

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| COMMITTEE | Education & Children's Services |
| DATE | 26 November 2024 |
| EXEMPT | No |
| CONFIDENTIAL | No |
| REPORT TITLE | Behaviour Action Plan |
| REPORT NUMBER | F&C/24/322 |
| EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | Eleanor Sheppard |
| CHIEF OFFICER | Shona Milne |
| REPORT AUTHOR | Emma Powell, Shona Milne |
| TERMS OF REFERENCE | 1.1.1, 1.1.2,1.1.3 |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report responds to the instruction to the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to review the adequacy of the current allocation of pupil support staffing and provision of specialist placements across the city; consider the output and report options for consideration back to the Education and Children's Services Committee within three cycles.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Note the continued hard work undertaken by Aberdeen City schools to provide creative, learner-centred support for learners across the city;
- 2.2 Instruct the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to develop a proposed operating model for a cost neutral time limited Early Intervention provision, to be based at Riverbank School for up to 10 primary children, and bring a firmer proposal to Committee for approval within 2 Committee cycles; and
- 2.3 Instruct the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to work with Head Teachers to identify a solution that will allow Pupil Support Assistants to be released for professional learning.
- 2.4 Instruct the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to append a summary of progress against the ASL Review recommendations and a summary of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Additional Support for Learning to the report being presented to Committee within 2 cycles.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 In order to comprehensively respond to the instruction to review the adequacy of provision for those with additional support needs, officers have undertaken a deep dive into the data held by the service (Appendix A), commissioned the

Education Psychology Service to undertake a detailed exploration of learner need (Appendix B) and have also drawn key themes from recently published HMLe reports (Appendix C) to ensure that external opinion is also taken into account. All three sources of evidence have been triangulated to inform the development of recommendations presented to Committee.

3.2. DEEP DIVE INTO SERVICE DATA

- 3.2.1 An analysis of centrally held data (Appendix A) was undertaken to consider the current range and volume of specialist provisions across the city, changes in learner need, current provision of Pupil Support Assistants, the professional learning offer, support for families and the levels of pupil attendance.
- 3.2.2 Data shows that there is a broad range of specialist provisions and specialist services available across the city, with the volume of provision thought to be in keeping with national averages, and far greater than some who have very limited provision. When children and young people have been allocated a full-time placement in a specialist provision, very few children and young people then transition onto a less supported provision, this impacts on the spaces available in specialist provisions on a yearly basis. Based on current arrangements, there is clear evidence that demand will always be greater than the number of places available and that there will continue to be a level of prioritisation required.
- 3.2.3 One provision (The Language Units) offers very targeted support for a time limited period before children and young people return to their mainstream settings. More children referred to this resource are able to access the service.
- 3.2.4 There is evidence that the complexity of additional support needs experienced by our learners has been steadily increasing, partly due to advances in medical science. As a result, the composition of learners in specialist provisions, and mainstream, has changed over time. There is also clear evidence that recent world events have impacted on our children and young people across all provisions and school settings.
- 3.2.5 In the absence of a change in national policy on a presumption of mainstreaming (and associated funding) there is a need to think about how best to mitigate a further increase in referrals for placements in specialist provisions. There is much to be learned from the operation of our Language Units where a short-term intervention is offered prior to transitioning back to mainstream, particularly to help address some of the increased demand identified in the early stages of primary.
- 3.2.6 The number of children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) has increased significantly from 34.6% in 2018/19 to 39.67% in 2023/24, this is in keeping with the national picture. Deprivation is a factor in the spread of additional support needs across the city. There is evidence that some of the whole city approaches utilised over the last few years are impacting positively.
- 3.2.7 The increase in learner needs following the pandemic triggered the planning of a high number of bespoke interventions for individuals with 10.70% of learners having an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in 2021. By 2023 this had reduced

to below pre pandemic levels, with only 7.99% of learners having an IEP. This suggests that interventions put in place immediately following the pandemic were successful for most children and young people.

3.2.8 The percentage of learners requiring an education-initiated Child's Plan has started to marginally increase. This supports other data sets suggesting that ASN learner needs are becoming more complex and in need of multi-agency action. Additional Support Needs will be given consideration as we develop our Family Support arrangements.

3.2.9 The number of Pupil Support Assistants in schools increased by 10% post pandemic, driven by the increase in school rolls. Head teachers have control of how they deploy the allocation. There is a very small resource allocated through the Child's Planning Forum to support transition identified through the Child's Plan. Requests for assistance data would suggest that our schools would easily deploy additional resource.

3.2.10 Pupil support assistants support learning, carry out first aid and administer medicine in line with policy. They work closely with learners with ASN and support them to develop academic and social skills under the guidance of the class teacher. Quality Assurance observations would highlight the level of skills in many, although as would be anticipated this is not consistent. There are opportunities for additional training to increase the capacity and capability of support staff, however these can be limited due to the working hours of PSAs aligning with learning hours for learners. There may be a need to consider how to improve induction arrangements and the accessibility of training opportunities to further build the capacity and capability of school teams.

3.2.11 We currently offer universal online support for all our families through our Parent Hub and information pages on the city website. The signposting is not always clear for parents/carers. There is a need to create a single source of information which is regularly updated.

3.2.12 Attendance levels are above national and all other Urban local authority averages, however they are still below pre pandemic levels (at 92.2% as opposed to 93.3%). Headteachers and central officers regularly review attendance data to help target groups or individuals who would benefit from further investigation.

3.2.13 When parents are reminded about the importance of attendance, we can see this has an impact on attendance levels. In order to improve this further a focus group of Head Teachers and central staff are reviewing our guidance and practices against Emotionally based school Non-attendance approaches.

3.3 EXPLORATION OF LEARNERS NEEDS

3.3.1 The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) undertook an Exploration of Learners Needs. This was to gain a further understanding of how the learning needs of children and young people are met across schools and insight in lived experiences. Full analysis can be found in Appendix B.

- 3.3.2 Analysis of Secondary School data tells us that schools are experiencing an increase in both complexity and number of learners' with Additional Support Needs in their mainstream settings, most clearly seen in the early stages of Secondary education. Secondary Senior Leaders referred to the changing picture of emotional presentation of learners' post pandemic, with factors such as Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) and emotional dysregulation seen in their settings. A perceived reduction in support from external support partners was a difficulty identified by Secondary leaders. A key factor identified as important to support learners was both the capacity of staff and the physical environment. Secondary Senior Leaders shared their appreciation for the many school staff that go above and beyond their remit to support the needs of learners across their settings.
- 3.3.3 The flexibility of Secondary schools to meet the complex range of Additional Support Needs was demonstrated through a range of creative approaches to maximise limited resource, this included looking more holistically at structural changes (e.g., increasing curricular offers). Embedding universal offers and approaches, such as relational approaches were also shared as helpful. Leaders in each secondary setting were asked what their three most effective interventions/approaches were. The four most frequently named were:
- Improved curricular offer
 - Internal outreach support
 - Circle – a universal & targeted approach for the learning environment for learners with neurodivergence
 - Internal Support Base
- 3.3.4 Analysis of the data from Primary Schools tell us that they are experiencing more learners in their settings with Additional Support Needs, and more complexity in the range and breadth of needs they are supporting. This is most noticeable in the early stages of Primary school. Primary Senior Leaders expressed that there could be challenges with ensuring capacity of their support staff and felt that that this could impact on staff wellbeing. Staff working in Primaries are highly valued and their work is appreciated. It is recognised that many school staff go above and beyond their remit to support the needs of learners. Opportunities for supporting and upskilling support staff can be limited due to their contracted hours and staff would welcome a solution to this. Primaries shared that current support levels depended on resourcing continuing. Primary schools are using a range of creative approaches to support learners including adapting their environments, creating enhanced areas, and prioritising staff resourcing to meet the needs particularly of those with dysregulation difficulties, or sensory needs.
- 3.3.5. Some primaries discussed the benefits of strong and effective partnerships and the value and support this brings them. Associated School Group partnerships were a helpful resource to support creativity and problem solving for some. Primaries shared that the buy-in from staff for approaches and interventions was integral to their successful implementation. Primary senior leaders were asked what their three most effective interventions/ approaches were, the most popular were:
- Creation of enhanced area

- Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA – a PSA training & ongoing support programme delivered by the EPS)
 - Circle – a universal & targeted approach for the learning environment for learners with neurodivergence
 - Trauma informed approach
 - Relational approach
 - Emotion Works – a way of talking about emotions and emotional regulation – universally or targeted.
- 3.3.6 All teaching and support staff in schools were given the opportunity to complete an anonymous online survey. As there were only 54 responses, generalisations across the workforce cannot be made but insights into the experiences of those working in schools can be seen. Staff shared concerns about the increasing complexity and levels of Additional Support Needs seen and the impact of learning environments for some learners (e.g. sensory or dysregulation). Staff shared that they see schools as welcoming of learners with Additional Support Needs and the diversity this brings. They reported that schools are adapting and changing practice with inclusive spaces, relational approaches and differentiated learning. That professional learning offered alongside support from Education and external services partners are all valued. These all help to mitigate some of the challenges.
- 3.3.7 Focus Groups took place with appropriate groups (including parents of children and young people with ASN, and Trade Unions) whose views were not gathered in the first 3 strands of the exploration. There was consensus across the various groups of what makes practice most effective in relation to supporting learners with ASN. Effective collaboration and partnership working with schools, families and internal and external partners was at the core of success, alongside clarity and streamlining of roles and support processes. Challenges were seen when these things were not in place. The embedding of strong universal supports, alongside continued capacity building and creative approaches were also valued as key for successful experiences and placements. It was agreed that when required intensive wrap-around support with partners can make the difference for some learners with complex ASN. These groups also discussed the increasing pressures of increased additional support needs in schools.
- 3.3.8 A Case Study approach was utilised to shine a light on some of the exemplary practice taking place across Aberdeen's schools, with Case Studies available in Appendix B. Four settings were involved, representing different stages, and localities in education. Strong pedagogical approaches were firmly embedded by teachers and support staff and creativity was seen across practice. Effective use of physical spaces to provide relational approaches, connections and collaborations with learners, and creation of a sense of belonging all contributed to the most effective learning experiences.
- 3.3.9 Finally, 160 learners from Primary, Secondary and Specialist provision across Aberdeen selected cards to indicate their own and perceptions of classmates' feelings regarding different topics related to wellbeing in school. Within the 'Wellbeing' theme more learners selected they sometimes could find the school environment overwhelming (noise/busyness/crowds) and worried at break times. But most learners rated they 'could show their true feelings in school'

and did not 'worry about coming into school'. Learners, through the cards they selected, rated the themes of 'Sense of Belonging', 'Relationships with Adults', and School' the most highly.

3.3.10 Undertaking this detailed exploration of learners' needs has highlighted how our schools are responding to increasing levels of complexity. For the most part, our school have responded extremely positively. To further strengthen our arrangements there is a need to:

- Carefully consider the physical space helpful to support learners, and take the need for such space into consideration when establishing new school capacities
- Establish further mechanisms to share practice, especially with how to adapt internal and external spaces across Associated School Groups and with the wider workforce
- Strengthen induction arrangements for support staff, and consider how best to release more staff more often to engage in high quality professional learning
- Influence the simplification of partnership referral processes
- Progress current plans to enhance arrangements for support to those with Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

3.4 THEMES FROM PUBLISHED HMIe REPORTS

3.4.1 HMIe undertake inspections of schools and share their findings in a report with school staff, parents and local authority officers. Analysis of the reports with a supporting learners' lens has identified 4 common strengths:

- High quality relationships with learners, parents, staff and across school communities
- The nurturing environments within our schools
- Leadership of schools
- Engagement and communication with parents

Schools with all these key strengths have the ideal conditions for supporting learners' needs. The good practice within the schools has been shared across staff networks and will continue to be used to support improved practice in others.

3.4.2 Key development areas common across the inspection reports analysed:

- Systems in place to monitor and track progress
- Appropriate level of challenge for learners
- Systems to support attendance
- Consistency of learning and teaching across settings
- Staff application of skills and knowledge

These key areas will be reviewed with head teachers to determine the adequacy of plans currently in place to address them.

3.5 CONCLUSION

3.5.1 Officers were instructed to evaluate the adequacy of current provision and Pupil Support Assistant resource and report their findings, and the next steps deemed most appropriate for consideration by Committee.

- 3.5.2 In reviewing the three sources of evidence holistically, and considering what is known about schools through quality improvement visits, officers conclude that the current level of fixed specialist school placements is appropriate in the context of current national policy.
- 3.5.3 The rise in complexity of need, at times triggered by recent world events, does however require consideration of different working practices. Officers conclude that it would be helpful to design an Early Intervention Provision, which mirrors arrangements in our Language Units and supports the positive return to mainstream school, for our youngest learners in primary school following a period of intensive support. It is proposed that such a model be fully scoped with a small-scale cost neutral operating model brought back to Committee within 2 cycles for approval. It is thought that operating and evaluating the impact of a small test of change could be invaluable in longer term planning.
- 3.5.4 In terms of provision of Pupil Support resource, all schools would report being able to utilise additional resource. There is evidence of highly skilled practitioners ably supporting and nurturing learners. However, there is also evidence that further professional learning could be beneficial in building the capacity and capability of some of the workforce further. There are currently difficulties releasing Pupil Support Staff for some professional learning given current contracts. It is proposed that a solution be identified to address this issue.
- 3.5.5 Members will be aware Scottish Government published the outcome of an Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Review, undertaken by Angela Morgan on behalf of Scottish Government, in 2020. The ASL Review confirmed that the intention of additional support for learning legislation and policy was right. However, it highlighted that improvements are necessary to ensure effective delivery across Scotland. Progress against a shared Plan, agreed between COSLA and Scottish Government, is routinely reported to COSLA.
- 3.5.7 In late 2023 the Education, Children and Young People Committee of Scottish Parliament agreed to undertake an inquiry into Additional Support for Learning (ASL). The inquiry, which ran between November 2023 and May 2024, focused on the following themes:
- the implementation of presumption of mainstreaming, meaning that, where possible, children and young people with additional support needs should be educated in mainstream schools alongside other pupils, rather than in special schools
 - the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on additional support for learning
 - the use of remedies as set out in the Act - these are dispute resolution options that are used when someone wants to dispute whether the provision put in place is adequate to support their child's additional support needs.
- 3.5.8 Both the ASL Review recommendations and the findings of the Parliamentary Inquiry provide further insight for Members. As a result, it is proposed that a summary of progress against the recommendations and of the findings of the Inquiry be appended to the report seeking approval for a draft Operating Model in 2 cycles.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 every education authority must make adequate and efficient provision for the additional support required by each child or young person having additional needs and monitor and review that support. This Report addresses how these duties can be fulfilled more effectively.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

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 young people not being appropriately supported and unable to achieve positive destinations | Training for staff and appropriate supports in place for young people. Test of change will reduce potential risk | L | Yes |
| Compliance | Risk of not complying with legislation and legal challenge (tribunals) | Mitigated by young people receiving the appropriate level of support | M | Yes |
| Operational | Staff feeling overwhelmed leading to low morale | Mitigated by offering high quality professional learning to ensure staff can meet their statutory duties under The Education (Additional Support for Learning) | L | Yes |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|------------|
| | | (Scotland) Act 2004 and the Equality Act 2010. | | |
| Financial | Risk of not having sufficient resource | Mitigated by realigning current services to better meet the needs of our young people in Aberdeen City today. | L | Yes |
| Reputational | Risk of not effectively meeting the needs of all learners | Services realigned to better meet the needs of our young people in Aberdeen City. | L | Yes |
| Environment / Climate | Risk of environmental factors inhibiting positive outcomes for learners | Single service realignment will strengthen universal/targeted support and sharing of best practice, thus preventing escalation of need through strengthened practice and reasonable adjustment. | L | Yes |

8. OUTCOMES

| <u>Council Delivery Plan 2024</u> | |
|---|--|
| | Impact of Report |
| Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u> | <p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following ACC Priorities:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise attainment and achievement • Support improvement in the health and wellbeing of children and young people • Maximise the impact Of Early Learning and Childcare |
| <u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026</u> | |
| Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes | <p>The proposals support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 3 - 95% of all children will reach their expected developmental milestones by their 27-30 month review by 2026. Through offering support to all parents and sharing parenting opportunities we will create networks of support for families of children with additional support needs.</p> <p>The proposals within this report also support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 6 – 95% of children living in our priority neighbourhoods (Quintiles 1 & 2) will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026. Through developing</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <p>partnerships and working with families to ensure all young people have access to a positive destination</p> <p>The proposals within this report also support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 8– 100% of children with Additional Support Needs /Disabilities will experience a positive destination by 2026. Through developing partnerships and working with families to ensure all young people have access to a positive destination. Through improving support for parents and supporting young people with an early intervention model.</p> |
| <p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</p> | <p>The proposals in this report seek to ensure the best use of resource in the system, promoting an understanding of the circumstances of individual children and young people to ensure that appropriate and timely personalised support is available to them.</p> <p>Effective use of resources will help to ensure all initiatives and interventions impact positively on all children and young people and are particularly targeted at those who are adversely affected by poverty.</p> <p>Specific links to:</p> <p>Stretch Outcome 4 90% of children and young people report they feel listened to all of the time by 2026</p> <p>Stretch Outcome 6 95% of children living in our priority localities will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026,</p> <p>Stretch Outcome 7 83.5% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026.</p> |
| <p>Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes</p> | <p>Underpinning the work of all schools in Aberdeen City is reducing the poverty related attainment gap and achieving excellence and equity for all.</p> |
| <p>Community Empowerment Stretch Outcomes</p> | <p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 16 – 50% of people report they feel able to participate in decisions that help change things for the better by 2026.</p> <p>There will be consultation with parents as part of the process for allocating additional support through the early intervention setting</p> |

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- [Integrated Impact Assessment](#)

| Assessment | Outcome |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Integrated Impact Assessment | New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed. - Integrated Impact Assessment |
| Data Protection Impact Assessment | |
| Other | |

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix A – Data held by the service
Appendix B - Exploration of Learner’s needs
Appendix C – Inspection analysis

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Name | Emma Powell; Shona Milne |
| Title | Principal EP; Chief Officer E&LL |
| Email Address | epowell@aberdeencity.gov.uk ; shmilne@aberdeencity.gov.uk |