

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	24 June 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Approaches to Quality Improvement
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/25/151
DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
REPORT AUTHOR	Shona Milne
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

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

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Notes the content of this report;
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to immediately implement the approach detailed in the Aberdeen City Council Early Learning and Childcare Quality Improvement Framework;
- 2.3 Instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to implement the approach detailed in the Aberdeen City Council Quality Improvement Framework across all schools from August 2025;
- 2.4 Instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to review the impact of arrangements on evaluations of core Quality Indicators over school session 2024/25, amending approaches as required, and report back to Committee with any proposed changes to arrangements in advance of the 2025/6 school session; and
- 2.5 Instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong learning to narrow the focus of the National Improvement Framework Plan for session 25/26 in order to focus more extensively on leading, learning, teaching and assessment in order to realise further improvement.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Quality Improvement Frameworks (QIF) established for the 2024/25 school session were put in place to help drive improvement across all sectors (ELC, primary and secondary). The frameworks continue to provide a helpful scaffold to support central officers and head teachers to deliver proportionate quality improvement support.

LEARNING FROM THE THEMATIC INSPECTION

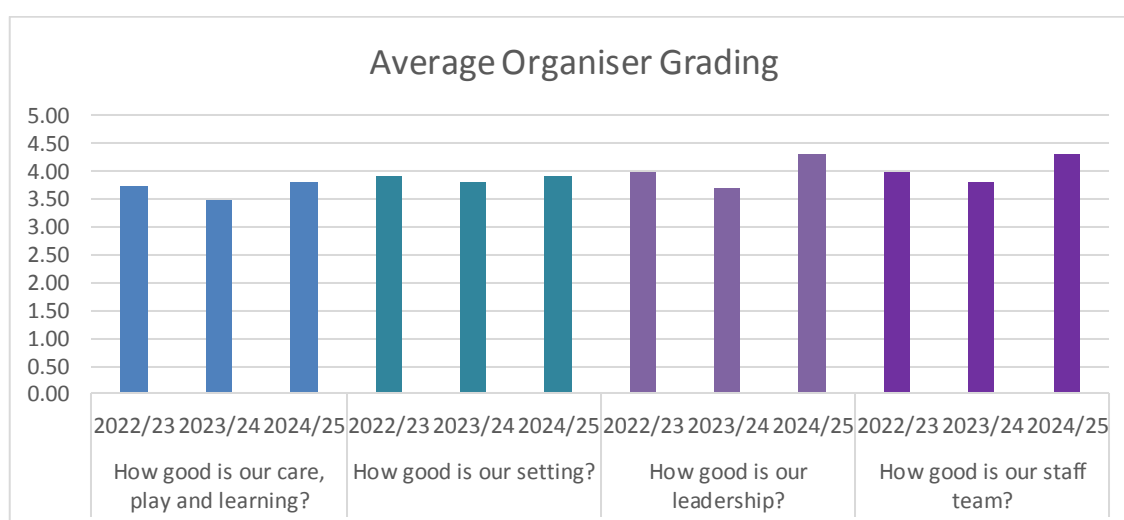
- 3.2 The [Aberdeen City Council feedback](#) from the HMIE Thematic Inspection of Local Authority Approaches to Support School Improvement offered comment on the impact of current arrangements. Inspectors noted that the school Quality Improvement Framework (QIF) provides clear exemplification of expected and appropriate processes, standards of self-evaluation, improvement planning and standards and quality reporting at school and local authority level. Inspectors noted the need to consistently evaluate the impact of our systems and processes, particularly in relation to schools in Category 3. This feedback validates the continued use and refinement of the Framework and has triggered more detailed consideration of Category 3 schools in determining any necessary changes to the Framework for use during school session 2025/26.
- 3.3 Inspectors suggested that a consistent approach to Improvement Planning format would be advantageous, and this feedback has been considered with a new format being used for session 25/26. 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. Discussion with Inspectors and written feedback indicated potential value in extending opportunities to participate in quality improvement visits to middle managers, and to continue to monitor the impact of these arrangements. This feedback has been considered as the QIF has been refreshed.
- 3.4 In addition, discussions with Inspectors and written feedback indicated a need to track the impact of sharing practice on improvement and also monitor the impact of middle leadership work on the secondary middle leadership pipeline. This feedback has also been reflected in the updated QIF for 2025/26.

LEARNING FROM EACH SECTOR

- 3.5 The impact of the QIF on inspection outcomes for each sector (ELC, primary and secondary) and on positive movement through the categories of support has been reviewed to inform the design of the frameworks for the 2025/26 academic session.
- 3.6 **Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)**
Early Learning and Childcare has, until now, been assessed against two inspection frameworks. HMIE inspect using How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare framework, while the Care Inspectorate inspect using the Health and Social Care Standards. From August 2025 both agencies will be using the new shared inspection framework when visiting settings. A copy can be found [here](#).

- 3.7 Following the successful leadership training run in session 23/24 to improve the quality of play and learning, the service delivered the Pedagogical leadership programme in partnership with Education Scotland for all ELC managers. Building on the success of the programme, 25 Leaders each received 3 further individual coaching sessions. These sessions provided leaders with the opportunity to engage in reflective discussions to support their leadership of ELC. There is clear evidence of the impact of professional learning on inspection outcomes.
- 3.8 Care Inspectorate reports continue to be a mix of risk based and routine inspections, this can make it harder to elicit a balanced view of performance against the National Standard. Common areas for improvement identified both locally and nationally include personal planning, play and learning, self-evaluation and safe environments. Bespoke support is provided to settings based on the quality improvement visit findings and inspection recommendations and any common themes used to design the training programme for practitioners.
- 3.9 The 6 ELC Locality Leads support approximately 200 ELC settings (including childminders). The team regularly visit settings to offer support and guidance to help drive improvement. Locality leads are part of School Quality improvement events for schools and offer support to practitioners in ELC and Primary 1.

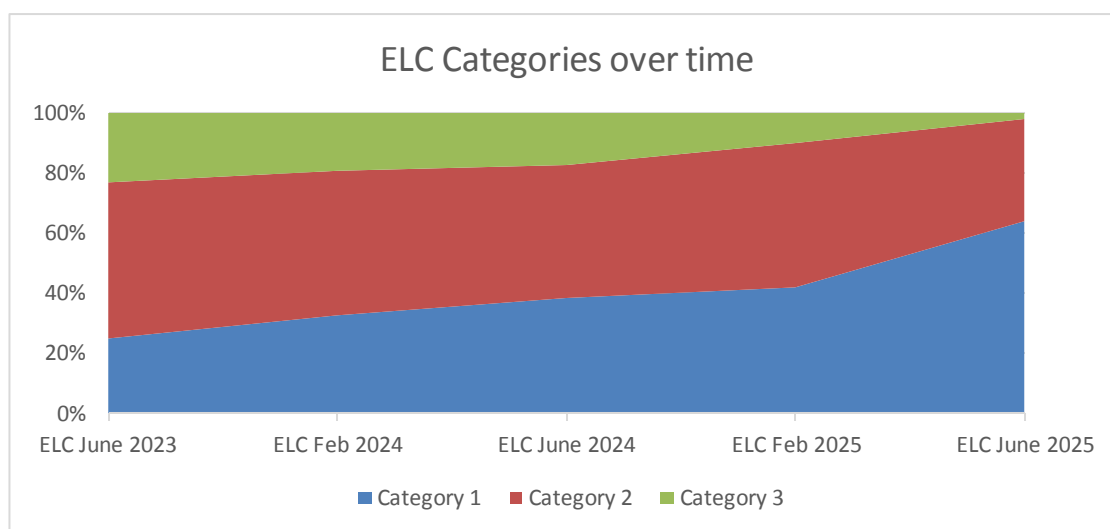
	How good is our care, play and learning?			How good is our setting?			How good is our leadership?			How good is our staff team?		
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Excellent	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
Very Good	4	5	2	6	6	2	4	6	5	7	5	5
Good	3	5	5	3	8	7	2	4	4	0	7	3
Adequate	3	10	3	1	6	2	4	10	2	3	7	2
Weak	2	3	0	3	2	0	1	2	0	2	2	0
Unsatisfactory	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average Organiser Grading	3.75	3.5	3.8	3.9	3.8	3.9	4.0	3.7	4.3	4.0	3.8	4.3



- 3.10 Average gradings have increased for all Quality Indicators (QIs). The increase in average grading for Quality of Leadership and Management suggests that the additional professional learning put in place has impacted positively. The number of weak gradings has decreased to zero across all QIs and there has been a significant drop in the number of Adequate gradings suggesting that the

support being provided to Category 3 settings is realising improvement and should be maintained. Quality of care combines gradings from care and play and learning. Individual grades, shared at feedback but not published, evidence that the quality of play and learning, although improving, remains a key area for improvement.

- 3.11 The service continues to support highly effective settings to share their practice by encouraging visits to the setting and supporting staff to lead professional learning sessions on in-service days and sector training events. Staff welcome the opportunity to share their practice with others and gain confidence through planning and delivering sessions for others. There is a clear correlation between this peer support offer and the increased proportion of settings being placed in Category 1 as shown below. Critically, very few settings now require Category 3 support.



- 3.12 Support offered to Category 3 ELC settings has enabled 66% of Category 3 settings to move to at least Category 2 in the last 12 months. The increased focus on professional learning to build capacity around play and learning will be maintained. Professional learning will be offered to ensure all practitioners are familiar with the national changes. The current ELC quality improvement framework is supporting improvement and so remains unchanged. It will be updated once the final national documents are available. A copy of the current framework is available at Appendix C.

3.10 Primary Schools

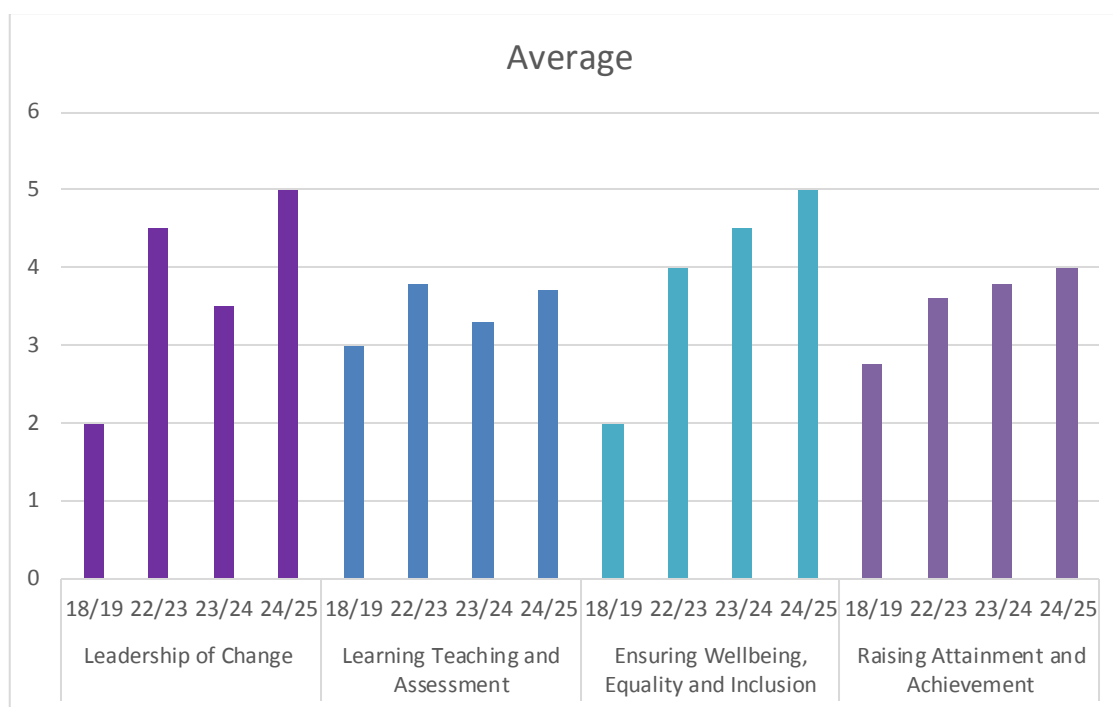
Primary schools are assessed by HMle against How Good is Our School (4). There are two types of inspection model. The short inspection model, which involves a team visiting the school for 2 days and focusing on Quality Indicators QI 2.3 (Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment) and QI 3.2 (Raising Attainment and Achievement) and the full inspection model where the inspection team are in school for 5 days and cover all 4 quality indicators. School inspections continue to be inconsistent with outcomes ranging from very good to weak suggesting that further improvements are necessary.

- 3.11 As a result of the variation evident across the sector, Trios now comprise schools sitting across all categories to ensure that those leading schools in

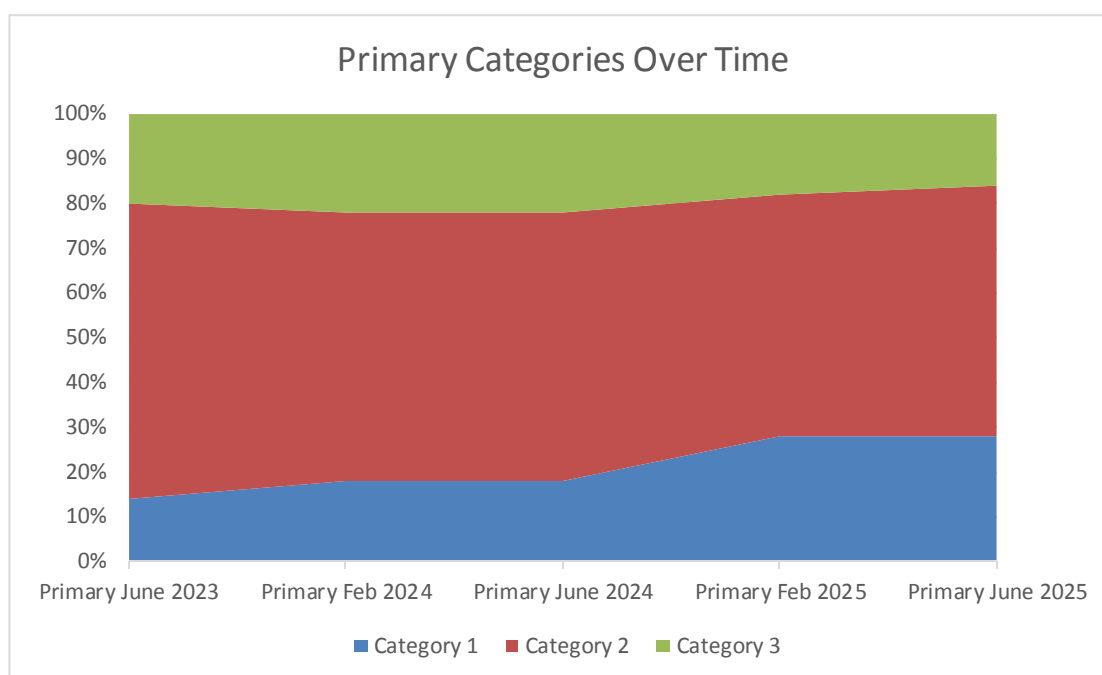
lower categories are being supported by those with higher evaluations. This approach is providing improved peer mentoring of Head Teachers.

- 3.12 Two Primary Quality Improvement teams, each comprising a Quality Improvement Manager and 2 Quality Improvement Officers, each support half of the city's primary schools. Although Teams officially oversee their half of the city's schools, they are involved in quality improvement visits across other city schools as required to allow central officers to focus on the schools requiring the highest levels of support and ensure consistency.
- 3.13 The primary Quality Improvement Team of 2 Quality Improvement Managers and 4 Quality Improvement Officers carried out 52 full Quality Improvement Visits in primary schools over session 2024/25. All 48 primary headteachers have been part of the evaluation team in at least one other school. In order to continue to increase the capacity of our middle leaders, almost all DHTs have been involved in at least one quality improvement visit to another primary school. Middle leaders report that these opportunities are invaluable professional learning.
- 3.14 In addition to this, each primary school has received 3 formal data discussions providing support and challenge around attainment. Some schools will have received very regular contact to check progress against actions for improvement depending upon their classification of need, with mechanisms in place to check that agreed actions are completed timeously. Taking this approach has realised positive movement in inspection outcomes.

Primary HMLe	Leadership of Change				Learning Teaching and Assessment				Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion				Raising Attainment and Achievement			
	18/19	22/23	23/24	24/25	18/19	22/23	23/24	24/25	18/19	22/23	23/24	24/25	18/19	22/23	23/24	24/25
Gratings																
Excellent																
Very Good		1		1		1		2		1	1	1		1		3
Good		1	1			2	3	2			1			2	3	1
Satisfactory			1		4	2	2			1			3	1	2	
Weak	3					0	1	2	3				1	1	1	2
Unsatisfactory																
Average	2	4.5	3.5	5.0	3	3.8	3.3	3.7	2	4	4.5	5.0	2.75	3.6	3.8	4.0

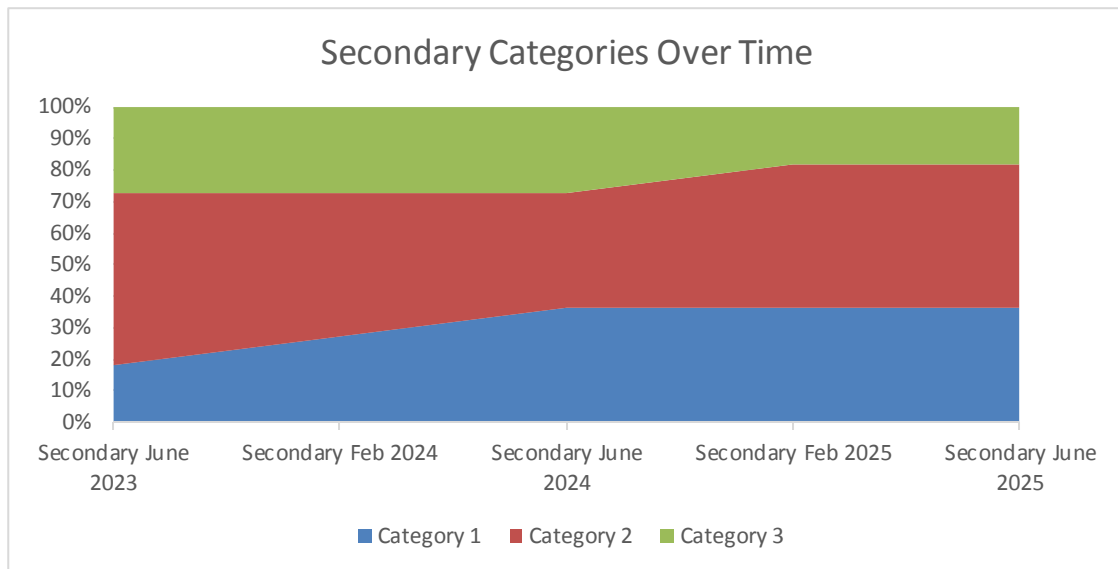


- 3.15 It is worth noting that the sample size is small (6/48 schools) and looking at this data in isolation doesn't give a complete overview. Data is also impacted by the type of inspection as the short inspection model only looks at QI 2.3 (Learning, Teaching and Assessment) and QI 3.2 Raising attainment and Achievement). However, in the last 12 months there is evidence of improvement in all QIs. The increase in raising attainment and achievement could indicate that training in data literacy and accountability is beginning to have impact.
- 3.16 There are still some schools who require support to achieve gradings of good or better and this has to be prioritised. If we look at the pre-pandemic baseline, there is a significant positive shift across all core QIs, however QI 2.3 is still not consistent and there is a need to continue to focus on this as a priority next session. Given that high quality learning, teaching and assessment is at the heart of positive educational outcomes, it is proposed that the service reduce the number of priorities in the National Improvement Framework Plan for 2025/26 so that more intensive and necessary support on Learning, Teaching and Assessment can be prioritised as failing to afford this area sufficient time is directly contributing to variation in inspection outcomes.
- 3.17 7 schools have moved down a category of support over the year, from Category 3 to Category 2 or Category 2 to Category 1. 14 Primary schools are now in Category 1 (5 more than in June 2023) and able to contribute to the self-improving system. Working city wide has allowed the team to focus on schools where there is the greatest need for improvement. School and central staff evaluations continue to align, leading to agreement on the support category the school requires to make required improvements. Appendix B provides an overview of the categories in place for schools for the start of the 2025/6 academic session.



- 3.18 The professional learning offer is reviewed annually in light of inspection findings. The Quality Improvement Framework for 2025/26 will be complemented by a professional learning programme focussed on:
- Leadership of change
 - Learning Teaching and Assessment including the implementation of the Northern Alliance Learning, Teaching and Assessment Toolkit
 - A continued focus on Relationships and actions from the behaviour plan
- 3.19 During session 24/25 a head teacher and Deputy Head Teacher have been seconded one day a week to support the development of the Northern Alliance Learning and Teaching Toolkit. This work has focused on ensuring senior leaders are aware of the content of the Toolkit and how to navigate through each of the sections. Development sessions have been well attended, and we can see that schools are making good use of the resources to support school self-evaluation as well as accessing the materials to support professional learning for whole school and individuals. Inspection outcomes show that there is a need to further strengthen our approach to learning, teaching and assessment and as a result, the use of the Toolkit has been added to the Quality Improvement Framework for session 25/26. Engagement and impact will continue to be measured as there is a need to focus more heavily on this area.
- 3.19 As part of the 24/25 Quality Improvement Framework regular sessions to share progress were added to the Quality Improvement Calendar. These have supported schools to share regular updates against improvement priorities, as well as successful interventions to raise attainment with their trio schools. These regular updates will continue to form part of the Quality Improvement Calendar for session 25/26. All Quality Improvement visits will continue to involve DHTs and other middle leaders increasing their involvement in providing specific written feedback. This will improve their ability to write evaluatively and help to grow Head Teachers of the future. There is emerging evidence that the new Trio groups are providing increased challenge.

- 3.20 The Quality Improvement Framework (Appendix A) has been amended to reflect changes to working practices as outlined in paragraphs 3.11, 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14, more intensive support for schools not yet achieving evaluations of good or better and the ongoing agreed Behaviour Plan.
- 3.21 **Secondary Schools**
Variability continues across our secondary schools. Schools in Category 1 are performing at the highest levels (some nationally) and those in Category 3, although making progress, still require considerable support from the central team and peer Head Teachers. Tactical teams have been useful in providing support and these continue to be in place on a consultative basis for those schools in Category 3. The team has managed 3 return HMIE visits this session along with a short model inspection.
- 3.22 The Quality Improvement Manager for secondary and two Quality Improvement Officers have worked in collaboration with other senior Officers and Secondary Head Teachers to utilise the expertise of our Associate Assessors (high performing Head Teachers who support HMIE to undertake school inspections) to support a self-improving system.
- 3.23 Secondary schools are now part of a Quad or a Trio with each group being led by an Associate Assessor. This arrangement ensures all Secondary Head Teachers have access to a mentor to provide support and challenge. The number of HMIE School Inspections being carried out, however, does impact on the team's capacity. In order to create capacity for session 25/26, Associate Assessors will have a greater role in Quality improvement and these responsibilities, including leading Quality Improvement Visits and providing professional learning around national standard for each of the Core QIs, have been added to the framework.
- 3.24 During session 2024-25, four of our eleven secondary schools hosted an HMIE inspection. This reduced to a degree the number of QI visits that were possible during the session. However, the secondary team will have undertaken 8 Quality Improvement visits. 6 visits have focussed primarily on QI 2.3 (Learning, Teaching and Assessment), one focussed on QI 3.2 (Raising Attainment and Achievement) and one on QI 3.1 (Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion) and QI 1.3 (Leadership of Change). Over the course of the visits, teams will have observed approaching 250 classes with the school being left with a clear set of next steps to support progress.
- 3.25 Each of the visits had a team comprising central team and senior leaders from schools. 7 of our secondary HTs and 19 DHTs have been part of a quality improvement team visiting another school in the city over session 24/25. The model provides valuable professional development for team members and has been received positively by schools and staff involved in the visits.
- 3.25 4 schools remain in Category 1 of the framework and require minimal oversight. 5 schools are now in Category 2 and are continuing to make progress with the support available. 1 school has moved from Category 3 into Category 2 and the remaining schools (2 both in an inspection cycle) remain in Category 3 and continue to receive bespoke support aligned to their particular circumstances. There is very clear evidence that Category 3 schools make most progress when school leaders fully drive improvement at school level.



- 3.26 There is emerging evidence of the impact of involving members of school senior leadership teams in quality improvement activities beyond their own schools. Widening the visit team to include a wide cross section of senior leaders not only benefits the school being visited but also the individual team members and their home school. This approach also ensures a shared understanding of what high quality looks like and is building capacity across our schools.
- 3.27 Secondary schools and the central team introduced a programme of professional learning during session 2024-25. Central Officers and Associate Assessors have delivered professional learning in:
- Learning & Teaching (Head Teacher Meeting Nov 2024)
 - Timetabling (Dec 2024)
 - ABZ Campus (Jan 2025)
 - An Introduction to INSIGHT to wider Central Officers and School Leaders (Mar 2025)
 - Attainment (Statistical Summary Report) - Various Across Year
 - Timetabling Software (Mar 2025)
 - Secondary Conference QI 1.3, 2.3, 3.2, (May 2025)
 - Secondary Conference QI 2.1, 3.1 (May 2025)
- 3.28 The timetabling course has now run for the second year and in December 2024 delegates from Aberdeenshire and Moray attended. Evaluation and feedback has been universally positive.
- 3.29 Officers acknowledge that the volume of inspections continues to impact on the capacity of the central team and cannot be controlled locally. In order to continue to respond positively to the inspection regime, and accelerated progress, there is a need to reduce the volume of activity outlined in the National Improvement Framework Plan for session 2025/26.
- 3.29 **Quality Improvement Framework for 2025/26**
Changes made to the Quality Improvement Framework are highlighted in blue in Appendix A. These include:
- Increased involvement of Secondary Associate Assessors

- Establishing a network of Learning Teaching and Assessment leads
- Changes to the split of primary teams
- Changes to the trio sets of schools
- Planned sessions for trios to work together on school improvement planning
- New improvement planning format for all sectors
- Integration of the Northern Alliance Learning and Teaching Toolkit

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. All activity outlined within the report is funded from within existing budgets.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No negative environmental impacts have been identified.

7. RISK

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

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

8. OUTCOMES

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

Children's Services Plan National Improvement Framework Plan	plan, the Child Poverty Action Plan and the National Improvement Framework Plan is also supported through external scrutiny.
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9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	I confirm as Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning that an Integrated Impact Assessment is not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

11. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Quality Improvement Framework for Schools
Appendix B – School Support Categories
Appendix C – Quality Improvement Framework for ELC

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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