

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	2 July 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Inspection Reporting
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/24/192
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 on the quality of Aberdeen City schools and Early Learning and Childcare settings 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; and
- 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.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Education Service utilise 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*.

The updated QIF proposed for academic session 2024/25 is also being considered by the Education and Children’s Services Committee in July 2024.

3.2 Education Scotland Inspection of Quarryhill Primary and Nursery Class

Quarryhill Primary School and Nursery Class was inspected week beginning 22 January using the short inspection model. During the visit inspectors talked to parents/carers and children, worked closely with the headteacher and staff and visited classrooms in the school and ELC to see how well children were being supported. The inspection team found the following strengths in the school’s work.

- The supportive relationships all staff develop with children. This supports children to feel cared for. The positive relationships in the nursery help children to settle and make progress.
- The recently introduced developments to improve children’s reading. This is leading to children becoming more able to discuss what texts they like and dislike.

The following areas for improvement were identified and discussed with the headteacher and Quality Improvement Manager.

- Practitioners should build on their very recent, positive start to improving approaches to learning and teaching in the nursery. This will ensure experiences engage, motivate and challenge all learners appropriately.
- Develop high-quality learning and teaching, using topics which children find interesting. Teachers need to adopt a greater range of approaches to teaching, which motivate children more in their learning.
- Develop how teachers evaluate children’s progress. Teachers need to use the information they gather to plan learning which provide all children with greater challenge.

Quarryhill School was evaluated as Weak against the Quality Indicators

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

Inspectors noted that staff had established positive relationships with children. Children come to school motivated and ready to learn however the curriculum on offer in most classes does not engage children or provide them with appropriate challenge. Although progression frameworks were available to staff, they require to be used consistently in order to ensure all children’s needs are met effectively. Too much time is spent providing whole class instruction and children need support to understand the why and what of their learning.

It was noted that the range of lunchtime and after school clubs were helping to develop children's confidence however there is a need to help children to better understand the skills they are developing and how these relate to real life contexts.

Staff and parents were pleased the inspectors highlighted the work around the improved library environment and the work being done around improving classroom environments.

The whole management team changed in June 2023 and this left the school vulnerable as both the HT and DHT had been in post for a number of years. Officer-led Quality Improvement visits took place in February and October 2023. Evidence from these visits resulted in an overall assessment of the school at Satisfactory and the school remained at **Category 3**, due to the vulnerability around changes to the senior leadership team and the number of new members of staff in post. Records show that there was limited follow up of next steps identified during the visit partially due to the quality improvement team covering vacant head teacher posts. This vulnerability has been addressed through a review of the Local Authority Quality Improvement Framework also being considered by this Committee.

Following the inspection, the school remains **Category 3** and is in contact with the central team for support on a weekly basis. The QIO meets with Headteacher formally on a fortnightly basis to discuss progress against the plan. A copy of the plan can be found at Appendix A.

- 3.3 HMle made the following evaluations of the Quarryhill Nursery Class. The Care inspectorate were not part of this inspection.

Nursery Class Quality Indicators	Evaluation
Learning, teaching and assessment	Weak (2)
Securing children's progress	Satisfactory (3)

Inspectors noted that the children at ELC experience warm and attentive relationships with staff. The curriculum requires to be reviewed to ensure practitioners are planning appropriately for sustained learning as well as offering spontaneous play opportunities. Practitioners require to deepen and extend children's learning through increased opportunities for children to apply their skills. The new approach to planning requires to be embedded in order to ensure learning builds on and develops learners' skills.

A quality improvement calendar is now in place and there is a detailed action plan in place to meet the improvements in the report.

Quality Improvement visits had taken place in February and September 2023 and evidence from these visits resulted in an overall assessment of Satisfactory for ELC and the setting remained at **Category 3**. Following the inspection the setting remains at **Category 3** and is receiving additional support on a weekly basis. A copy of the ELC Action Plan can be found at Appendix B.

The overall assessment of Satisfactory was based on observations of practice in classrooms and although the plans had been discussed, officers had not spent time scrutinising these. This scrutiny of written plans will be built into future Quality Improvement Visits.

Quarryhill will benefit from receive on-going support to address the areas for improvement. Support being provided includes:

- A formal partnership with Kingswells Primary Senior Leadership Team to develop a greater understanding of play based learning established immediately following the inspection.
- Officers collaborating with school senior leaders and teaching staff to review planning and the curriculum on offer ELC – P7. This will be progressed during the fortnightly visits from the Quality Improvement Officer
- Moderation activities in the school and across the Associated Schools Group to improve teacher judgement of achievement of a level.
- Staff visiting other settings to see high quality learning, teaching and assessment.

Progress will be monitored through Quality Improvement Visits and fortnightly meetings with SLT. A copy of the full report can be found [here](#)

It is of concern that the officer evaluations were one grade higher than those awarded by HMIE in one quality indicator. Following a review, it is thought that the reduced level of support afforded to the school due to officers covering vacant HT posts has impacted on progress.

Following the HMIE visit to this school and others in the locality, there has been a review of the working arrangements of the primary quality improvement team across the city. The service will move to a model where officers will spend more time working across different localities to ensure consistency in both evaluative judgements and in the support being afforded to schools.

Following a competitive recruitment process we have appointed an experienced Head Teacher to the post of permanent Head Teacher at Quarryhill Primary School.

3.4 **Education Scotland Inspection of Robert Gordon's Nursery Class**

Robert Gordon's Nursery is a funded provider located within the Campus of Robert Gordon's College and part of Robert Gordon's Junior School. Education Scotland Inspectors visited the school in February 2024. During the visit inspectors talked to parents/carers and children, worked closely with the headteacher and staff and the ELC to see how well children were being supported. Taking this approach enabled them to triangulate evidence to support their evaluations.

Inspectors noted that children experienced a welcoming and nurturing environment and were happy to attend nursery. Staff make good use of national training and should continue to explore their practice in order to further improve the quality of children's experiences.

Nursery Class Quality Indicators	Evaluation
Leadership of change	Good (4)
Learning, teaching and assessment	Good (4)
Ensuring wellbeing, equality and Inclusion	Very Good (5)
Securing children's progress	Very Good (5)

The staff team are pleased with the positive report and will continue to work on developing children's learning experiences. The Locality Lead Officer will offer support in this area. Prior to inspection the setting was in **Category 1** and following the inspection will remain into **Category 1** of the Quality Improvement Framework.

3.5 **Education Scotland further Inspection of Northfield Academy**

Northfield Academy was subject to a further inspection during the week beginning 11 March 2024. During the visit inspectors talked to parents/carers and young people, worked closely with the headteacher and staff and visited classrooms in the school to observe how well young people were being supported. Taking this approach enabled them to triangulate evidence to support their evaluations.

Inspectors noted that the recently appointed headteacher was highly regarded by parents, staff and young people. The ethos and communication within school and with parents has improved with parents feeling welcomed to school for meetings and arranged drop-in sessions. The headteacher has engaged with all stakeholders ensuring they are aware of the priorities for improvement, why they have been selected, and how well the school is making progress towards these.

Improvements have been made around keeping young people safe, with an increasing number of young people who report feeling safe in school. The senior leadership team including the headteacher are more visible in the corridors and around the school which is impacting positively on corridor behaviour. Young people in the S1 Crew model are highly motivated and positive about the experience.

The recently implemented mobile phone guidelines are supporting improved lesson structure as young people are more ready to learn. Inspectors acknowledged that although in early stages of development, arrangements to plan, track and monitor when embedded will be effective.

Staff understanding of nurture is being developed through the promotion of the new vision and restructuring of the pastoral care team. Trusting relationships are being developed through the Crew model in S1 and this will be built upon as these young people move into S2. Attendance still requires further action and this is being looked across the ASG to support an early intervention and family approach.

Progress is being made in broadening the curriculum and increasing pathways for young people and this will, in turn, result in improved attainment.

The regular engagement between HMIE and the head teacher will continue in order to support the school on its improvement journey. Staff, although aware there is still work to be done, were pleased that inspectors could see the improvements they had made to date.

The school will remain in **Category 3** and continue to receive regular support from central officers.

A copy of the report can be found [here](#)

3.6 **Education Scotland Further Inspection of Sunnybank School And Nursery Class**

Sunnybank School and Nursery Class was subject to a further inspection in April 2024. During their visit, they talked to children and worked closely with the acting headteachers and staff looking for progress made against the areas identified in the original inspection.

Inspectors noted that under the leadership of the acting headteachers there has been an improvement in the quality of learning and teaching. Teachers are working to a set of agreed expectations ensuring consistency in the quality of delivery across the school and ELC.

Inspectors found that there has been an overall improvement in attainment for the majority of children. They noted that data was now being used effectively to track children's progress in writing and learners are now able to talk more positively about their learning.

The nurturing learning environments created by staff ensure that children with additional support needs are well supported in the school and ELC.

Inspectors believe the school has made positive progress against the original inspection and are confident in the capacity to continue to improve. Education Scotland will not be making any further visits to the school in connection with the May 2023 inspection.

Prior to the return inspection the school was sitting in **Category 3** and the ELC was in **Category 2** following the inspection both the school and ELC will move into **Category 2**.

A copy of the report can be found [here](#)

3.7 The Education (Scotland) Bill has been published. Part 2 of the Bill establishes a new non-ministerial office holder in the Scottish Administration to be called '*His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland*'. The statutory functions to secure the inspection of education provision will be conferred on the HM Chief Inspector, once appointed. HM Chief Inspector will lead a new independent education inspectorate (to be known as, His Majesty's

Inspectorate of Education in Scotland), to take forward the education inspection functions that currently sit within Education Scotland.

3.8 **Care Inspectorate Inspections**

The Care Inspectorate has now resumed their standard inspection model and no longer prioritise the inspection of settings deemed to be at higher risk.

3.9 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.

3.10 **St Devenicks Playgroup** is a funded provider playgroup located in St Devenicks Church, Bielside. The playgroup was inspected by Care Inspectorate over 2 days on 12th and 13th March 2024. Inspectors praised the management and staff team who were committed to delivering a quality service to children and families.

Children benefited from warm nurturing interactions from staff who knew them well and had fun as they explored the environment freely though uninterrupted play, inspectors also noted that children and families benefitted from effective improvement planning. Inspectors suggested that Outdoor play areas should continue to be developed to support children's health and wellbeing.

All areas for improvement identified in previous inspections have been fully met.

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?	Very Good (5)
How good is our staff team?	Very Good (5)

The staff team are delighted with the positive report and will continue to develop the outdoor area. The Locality Lead Officer will offer support in this area. Prior to inspection the setting was in **Category 2** and following the inspection will move into **Category 1** of the Quality Improvement Framework.

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

3.11 **Kingsford ELC**, a Local Authority setting, received an unannounced visit from Care Inspectorate in April 2024. Inspectors noted that children received nurturing care and support from staff who knew them well.

Children were observed to lead their own play through a well balanced mix of activities both indoors and outside. Inspectors noted that the staff team were motivated and enthusiastic about their roles and were keen to engage in professional learning to develop their practice further. Inspectors suggested that management and staff should now continue to ensure quality assurance, including effective audits and monitoring, are embedded into practice.

Aspect being inspected	Previous evaluation June '23	Recent Evaluation April 24
How good is our care, play and learning?	Adequate (3)	Adequate (3)
How good is our setting?	Good (4)	Good (4)
How good is our leadership?	Adequate (3)	Adequate (3)
How good is our staff team?	Adequate (3)	Good (4)

The team were happy that their progress had been recognised. The Locality Lead has been supporting the development of enabling spaces as well as reviewing personal plans. They are currently concentrating on quality assurance being embedded in practice to ensure that these processes impact positively on outcomes for children. This evaluation matches with the evaluation of the central team. Prior to inspection the ELC was sitting in **Category 2** and following the feedback they will remain in **Category 2** until they realise good gradings for all aspects. A copy of the ELC plan can be found at Appendix C.

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

3.12 **Skene Square ELC**, a Local Authority setting located within Skene Square school, received an unannounced visit from the Care Inspectorate in May 2024. Inspectors reported that Staff knew the children very well and supported their individual needs. They were kind, caring and nurturing in their approach with the children. Staff had developed good relationships with parents, they felt well informed and involved in their child's experiences and learning. The inspectors highlighted the strong leadership of the setting which ensured a culture of continuous improvement.

Aspect being inspected	Evaluation May 2024
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 Skene Square are delighted their hard work has been recognised in this very positive evaluation of their service.

This evaluation matches with the school self-evaluation and the evaluation gradings discussed at the most recent Quality Improvement Visit with central officers in February 2024. The setting was in **Category 2** prior to inspection and will now move to **Category 1** of the Quality Improvement Framework and practice will be shared with settings in categories 2 and 3. A link to the full inspection can be found [here](#)

3.13 **Copper Pots**, a funded provider setting based in the Woodside area of Aberdeen, received an unannounced visit from Care Inspectorate on 24 April 2024. Inspectors noted that improvements had been made to the lunchtime

experience and children were getting more opportunities to play outdoors with a more proactive approach to risk assessment supporting safer play.

Aspect being inspected	Previous evaluation July '23	Recent Evaluation
How good is our care, play and learning?	Weak (2)	Adequate (3)
How good is our setting?	Weak (2)	Good (4)
How good is our leadership?	Weak (2)	Adequate (3)
How good is our staff team?	Adequate (3)	Good (4)

The team at Copper Pots are happy that the work they have done to improve safety and environments has been recognised by inspectors. Although they had made some improvements to health care plans there is still a need to bring all the information together in a single plan which is easily accessible to all staff. Play environments have been improved however there is a need for staff to provide children with targeted challenge and support the extension and deepening of learning further.

This evaluation matches with the setting self-evaluation and the evaluation gradings discussed at the most recent Quality Improvement Visit locality leads in February 2024. The setting was in **Category 3** prior to inspection and will now move to **Category 2** of the Quality Improvement Framework. A copy of the action plan can be found at Appendix D.

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

- 3.14 **Flexible Childcare Services, Cummings Park**, is a funded provider setting located in the Cummings Park area of Aberdeen. The setting received an unannounced inspection over 2 days in April 2024. Care Inspectorate reported that staff were kind, warm, and nurturing in their approach with children. Staff knew the children and their families well, supported their individual needs, and acted on cues for comfort and reassurance.

Children led their own play through a well-balanced mix of activities, both indoors and outside. They commented that staff were passionate about their role and were keen to extend their professional development to further improve outcomes for children. The setting now have to ensure positive and nurturing mealtimes across the setting. Quality assurance, including effective audits and monitoring should now be embedded into practice.

Aspect being inspected	Previous evaluation September '23	Recent Evaluation April 2024
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?	Adequate (3)	Good (4)

The management and staff team are pleased that their ongoing progress has been recognised and will continue to drive their improvement priorities. The setting will move to Category 2 level of support within the Quality Improvement Framework. The Locality Lead has been offering advice and support on a regular basis and will continue to work with the team as they embed quality assurance into practice.

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

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	Quality assurance arrangements in place to validate self-evaluation gradings	L	Yes

	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>Children's Services 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>

National Improvement Framework Plan	
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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 - Quarryhill School action plan
Appendix B - Quarryhill ELC action plan
Appendix C - Kingsford ELC action plan
Appendix D - Copper Pots ELC action plan

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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