1 of the Quality Improvement Framework and will remain in this category.

A link to the full report can be found [here](#)

- 3.10 **The Bruce Nursery**, a funded provider setting in the west end of Aberdeen, received an unannounced inspection in March 2025. Inspectors noted that Children were happy, confident and actively involved in leading their play and learning. They experienced warm, caring and nurturing support. Good use was being made of loose parts and open ended resources to enrich children's play and learning. Children enjoyed relaxed, unhurried, sociable snack and mealtimes. Positive relationships with families supported continuity of care and effective partnerships. The manager and staff were committed to the ongoing development of the service and quality assurance processes should continue to be embedded to secure sustained improvements across the service.

Aspect being inspected	Previous evaluation October 2023	Recent Evaluation March 2025
How good is our care, play and learning?	Adequate (3)	Good (4)
How good is our setting?	Adequate (3)	Good (4)
How good is our leadership?	Adequate (3)	Good (4)
How good is our staff team?	Good (4)	Good (4)

The Bruce Nursery team are pleased that the changes they have made have been recognised and will continue to work towards their goals. The Bruce

Nursery will move from Category 3 to Category 2 of the Quality Improvement Framework.

A link to the full report can be found [here](#)

- 3.11 **Little Clouds Nursery**, received a follow up inspection which took place on 19 March 2025. This was an ungraded inspection to check that they had met the requirements made at previous inspection and that they were making progress towards the areas for improvement.

The key messages from the follow up were that Children were happy and enjoyed an increasing range of play activities. Children were cared for by staff who knew them well. Infection control practices had improved which helped keep children safe. An improvement action plan was in place to help support continued improvement. Staff had improved practice around accident and incident management. The service had made some progress and continued to work with the Care Inspectorate and local authority.

At the previous inspection three requirements were made and the actions taken against each are outlined below:

Requirement 1

By 30 January 2025, the provider must have a robust plan in place which details how the service will provide quality play and learning opportunities that are child-led, meaningful and sufficiently challenging.

Action taken on previous requirement

The quality of children's play and learning opportunities was supported by an improvement action plan. This addressed how children would experience play that is child-led, meaningful and sufficiently challenging. The Care Inspectorate carried out a series of monitoring visits and meetings with the service, provider and manager. At each stage, the provider and manager worked with the Care Inspectorate to provide up to date information when this was requested. The improvement plan included details on how the service will improve the quality of play and learning opportunities for children. The provider and manager should now ensure that staff have protected time to attend key training events, and that staff are supported well to achieve the planned improvements.

Met - within timescales

Requirement 2

By 30 January 2025, the provider must ensure children are cared for in an environment which is clean and hygienic, and they are protected by sufficient infection, prevention and control measures.

Action taken on previous requirement

Inspectors found the children were cared for in a clean and hygienic environment. Staff had revisited training during regular staff meetings. Staff were aware of their role and responsibility in maintaining a hygienic environment. Management conducted regular quality assurance to ensure standards and practice was consistent. Staff supported children of all ages to wash hands at appropriate times such as during mealtimes and personal care routines. Nappy changing areas were clean and well kept. Some maintenance had been completed in the nappy changing areas to support this. A new dummy storage system to maintain hygiene was in place and consistent within staff practice. This collective approach helped ensure children were cared for in an environment that was clean, tidy and supported their health and wellbeing.

Met - within timescales

Requirement 3

By 10 March 2025, the provider must ensure children receive nurturing care and support from a staff team that have the knowledge, skills and competence to provide individual care that is right for them.

Action taken on previous requirement

Inspectors found that the children were well cared for by staff who knew them well. Staff had attended a range of training specific to the needs of the service and were able to speak confidently about the impact of this on their practice. Inspectors reported staff responded well to a number of first aid scenarios put to them displaying good critical thinking skills and decision making and changes to service policy around accident and incident management were evident in staff practice. Inspectors noted that the management team had made progress in developing a plan for continuous improvement and they could see how they were developing this to support staff following a significant incident.

Met - within timescales

All requirements were met within timescale and although some progress was recognised by inspectors against all areas for improvement identified in November 2024, these will remain in place and will continue to be worked on as part of the setting action plan.

The setting will remain in Category 3 of the Quality Improvement Framework and the Locality Lead Officer will continue to offer support, training and advice on a fortnightly basis.

The follow through report can be found [here](#). The action plan can be found at Appendix F

. 4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

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	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	
Commit to realising the potential of each individual, by seeking to widen curriculum	

choice and implement progressive choices. Commit to closing the attainment gap in education while working with partners across the city.	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.
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
Prosperous People - 95% of all our children, including those living in our priority neighbourhoods, will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026.	Engagement with inspectors provides an opportunity to learn from national best practice and validate self-evaluation evidence available. The support and challenge received by Inspectors helps to shape improvement plans for the coming sessions in keeping with the LOIP stretch aims.
Regional and City Strategies Regional Cultural Strategy Prevention Strategy Children's Services Plan National Improvement Framework Plan	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.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	No assessment required. I confirm this Shona Milne , Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning .
Data Protection Impact Assessment	No DPIA is required.
Other	

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

11. APPENDICES

- Appendix A - National Thematic Inspection: Local authority approaches to support school improvement
- Appendix B – Manor Park School Learning Teaching and Assessment Action Plan

Appendix C - Manor Park School Raising Attainment and Achievement Action Plan

Appendix D - Westpark School and ELC Action Plan

Appendix E - Westpark School Action Plan

Appendix F - Little Clouds Action Plan

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Name	Shona Milne/Graeme Simpson
Title	Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning/Chief Officer Family Support
Email Address	shmilne@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Tel	01224 522000