

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Education & Children's Services Committee
<b>DATE</b>	12 September 2023
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Northfield Advisory Group
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	CFS/23/229
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Eleanor Sheppard
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Shona Milne
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Eleanor Sheppard
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	1.1.1

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Education and Children's Services Committee of 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 instructed the Interim Director Children and Family Services to establish an Advisory Group, to help drive improvements at Northfield Academy in the longer term and routinely report the outputs of each meeting at the next scheduled meeting of the Education and Children Services Committee. This report updates the Committee on the output of the first meeting of the group held on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2023.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 note the output of the first meeting of the Advisory Group.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Education Operational Delivery Committee and Children's Services Committee of 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023 instructed the Interim Director Children and Family Services to implement a governance framework, including the establishment of an Advisory Group, to help drive improvements at Northfield Academy in the longer term.
- 3.2 Officers secured the expertise of 4 external members to form the Advisory Group as reported to Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023. The interim Director Children and Families shaped a draft agenda for the first meeting of the Group in a bid to ensure that the first meeting would provide the Advisors with a clear understanding of the school and community.
- 3.3 Advisors fed back on the proposed agenda, and amendments were made to provisional plans to ensure that all Advisors were able to glean the information they require.

### **DISCOVERY DAY ON 23<sup>RD</sup> JUNE 2023**

- 3.4 The Advisory Group spent 23<sup>rd</sup> June at Northfield Academy. The group explored a range of school and community data, and had an opportunity to tour the school, meet with parents and carers, with young people and with the staff. The group also met with members of the Tactical Team and heard of the progress made to date and of planned next steps.
- 3.5 The Advisors commended the work undertaken to date and noted the considerable expertise being made available through the Tactical Team.
- 3.6 They believe that the innovative S1 model being implemented from August, which would see all young people being a member of a 'crew' and crew participation in a residential outward-bound experience at the start of the new school year to build strong relationships and teamwork, could provide the reset the school requires. The proposed S1 curriculum, designed to support the setting of clear expectations and awareness of and responsibility for community, was welcomed. Advisors noted the positivity around the model by S1 staff and reported important levels of positivity based on how they saw current P7s responding to the model on their transition days.
- 3.7 Advisors suggested that it would be helpful to consider how subject specialists might influence the S1 model as the initiative moves forward and noted that co-operative delivery of the S1 curriculum provides significant opportunities for staff to share ideas on pedagogy with each other.
- 3.8 The Advisors are keen to continue to receive information on levels of pupil engagement in S1 and suggested that there could be further opportunities to extend work with local primary schools further as this might help establish trusting relationships with the school in advance of transition points. There may also be opportunities to extend this model to other schools. It was suggested that young people should decide how to describe the new S1 block.
- 3.9 The Advisors commended the speed at which changes to the curriculum were made and were pleased that approaches to consultation had been clarified. The Group noted that considerable time will require to be invested by Northfield staff to ensure that appropriate courses and programmes are available and that this work should be overseen, but not delivered by the Tactical Team. Support may be available to support the development of programmes through Education Scotland.
- 3.10 Discussions with young people and parents and carers highlighted that there may be a need to invest more time in ensuring that pupils and parents are taken through the rationale for proposed changes in more depth by the school. The group also noted the importance of work currently underway to ensure that planning for S2 in 2024 builds on the successes of the S1 model and does not feel like a transition. The Advisors noted that work will be required to ensure that subject specialists benefit from their time with S1 staff delivering project-based learning, as this will help support long term improvement. The group noted that young people and parents of the S2 – S4 cohort could perceive that they were not benefiting from the change being experienced in S1 and for senior phase pupils through the ABZ campus model and the need to ensure that the benefits of the reset for all children and young people, staff and school community are well communicated and clear.

- 3.11 The Group were pleased that work to develop the vision and values for the school would culminate in a clear description of what delivering the vision, values and aims would look like. They noted that increased awareness of how pupil presentation links to trauma will take time to embed. The Group advise that careful consideration be given to how those who are witnessed not delivering the values be challenged and noted the criticality of this in helping embed sustainable changes. Mechanisms will be required to ensure that all members of the school community have a high level of personal awareness and work together to monitor compliance. This will require extremely high levels of persistence.
- 3.12 The group welcomed the work being undertaken on health and wellbeing and recognised that there will be a need to guide staff to understand when to review situations more fully. The stronger use of data to understand the impact of changes being made was welcomed.
- 3.13 The level of investment in the school by the Tactical Team and Officers is significant. The Advisors advise the establishment of a risk register to help proactively mitigate risks associated with the withdrawal of the Tactical Team and other Officers at some point in the future. They urged a consistent focus on sustainability.
- 3.14 The Advisors noted that young people and parents/carers are very invested in the school and want the school to do well. There is a considerable risk that the prevailing narrative about the school and community hampers progress and the Advisors welcomed the cross-party political support for the school and community noting the importance of this.
- 3.15 The Advisors advise the development of a media strategy to help shift the narrative. This could include:
- Taking a more proactive approach to helping young people achieve awards
  - Seeking support from partners to help promote successes
  - Engaging with the media to share how negative media coverage impacts young people
  - Routine and regular celebrations of young people and community
- 3.16 The Advisors commend current work with the Lord Dean to help engage ex pupils in the improvement journey of the school. They suggest further consideration of the skills required for life and encouraged consideration of scholarships from the Robertson Trust.
- 3.17 The Advisors suggest proactively gathering data on the assets in the community and extending partnerships with CLD and community groups and building a fuller picture of all assets available to shift the narrative around the community.
- 3.18 There is a need to ensure that the voices of young people continue to strongly steer decision making. The Advisors suggest consideration of commissioning of an independent organisation to support this work. Advisors would welcome regular opportunities to engage with a wide range of stakeholder groups (range of pupil groups, parent/carer groups and access to staff holding different positions) and suggested that engagements with stakeholders be explored more fully at the next meeting to agree an approach for the Advisors.

- 3.19 The Advisors asked that information be provided on:
- The prevalence of foetal alcohol syndrome in the community
  - Levels of domestic abuse in the community
  - Health Visiting in the community
  - Community perceptions
- 3.20 It was suggested that having an independent researcher chronical the school community improvement journey would be helpful to ensure that learning is captured to inform the next steps for both school and Local Authority. This would help ensure that scaling up opportunities are planned for and appropriately resourced. It will be important to ensure that there is clarity around what and how improvement is being measured to ensure that wider evaluative activity supports that already planned through the established LOGIC model.
- 3.21 **Summary of areas highlighted for consideration by the Advisors**  
The Group advise that careful consideration should be given to how those who are witnessed not delivering against the values be challenged and noted the criticality of this in helping embed sustainable changes. Mechanisms will be required to ensure that all members of the school community have a high level of personal awareness and work together to monitor compliance. This will require a very high level of persistence.
- 3.22 Advisors suggested that it would be helpful to consider how subject specialists and S1 staff can benefit from sharing pedagogy with each other.
- 3.23 The Advisors suggest the establishment of a risk register to help proactively mitigate risks associated with the withdrawal of the Tactical Team and other Officers at some point in the future. They urged a consistent focus on sustainability.
- 3.24 The group would welcome a meeting with the Senior Leadership Team at the next meeting.
- 3.25 The Advisors suggest the development of a media strategy to help shift the narrative and suggested that the school should ensure effective communication of the benefits of the reset for all children and young people, staff and wider school community.
- 3.26 The Advisors suggest proactively gathering data on the assets in the community and extending partnerships with CLD and community groups and building a fuller picture of all assets who can support us to shift the narrative around the community.
- 3.27 There is a need to ensure that the voices of young people continue to strongly steer decision making. The Advisors suggest consideration of commissioning of an independent organisation to support this work or considering the role of the Advisors in this area.
- 3.28 It was suggested that having someone chronicle the school improvement journey would be helpful to ensure that learning is captured to inform the next steps for both school and Local Authority. This might be most easily supported through a clear framework which identifies responsibilities to ensure there is no duplication.

3.29 Members of the Education and Children’s Services Committee were invited to meet the Advisors at the end of the first meeting of the Group. The Advisors appreciated the opportunity to engage directly with Committee members.

3.29 The school and Tactical team will consider the feedback from Advisors at the start of the 2023/24 session.

#### 4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. Costs will be met from established budgets.

#### 5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Having regard to the Advisors feedback will assist the Council discharge its statutory duties under the Education legislation more effectively.

#### 6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 No risks 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?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	Risk of not improving outcomes for learners at Northfield.	Detailed plan in place to address the findings of the inspection.	L	Yes
<b>Compliance</b>	Risk of not complying with national guidance	Detailed plan in place to address the findings of the inspection with on-going support from across our secondary schools and beyond.	L	Yes
<b>Operational</b>	Risk that improvement work does not lead to improved outcomes for learners	Weekly Tactical meetings to look at the impact of changes on young people.	L	Yes
<b>Financial</b>	No risks identified			

<b>Reputational</b>	Risk that poor quality of provision will present a reputational risk to the Council	Weekly meetings of the Tactical Team will help address any issues timeously.	M	Yes
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	No risks identified			

## 8. OUTCOMES

<u><b>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</b></u>	
<b>Impact of Report</b>	
<p><b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b></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 can support wider reform when issues are entrenched. It is thought that the external report will serve as a catalyst for change at Northfield Academy.</p>
<u><b>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</b></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 Advisors provides an opportunity to learn from both national and international best practice. The establishment of the Expert Advisory group will help ensure that the provision of services from Northfield better serves the community.</p>
<p><b>Regional and City Strategies</b></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
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<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	A Stage 1 Assessment has been completed.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	Not required
<b>Other</b>	No

**10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

**11. APPENDICES**

None

**12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS**

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