SERVICE UPDATE

Name of Cluster:	Corporate Landlord
Date:	20 October 2025
Title of Update:	Review of Spaces in Schools for Additional Support Needs
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UPDATE:

At its meeting on 24 June 2025, the Education and Children's Services Committee instructed officers to bring back a report as soon as possible based on the adequacy or otherwise of spaces for Additional Support Needs within each School within the city, in order to truly understand the actual requirements for each school, and to note that the Executive Director had undertaken that officers would provide an interim service update on the above in September.

In response to this instruction, officers have begun to engage with all schools in the city to gather information on the way in which spaces in their settings are used for Additional Support Needs (ASN).

At the start of the school session, good practice was self-reported across Aberdeen City, and across both sectors. Responses needed to be anonymised to ensure no learners are identified or identifiable within good practice, which required some additional officer time prior to publishing the Service Update.

The following are key themes which arose across each of the Primary & Secondary Sectors. A summary and comparison table is also provided showing the themes of good practice across both sectors.

We can see that schools have been creative and adaptive in turning rooms they no longer used, or that were no longer needed, into the areas modern learning settings require.

1. Themes of Good Practice for Using Space for Additional Support Needs (Primary Schools)

1.1 Repurposing Existing Spaces

- **Libraries, cloakrooms, storage spaces, offices, and medical rooms** have been transformed into ASN hubs, sensory rooms, nurture spaces, and breakout areas. Examples include libraries becoming hub and breakout rooms, or medical room being repurposed into sensory spaces.

- **No additional funding** is often required, demonstrating resourcefulness and creativity in making the most of what is available.

1.2 Multi-Functional and Adaptable Environments

- Spaces are designed to be **multi-functional**, supporting regulation, learning, nurture, and sensory needs. For example, support spaces that support regulation, safety, and calm; and room's that can instantly become a sensory space with blackout blinds.

- **Flexible use and timetabling** allow spaces to serve different groups and purposes throughout the day. School staff remain flexible and responsive to the needs of their learners, and adapt environments as necessary.

1.3 Sensory Regulation and Wellbeing

- **Sensory rooms and quiet spaces** have been created to support emotional wellbeing and regulation. Schools have created sensory areas from repurposed spaces, making sensory support more accessible.

- **Nurture rooms and outdoor spaces** are used to help learners regulate emotions and re-engage with learning.

1.4 Targeted Support and Inclusion

- **Hub models and breakout spaces** allow targeted support while maintaining links to mainstream learning.

- Spaces are used for **small group or 1:1 interventions**, supporting inclusion and ensuring learners are not isolated from their peers.

1.5 Staff Flexibility and Creativity

- Where physical space is more limited, **staff demonstrate flexibility and creativity** in adapting spaces and working together.

- Staff are responsive to changing needs, continually developing and sharing good practice, across their schools but also supporting one another in their trios, across ASG's and wider.

1.6 Continuous Development and Responsive Practice

- Spaces are **continually adapted and developed** in response to changing learner needs and school roll

- Schools share their facilities and approaches with colleagues to support wider learning and improvement.

<u>1.7 Summary of Good Practice in Primary Schools</u>

Theme	Key Features
Repurposing Existing Spaces	Libraries, cloakrooms, storage spaces, offices converted for ASN
Multi-Functional/Adaptable Spaces	Spaces for regulation, nurture, sensory support
Sensory Regulation & Wellbeing	Sensory rooms, nurture spaces, outdoor areas
Targeted Support & Inclusion	Hubs, breakout spaces, small group/1:1 interventions
Staff Flexibility & Creativity	Adapting spaces, teamwork, sharing practice
Continuous Development/Responsive	Ongoing adaptation, sharing facilities and approaches

2. Themes of Good Practice for Using Space for Additional Support Needs (Secondary Schools)

<u>2.1 Repurposing and Flexibility</u>

- Schools are **repurposing under-utilised spaces** (e.g., conference rooms, offices, storage spaces) to create targeted learning environments, sensory rooms, and wellbeing hubs. This is evident where spaces are adapted to meet evolving needs without requiring new buildings or major capital investment.

- **Ongoing adaptation** is highlighted, with schools continually reviewing and changing how spaces are used to respond to learners' needs and attendance patterns.

<u>2.2 Wellbeing and Inclusion</u>

- The creation of **wellbeing hubs** and breakout rooms is a recurring theme. These spaces are used for a wide range of activities, including emotional support, learning, and social development.

- Schools are careful to ensure that learners accessing alternative curricula or targeted support do not feel isolated from the wider school community, maintaining a sense of belonging and inclusion.

<u>2.3 Multi-Functional and Shared Spaces</u>

- Many schools use spaces for **multiple purposes**: teaching, small group interventions, assessments, quiet time, and social activities

- Shared use of rooms and flexible timetabling encourages tolerance and acceptance among learners.

2.4 Targeted Support and Attainment

- Spaces are designed to support **targeted interventions** for literacy, numeracy, and emotional wellbeing.

- Quiet spaces and breakout rooms are used for small group work, 1:1 support, and to help learners regulate and re-engage with learning.

2.5 Community and Partnership Working

- Some Wellbeing Hubs are accessible via the community spaces and are used to support vulnerable learners and families, especially those with attendance concerns or who cannot access the main school building.

- Some schools encourage and welcome visitors to see their facilities and approach, sharing good practice with others, working in partnership with other services and agencies.

2.6 Maximising Capacity and Resources

- Some Secondary Schools have maximised capacity by creating multiple resource rooms, kitchens for vocational learning, and quiet spaces for break and lunch.

- Some Secondary Schools have utilised outdoor learning spaces, which extends the curricular offer and qualifications available to young people.

2.7 Summary of Good Practice in Secondary Schools

Theme	Key Features
Repurposing & Flexibility	Adapting existing spaces for ASN, wellbeing, learning
Wellbeing & Inclusion	Wellbeing hubs, breakout rooms, inclusion strategies
Multi-Functional/Shared Spaces	Teaching, quiet time, assessments, social activities
Targeted Support & Attainment	Literacy/numeracy interventions, quiet spaces
Community & Partnership Working	Wellbeing hub for families, sharing facilities/practice
Maximising Capacity & Resources	Multiple resource rooms, outdoor learning spaces

3. Summary / Comparison Table

Theme	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Commonalities / Differences
Repurposing & Flexibility	Libraries, cloakrooms, storage spaces, offices	Conference rooms, offices, storage spaces	Both repurpose existing spaces creatively
Multi-Functional/Shared Spaces	Multi-use nurture, sensory, breakout rooms	Multi-purpose teaching, wellbeing, quiet rooms	Both value flexibility; secondary may have larger scale
Wellbeing & Emotional Regulation	Nurture rooms, sensory spaces, outdoor areas	Wellbeing hubs, breakout rooms	Both prioritise wellbeing; secondary more formalised spaces
Targeted Support & Inclusion	Hubs, breakout spaces, small group/1:1 interventions	Targeted support rooms, quiet spaces	Both promote inclusion; secondary have more set places for this
Staff Flexibility & Collaboration	Creative adaptation, teamwork	Departmental, external partnerships, sharing practice	Both rely on staff flexibility and collaboration
Continuous Development	Ongoing adaptation, sharing facilities	Maximising capacity, responsive practice	Both adapt and share good practice

In summary:
Both primary and secondary schools in Aberdeen demonstrate strong, creative, and flexible practice in adapting spaces for ASN and wellbeing. The main differences lie in scale, formalisation, and the complexity of provision, but the underlying principles—repurposing, flexibility, inclusion, wellbeing, and continuous improvement—are consistent across both sectors.

Next Steps:
Officers will continue to engage with schools to share the examples of good practice outlined above, and to gather further information on the adequacy of spaces for ASN within each setting. Findings will be included in a report to the Education and Children's Services Committee in Spring/Summer 2025.