

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	16 September 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Inspection Reporting
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/25/215
EXECUTIVE 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 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 utilises 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*.

3.2 Link Inspector

The Link Inspector is a new role within Education Scotland. We have agreed to be a pilot Local Authority to help shape this development and have been allocated an Inspector to work alongside the central team.

Following planning meetings and introductions to Senior Leaders in the centre and in schools, monthly visits have been arranged which include attending Head teacher events where the Inspector will be given an opportunity to share national best practice and offer guidance. This work will support leaders across the system to have a greater understanding and insight into the national standard.

3.3 EDUCATION SCOTLAND INSPECTIONS

3.3.1 Further Inspection of Northfield Academy

A first HMIE inspection took place at Northfield Academy in January 2023, with a letter published in March 2023. A further visit was made in January 2025, with inspectors visiting classes, gathering the views of young people, parents/carers and staff, and working closely with the headteacher and senior leaders. A set of five priorities were identified for securing improvement. A summary of progress reported against each priority by HMIE is noted below.

Area for improvement 1: Senior and middle leaders should work to improve the strategic leadership of all areas of the school. Review and update the school's vision and values. There should be a clear and shared understanding of the expectations, direction and identity of Northfield Academy. Ensure plans for improvement are agreed with young people, teachers and parents.

Inspectors noted strong progress in this area highlighting the headteacher's inspirational leadership and clear direction for school improvement underpinned by the school values of nurture, flourish, achieve. Also noted was the increase in correspondence with parents/carers about their children's learning resulting in improved parent satisfaction with the school.

Area for Improvement 2: Develop a calm, safe and purposeful learning environment. Build positive relationships across the school. Young people should be central to discussions about behaviour expectations and feeling safe in school.

Inspectors noted progress in this area including how young people are welcomed into class. The implementation of the mobile phone policy was seen to be helping remove distractions during learning. Inspectors commented that new approaches to reporting bullying allows young people experiencing bullying to report the issues confidentially. Staff are running an increasing number of lunchtime and after school activities and these are being appreciated by young people.

Area for Improvement 3: Agree with staff a shared understanding of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment. Develop effective processes to plan, track and monitor young people's progress.

Positive progress had been made in this area with the creation of a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework to support teacher development. There is increased consistency in how lessons are delivered across the school with clear expectations for young people. The Crew experience has been rolled out to S3 and is continuing to support the development of skills. The tracking and reporting schedule is providing parents/carers with regular updates on their child's progress.

Area for improvement 4: Ensure the wellbeing needs of all young people are a key part of all school activities. Clarify procedures relating to pupil attendance and time keeping.

The school vision and values are promoted throughout the school giving young people an increased sense of belonging. Work with partners continues to provide interventions to support small groups and individuals to progress in their learning. Tests of change in S1 and S2 to support attendance have had positive impact and learning will now be spread across the rest of the school.

Area for improvement 5: Urgently improve attainment from S1 to S6. Review the number of young people who leave school in S4 and S5, and those who do not go to a positive destination. Make plans to support broader achievements for all young people. The school should demonstrate how young people on reduced timetables are included, educated and safe.

The introduction of Crew in S1 and S2 has led to improvements in literacy and numeracy in the Broad General Education (BGE), with work ongoing to increase presentation numbers, broaden the curricular offer and support young people to achieve positive destinations. However, at the time of inspection, it was recognised that limited progress had been made in raising attainment overall and therefore this area of work continues to have the highest priority for the staff team at Northfield Academy.

Appendix A shows the action plan to continue to develop each of these priority areas.

Whilst pleased with the findings of HMIE during this most recent visit, school leaders are determined to continue the pace of further improvements, with support from the wider local authority.

Noting strong and positive progress in some of the areas for improvement, HMIE inspectors have agreed that the school would now benefit from a period of time to further progress the actions and will carry out a further inspection within 18 months of the publication of the letter.

A copy of the letter to parents/carers can be found [here](#).

Northfield will remain in **Category 3** of the Quality Improvement Framework

Northfield Advisory Group

The Northfield Advisors were asked to reflect on the experience of working with Northfield Academy. Although not all Advisors responded, the majority provided feedback. They commented on the importance the support of the education and children's services committee and felt that the level of involvement of the Education Convenor was unusual but important to support school improvement. All advisors were impressed with the quality and understanding of data available and how this was being used to support the school and wider community identify the right priorities.

Advisors reported that they found it hugely beneficial to scrutinise and participate up-close with the process and were impressed with how well the Service understood the context of the school. Advisors were also pleased to see how the Service mobilised and utilised a wide range of resources, including secondary Head Teachers, to support the school's improvement journey.

The group felt that the quality of discussion which took place helped the team to challenge their collective understanding. They noted that the entire process of change aligns with the key principles of implementation science especially on values-driven culture and leadership. They felt the voices of the young people were at the heart of the work being undertaken and could see the young people's confidence and resilience grow during their involvement. It will be crucial to maintain the established ethos as the school continues on its improvement journey.

Advisors welcomed the time invested in establishing processes to ensure they were able to access a wide range of stakeholders and the level of honesty from both the school and central officers allowing sensitive and difficult issues to be raised. This commitment and openness, alongside unsupervised and unmoderated discussion with families and young people was the initial attraction to become involved. Advisors commented that this approach allowed them to see beyond the data and understand the aspirations of young people and families.

Advisors reported that they valued the opportunity to be part of the Northfield Improvement journey and commented on the significant progress made between each of their visits to the school. They all expressed confidence in the leadership of the headteacher, commenting on how he has led the school in removing the boundaries between school and local community. The Advisors wish the Northfield community well in the future and have expressed an interest in being involved in future projects where appropriate.

3.3.2 Further Inspection of Harlaw Academy

Harlaw Academy was originally inspected in November 2019 with a report published in February 2020. Four further visits have been made in the intervening period, with the most recent being during the week of 17th March 2025. Three key priorities have been consistently scrutinised by HMIE colleagues during visits.

Area for Improvement 1: Streamline approaches to improvement so that self-evaluation activities clearly identify priorities which will make the biggest difference to outcomes for young people.

Inspectors noted a substantial amount of work had been completed in relation to this area for improvement. Staff are now working well together and being given the opportunity to lead change through involvement in improvement groups. Processes and systems within the school have been strengthened and this is leading to more accurate self-evaluation and identification of actions to improve the school.

Area for Improvement 2: Continue to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment so that young people's experiences engage them and meet their needs. Develop more fully an ethos for learning with high expectations and mutual respect.

The refreshed professional learning offer is supporting the sharing of effective practice across the school. The delivery of learning and teaching is more consistent with staff and learners being clear of expectations for learning and engagement across the school. There remains a need to improve pace and challenge to ensure all learners experience learning matched to their needs

Area for Improvement 3: Strengthen approaches to monitoring young people's progress across all subject areas so that staff at all levels have a clear overview of learners' progress. Continue to raise attainment of young people at all stages.

The new tracking system being implemented will enable the school to gather an overview of a young person's attainment enabling staff to identify interventions to support where necessary. Inspectors noted that staff and senior leaders are continuing to widen the curriculum in the senior phase to give learners more options to succeed, and encouraged the school to progress plans within the senior phase curriculum to allow young people to improve the quality of passes.

The school was in **Category 3** of the Quality Improvement Framework and will remain there following the inspection to ensure the HT and SLT have the support required to continue to realise improvement.

Inspectors have referenced progress made across the priority areas and recognise that more time is needed to allow the school to demonstrate that this improvement is sustained. They will make a further visit within eighteen months to allow for this time to be given to the school.

Members will be pleased to note that the strategy of change in the senior phase curriculum has realised improvements in the quality of A-C passes at key stages of SQA attainment.

A copy of the letter to parents/carers can be found [here](#) and the action plan can be found at Appendix B

3.4 CARE INSPECTORATE INSPECTIONS

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.

3.4.1 Kirkhill ELC, a local Authority setting, received an unannounced Inspection which took place on 26th and 27th May 2025. Inspectors noted that children

received nurturing approaches from staff that helped them feel emotionally safe and secure. Children experienced safe, unhurried mealtimes and enjoyed a variety of play and learning experiences. Children's health and wellbeing was enhanced through daily access to outdoor play. The environment was comfortable and resources were well-maintained. Quality assurance and self-evaluation had resulted in changes which promoted positive outcomes for families. Effective staff deployment supported positive outcomes for children.

All three of the areas for improvement from the previous inspection have been met.

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

The new nursery manager has worked hard to implement the necessary improvements, and staff are pleased that their improvement journey has continued to impact positively on children and families.

The setting will move from **Category 2** to **Category 1** of the Quality Improvement Framework.

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

3.4.2 The Kindergarten Nursery, a funded provider setting in the Midstocket area of Aberdeen, received an unannounced inspection the 10th and 11th June 2025. Inspectors noted that children were very well supported by staff who were consistently responsive to their needs. Good quality child led play, learning and development opportunities were available to children throughout the day. Outdoor play and learning was enhanced by the regular use of resources in the community including a variety of green spaces and walks to local shops and libraries. Some improvements had been made to the environment to support a more welcoming and inviting space. Strong leadership and a whole team commitment to improvement had led to the continued development of the service which impacted positively on children's wellbeing, play and learning. There was a good mix of skills and experience across the staff team which contributed to positive outcomes for children.

Aspect being inspected	Previous evaluation Aug 24	Recent Evaluation June 25
How good is our care, play and learning?	Adequate (3)	Good (4)
How good is our setting?	Weak (2)	Good (4)
How good is our leadership?	Adequate (3)	Good (4)

How good is our staff team?	Adequate (3)	Good (4)
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The team at The Kindergarten are delighted that the improvements made had been observed by the Care Inspectorate. The team will continue to develop their identified priorities for improvement.

The setting will move from **Category 2** to **Category 1** of the Quality Improvement Framework.

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

3.4.3 Thrive Childcare and Education Happitots Cove Bay, a funded provider in the Cove area of Aberdeen, received an unannounced inspection between the 3rd and 4th June 2025. Inspectors noted that children experienced warm and caring interactions, helping them to feel settled and secure. Children's play and learning experiences had improved. The environment was comfortable and resources were well-maintained. Quality assurance and self-evaluation had resulted in changes which promoted positive outcomes for families. One requirement and three areas for improvement from the previous inspection have been met. Management and staff were committed to the continued development of the service. Inspectors identified that further work was needed to ensure play experiences were consistent and challenging for all children. as staff were not always effectively deployed to meet the changing play and personal needs of children throughout the day. Management and staff will create an action plan to address these areas for development.

Aspect being inspected	Previous Evaluation July 24	Recent Evaluation June 25
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)	Good (4)
How good is our staff team?	Weak (2)	Adequate (3)

Staff and management are pleased that the improvements made have been recognised and have had an impact on children and families. They will continue to address the areas for further development. Happitots will move from **Category 3** of the Quality Improvement Framework to **Category 2**

The service improvement plan can be found at Appendix C.

The full report can be read [here](#).

3.4.4 J.Puddleducks@Victoria Street, a funded provider in the Dyce area of Aberdeen, received an unannounced inspection between the 9th and 11th June 2025. Inspectors spoke with staff, children and parents and observed practice. Inspectors noted that although children were having fun as they played there was a need for staff interactions to improve in order to extend children's play and learning experiences. Children are safe within the setting however there

is a need to review environments to ensure they are consistently inviting and stimulating for children.

Aspect being inspected	Previous Evaluation May 24	Recent Evaluation June 25
How good is our care, play and learning?	Adequate (3)	Adequate (3)
How good is our setting?	Good (4)	Adequate (3)
How good is our leadership?	Good (4)	Good (4)
How good is our staff team?	Adequate (3)	Good (4)

The setting is currently carrying a number of vacancies and is using this as an opportunity to redeploy staff to work with different age groups. Managers are aware of the need to provide professional learning for some of the relocated staff.

The setting was in **Category 3** prior to the inspection and will remain in **Category 3**. The locality lead will continue to undertake unannounced visits to ensure the plan is being actioned.

The setting's action plan can be found at Appendix D.

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

3.5 School Age Childcare Inspections

Registered school age childcare provisions are inspected regularly by the Care Inspectorate. All inspections are unannounced.

- 3.5.1 **Mile End Out of School Care** is run by Aberdeen City Council and is registered to provide care to a maximum of 50 children of primary school age at any one time, with no more than 40 during school term time. The service, which provides before school, after school and holiday care provision, received an unannounced inspection between 15th and 16th July 2025. Inspectors spent time with children attending the service, spoke with parents and carers, staff and management.

Inspectors noted that children were cared for by staff who knew them well. Children benefitted from opportunities to develop their life skills. Daily access to outdoors supported children's health and wellbeing. Children's interests were promoted through their play and learning experiences. Staff were mostly well deployed and worked well together to meet children's needs. As a result of feedback, quality assurance processes will be further embedded to continue to support quality care and experiences.

Staff and management are exceptionally proud of the service delivered at Mile End and welcome the positive feedback and inspection evaluations.

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?	Good (4)
How good is our staff team?	Good (4)

The full report can be accessed [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 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
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement Commit to realising the potential of each individual, by seeking to widen curriculum choice and implement progressive choices. Commit to closing the attainment gap in education while working with partners across the city.	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.
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
Prosperous People - 95% of all our children, including those living in our priority neighbourhoods, will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026.	Engagement with inspectors provides an opportunity to learn from national best practice and validate self-evaluation evidence available. The support and challenge received by Inspectors helps to shape improvement plans for the coming sessions in keeping with the LOIP stretch aims.
Regional and City Strategies Regional Cultural Strategy Prevention Strategy Children's Services Plan National Improvement Framework Plan	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.

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 - Northfield Academy Action Plan

Appendix B – Harlaw Academy Action Plan

Appendix C - Thrive Childcare and Education Happitots Cove Bay Action Plan

Appendix D – J.Puddleducks Action Plan

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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