

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	4 July 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Approaches to Quality Improvement
REPORT NUMBER	CFS/23/204
DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
REPORT AUTHOR	Shona Milne
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1 and 1.1.2

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 Education Officer to implement the approach detailed in the Early Learning and Childcare Quality Improvement Calendar;
- 2.3 instructs the Chief Education Officer to implement the approach detailed in the Aberdeen City Council Quality Improvement Framework from August 2023 across all schools; and
- 2.4 instructs the Chief Education Officer to review the impact of arrangements on evaluations of core Quality Indicators over school session 2023/24, amending approaches as required, and report back to Committee in advance of the 2024/25 school session.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Now that HMIE has fully resumed their inspection regime, there are clear indications that current approaches to quality improvement are supporting improvement in some sectors more than others. However, approaches are not universally addressing the variation in inspection outcomes.

- 3.2 A review of each sector (ELC, primary and secondary) highlights quite different emerging trends that now need to be factored into our quality improvement (QI) arrangements.
- 3.3 **Early Learning and Childcare**
Early Learning and Childcare is currently assessed against two inspection frameworks, HMIE inspect against How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare with the Care Inspectorate inspecting against the Health and Social Care Standards. Work is underway nationally to develop one combined framework and this development is welcomed and will go some way to addressing uncertainty around expectations. As a result of the two inspection frameworks, the themes from the inspection activity of each agency differs.
- 3.4 HMIE reports into ELC provision are most often highlighting a need to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. In some cases, reports are also highlighting a need to strengthen the leadership of change which relies on all staff having a very clear understanding of their role in driving improvement and working together to realise a common purpose. It appears that the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare, and establishment of new teams during the period of public health restrictions where staff movement impacted on management oversight, has resulted in a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities in some cases.
- 3.5 As a result of these vulnerabilities, a programme of mandatory professional learning has been developed to reinforce standards and highlight key responsibilities. Proposed accountability frameworks are also being developed to make expectations against job profiles explicit.
- 3.6 Care Inspectorate reports are currently risk based and this can make it harder to elicit a balanced view of performance against the Health and Social Care Standards. Areas for improvement identified both locally and nationally include personal planning, self-evaluation and safe environments. Future QI visits will take account of these themes and training/support will be offered to settings where required.
- 3.5 The 6 ELC Locality Leads who support approximately 200 ELC settings (including childminders) to improve practice through delivery of professional learning and quality improvement visits, have to date been working closely with school quality improvement teams to ensure that all quality improvement activity and messaging is aligned. Going forward, Locality Leads will continue to share intelligence with school quality improvement teams, but will now undertake a more frequent series of drop in visits to support more rapid improvement in ELC settings. This better mirrors the approach taken by the Care Inspectorate.
- 3.6 Head teachers/Centre Managers will be asked to adopt a standard approach to capturing ELC improvement journeys so that the central team can carefully monitor progress in real time and ensure that settings are using self-evaluation to secure improvement. This approach is being adopted due to the positive

impact seen in settings who have adopted this approach. An example of such a visual improvement journey record is available in Appendix A.

3.7 Some recent Care Inspectorate inspection outcomes are exceptionally positive. Leaders of high performing ELC settings will be asked to welcome staff from settings with less positive evaluations to help exemplify standards further. Appendix B contains the proposed ELC Quality Improvement Calendar for 2023/24.

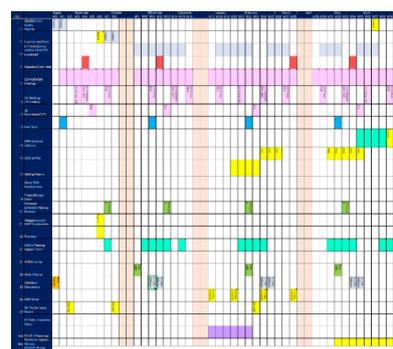
3.8 **Primary Schools**

There is evidence (in both validated self-evaluation and inspection outcomes) that performance in primary schools has improved overall when compared to the pre-pandemic position. Most improvement is evident in QI 1.3 (Leadership of change) and QI 3.1 (Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion). However, given the low pre-pandemic baseline, there are still some schools who require support to achieve gradings of good or better and this has to be prioritised.

3.9 It is now important to address variation by working more proportionately to address risk. Our approach to Quality Improvement will be informed by school self-evaluation, identification of support requirements through quality improvement activity and timelines following or prior to inspection. Consideration of all known factors will inform the level of support and challenge being afforded to individual primary schools. Having explored the need for this approach with school leaders, there is a high level of agreement on the level of support required by each school.

3.10 The 3 Quality Improvement Managers and 3 Quality Improvement Officers will support primary schools through a range of activity outlined in the Quality Improvement Framework available in Appendix C. This will be supported by a professional learning offer to build capacity. The professional learning offer has been developed to closely mirror outcomes from school quality improvement visits and aligned with the core Quality Indicators from How Good Is Our School.

3.11 There are multiple opportunities to exemplify standards and our approach for 2023/24 seeks to maximise these. A calendar of quality improvement activity has been developed to support planning for senior leaders in Primary schools, with the expectation that school leaders develop a local calendar for their own school setting. The overarching primary Quality Improvement calendar shown provides a clear structure and focussed themes for Head Teacher meetings and professional learning events and is aligned with the core quality indicators.



3.12 Quality Improvement visits will continue to be supported by Trios of Head Teachers to ensure that best practice can be shared and colleagues can learn from others. Some schools will receive a higher level of support than others

and some school leaders will be asked to play a more significant role in supporting improvement in other local schools.

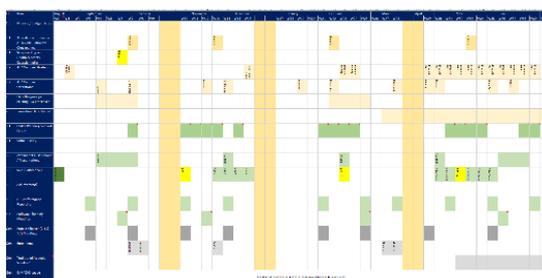
3.12 Secondary Schools

There is more variability across secondary schools than in primary with some schools performing at the highest levels and being sector leading in some areas, whilst others require considerable support. This wide range requires us to think quite differently about how we use the expertise available to us in our schools to support improvement across all schools.

3.13 The Quality Improvement Manager for secondary and two Quality Improvement Officers have worked in collaboration with other senior Officers and Secondary Head Teachers to test a range of support mechanisms for schools depending upon their individual circumstances over 2023/24. It is clear that more bespoke arrangements are required for some schools and given the intensity of support required, these arrangements will require to be supported by colleagues beyond the central team.

3.14 Quality Improvement in Secondary Schools forms a vital part of ensuring that we improve experiences for young people and examine the improvement work of schools to see how much progress has been made. Following reflection and review of the method, focus and format of that quality improvement work, a range of changes are being made for session 2023-24.

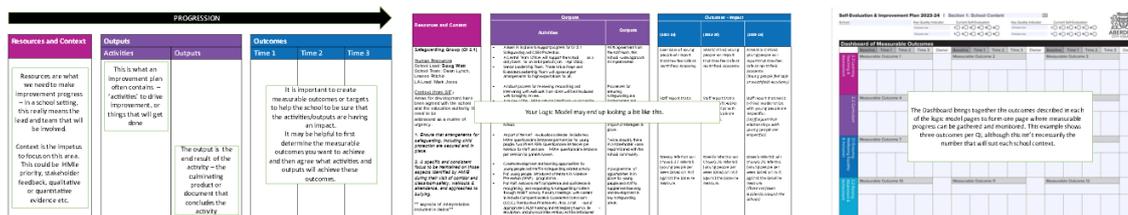
3.15 As described in paragraph 3.11 above, and following discussion with secondary Head Teachers, a calendar of quality improvement activity has been developed to support schools in their planning for the session. This calendar will be maintained as a live document and offers an opportunity for transparent and intentional collaborative working to share expectations around the standards across all eleven secondary schools.



3.16 A self-improving system for schools operates well when schools work together in mutual support and, together with central officers, evaluate their own progress and identify the level of support they need. Following discussion at a city-wide Head Teacher meeting on 27th April, Head Teachers identified the level of support they required, and this was validated and endorsed by members of the central team. What has now been created is a bespoke set of support activities for each school based on their self-evaluation. This self-improving system also necessarily includes opportunities for senior leaders in schools to look outward and visit other city schools to build their own experience and contribute to the improvement journey of the destination school. Some schools, will benefit from a dedicated team drawn from across the system. Taking this collaborative approach is helping to increase the capacity available to support improvement.

3.17 Reflective discussion across session 2022-23 has allowed Head Teachers and school leaders to identify an opportunity to improve the way we plan improvements in our school settings. This reflection led to a realisation that

our documentation had too heavy a focus on activity and not enough focus on the robust measurable outcomes that demonstrate how and where improvements are having an impact. Secondary schools have agreed to pilot a new *Logic Model* planning framework for 2023-24.



- 3.18 Continuing from the theme of quality improvement is collective intention across both schools and central team to introduce a programme of professional learning on a termly basis to support staff in their drive for improvement in each school.
- 3.19 These inputs will cover each of the core quality indicators set out by Education Scotland as central to school improvement – Leadership of Change (QI 1.3), Learning, Teaching and Assessment (QI 2.3), Ensuring Wellbeing Equality and Inclusion (QI 3.1) and Raising Attainment and Achievement (QI 3.2). School Leaders are involved in the design and delivery of these sessions which have been well received to date.
- 3.20 A refreshed school Quality Improvement Framework, which exemplifies expectations of schools and approaches used by the Local Authority, is included in Appendix C.
- 3.21 The Interim Director of Children and Family Services, in her capacity as Deputy Lead of the Northern Alliance, has led the development of a Regional Quality Improvement Framework to help all Local Authorities across the 8 Local Authorities, work together to address variability in Learning, Teaching and Assessment.
- 3.22 This work, being supported by HMIE, aims to broaden the sharing of best practice across the Northern Alliance and accelerate our progress in addressing variability. The Regional framework was launched on 27th June and will be subject to yearly review. This provides an ideal opportunity to learn from other local systems and amend local arrangements to reflect learning emerging from other Local Authorities.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The recommendations in this report will assist the Council as Education Authority in meeting the requirements of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education which is provided in our schools with a view to raising standards.,

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	
<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>Children's Services Plan</p> <p>National Improvement Framework Plan</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 plan, the Child Poverty Action Plan and the National Improvement Framework Plan is also supported through external scrutiny.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

11. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Visual ELC Improvement Journey

Appendix B – ELC Quality Improvement Calendar

Appendix C – Quality Improvement Framework for schools

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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