Aberdeenshire
C O U N C I L   **Education and Children's Services**

**REPORT TO EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE –
1 SEPTEMBER 2022**

ABERDEENSHIRE'S FIVE YEAR SCOTTISH ATTAINMENT CHALLENGE REPORT

1   Executive Summary/Recommendations

1.1   This report, written in partnership with Education Scotland's local attainment adviser, sets out Aberdeenshire's progress towards the Scottish Attainment Challenge over the last five years. The report contains information on next steps with particular reference to the process of establishing stretch aims which are relevant to the National Improvement Framework plan for session 2022/3. Also included as **Appendix 2** is the summary report on the recent Collaborative Improvement activity conducted within Aberdeenshire. This relates to the activity detailed in the Recovery and Progress report and gives sight to priorities of the service for the coming session.

1.2   The Committee is recommended to:

1.2.1   Consider and comment on the findings contained within both reports; and

1.2.2   Agree to a further Scottish Attainment Challenge report to Education and Children's Service Committee once 'Stretch Aims' have been finalised.

2   Decision Making Route

2.1   This report has not been presented to any other Committee.

3   Discussion

3.1   The Recovery and Progress report (**Appendix 1**) sets out a series of high level questions designed to measure the impact of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding in raising attainment and reducing educational inequity for all of Aberdeenshire's children and young people. The report on Collaborative Improvement (**Appendix 2**) details a specific initiative aimed at improving Education Scotland outcome reports for the primary sector within Aberdeenshire.

3.2   Both reports have been widely shared and actions taken as appropriate. They are designed to provide the Committee with background information that will allow members to more deeply understand the context in which future National Improvement Framework papers are set.

4   Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

4.1   This report helps deliver the Strategic Priority "Education, Health and Wellbeing" within the Pillar "Our People", tackling poverty and inequalities.

Pillar	Priority
Our People	Education
	Health & Wellbeing

4.2   This report helps deliver against Aberdeenshire Children's Services Plan Priority –
        Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing.

        This report helps deliver on the LOIP Priority – Child Poverty.

4.3   The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations
        are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		**x**	
Staffing		**x**	
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland		x	
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing		x	
Climate Change and Sustainability		x	
Health and Wellbeing		x	
Town Centre First		x	

4.4   As the Committee is being asked to acknowledge and comment on the paper, there
        are no staffing or financial risks associated.

4.5   The screening section as part of Stage One of the Integrated Impact Assessment
        has not identified the requirement for any further detailed assessments to be
        undertaken because the report is to Education and Children's Services Committee
        on recovery progress and there will be no differential impact, as a result of the
        report, on people with protected characteristics.

5   Scheme of Governance

5.1   The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been
        consulted in the preparation of this report are satisfied that the report complies with
        the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

5.2   The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of
        Section E.1.1.b of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of
        Governance the Council. List of Committee Powers in Part 2A

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Report prepared by Vincent A Docherty, Head of Education and Chief Education Officer
Date 28 July 2022

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Scottish Attainment Challenge: Recovery and Progress Report on 2021-22

Aberdeenshire Council

For Scotland's learners, with Scotland's educators

Contents

Section 1

1.1: Introduction

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was established to promote equity in education by ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed, with a focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. It is underpinned by the National Improvement Framework, Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child. It focuses on improvement activity in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Reducing educational inequity and closing the poverty-related attainment gap is a long term strategy which aims to impact on societal culture and thinking. On the 23 November 2021 the Cabinet Secretary announced the expanded mission statement, included below, of the refreshed SAC.

To use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty with a focus on tackling the poverty related attainment gap.

This report will look at the progress and impact of next steps as outlined in the local authority SAC: 201520 Impact Report. Leadership is recognised as a key driver of the success of any school or early learning and childcare (ELC) setting therefore the report will also take a closer look at Leadership – Governance and Management in relation to the SAC. Also reflected in this report are the local authority's next steps / future priorities in raising attainment and reducing educational inequity for all of Scotland's children and young people.

1.2: Approach used

During the period of 1 April 2022 to 10 June 2022, attainment advisors, in collaboration with Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) local authority project leads, gathered evidence from their individual local authority regarding the SAC in the year 2021-22. The purpose was to provide answers to the following high level questions regarding progress and impact of SAC:

1. What progress has the local authority made with regards to the next steps outlined in the SAC: 2015-20 Impact Report and what impact has this had?

2. Questions from SAC self-evaluation toolkit on leadership – governance and management:

   To what extent are local authority decision-making structures clear and transparent to all stakeholders?
   - In considering our approaches to planning, to what extent do we ensure that our plans are straightforward, clear and distinctly focused on equity?
   - How effectively do our quality assurance processes provide support and challenge, and empower schools, to focus on equity?
   - To what extent are we considering and ensuring long-term sustainability as part of our planning to achieve equity?
   - How effectively do we keep our elected members and other stakeholders informed about progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap?
   - How do we ensure that there is sufficient scrutiny be elected members of the Scottish Attainment Challenge work in the local authority and schools? Does this include the full range of work including Pupil Equity Funding and Care-Experienced Funding?

   At the time of educational recovery, to what extent:
   - Do we ensure that our plans are straightforward, clear and distinctly focused on recovery?

- Do we keep our elected members and other stakeholders informed about the impact of Covid-19 on the most disadvantaged learners and progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap?

3. What are the next steps / future priorities for the SAC?

1.3: Local Authority Context

Aberdeenshire is a Scottish Attainment Challenge Universal Programme local authority; providing access to Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) funding and the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). In 2021-22, Aberdeenshire Council received a PEF allocation, including top-up and pupil premium of £3,489,762 and CECYP funding of £338,400; totalling £3,828,162 across all funding streams.

Aberdeenshire is situated in the north east and represents 8% of Scotland's land mass, covering 2,432 square miles. 147 primary schools, 84 of which have a nursery, serve over 20000 pupils. Seventeen secondary schools serve almost 16000 pupils. Aberdeenshire has four special schools. Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) figures, 2020, confirm that 2.7% of Aberdeenshire pupils live in SIMD deciles one and two. The number of pupils living in deciles one and two has increased by over 0.7% since 2019. SIMD data from 2020 indicates the highest concentration of pupils living in deciles one and two are located in the north of the authority. Two primary schools, situated in the north, have 68% and 67.3% of pupils living within the two most deprived areas. Two academies to the north of Aberdeenshire also serve the greatest concentration of pupils living in deciles one and two, with SIMD figures indicating pupil numbers of 12% and 19.5%. Whilst school profiles remained relatively consistent from 2016 to 2020, free school meal (FSM) allocation rose by 49%. This suggests increased poverty. Work undertaken by schools to raise awareness of poverty, reduce poverty-related stigma and promote FSM uptake may also have contributed to an increased allocation of FSM.

1.4: Executive Summary from Year 5 Report

This report highlights the impact of SAC funding for the children and young people of Aberdeenshire; in particular, those most affected by poverty.

Key strengths identified:

- The empowered leadership values and structures which have influenced and supported more effective use of data for improvement. The local authority has embarked on an extensive programme of events to support staff in using data effectively to inform school improvement. This has enabled practitioners and leaders to use data more effectively to identify need and better match support to children and young people affected by poverty.
- Awareness of poverty, its effect on attainment, and the need for equity for all learners has increased. Collaboration between health, psychology and education services has resulted in the development of a comprehensive strategy to support the implementation of evidence-based, whole-school, inclusion approaches. As a result, the number of schools implementing relational and nurturing whole-school programmes has risen; with an increased supportive, inclusive ethos within most establishments, positively impacting children and young people.
- There is an improving trend in the combined literacy attainment for primary children living in quintile one, resulting in a narrowing of the poverty gap. Insight data shows a significant reduction in the literacy poverty-related attainment gap at S3. Bespoke collaborations in the most disadvantaged areas of Aberdeenshire target specific community needs. The authority is a lead provider of foundation apprenticeships, with a recent pilot project targeting pupils at risk of disengaging from school.

Whilst there is evidence of more robust PEF planning, effective health and welling interventions and improvement in closing the literacy poverty gap for some children and young people, overall there is limited evidence of closing the poverty-related attainment gap in literacy and numeracy.

Consequently, next steps include the following key actions:

- Promote the use of research-based literacy and numeracy PEF interventions, collaboration and sharing of good practice.
- Further interrogate data to consider authority and cluster wide poverty-related trends in reading, writing and numeracy; identifying next steps.
- Increase moderation opportunities across Aberdeenshire and beyond.
- Respond to the Care Review findings, 2020, increase staff awareness of the CECYP related gaps, increase Virtual Head Teacher (VHT) work with schools assessing need and identifying and implementing appropriate interventions to support CECYP in achieving their full potential.
- Further develop effective monitoring and evaluation of progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap.
- Increase and strengthen effective multi-agency working; to intensify the support for children, young people and families affected by poverty and ensure children and young people participate in systems leadership.

Section 2

2.1: Progress and impact of next steps from Year 5 Report

In the face of Covid-19 related challenges, Aberdeenshire has made significant progress with next steps identified in the Year 5 Report.

The delivery of a targeted improvement offer to two clusters with datazones within the most deprived 20% and rural dimensions of the poverty-related attainment gap is showing early signs of positive impact. The pilot offers bespoke support to schools and provides opportunities for practitioners to participate in collaborative activity; sharing practice council wide and nationally. Aberdeenshire colleagues continue to be key drivers behind the development of the Northern Alliance; with evaluations indicating effective professional learning in numeracy and literacy.

Following a pilot scheme involving data packs, August 2021, Aberdeenshire launched Power Bi to enable schools to interrogate ACEL and SNSA data; giving consideration to different cohorts including FSM, SIMD, EAL, ASN and CECYP. Attainment reviews across all 17 clusters, evidence an increased use of data in identifying areas of strength and improvement; with ongoing reports suggesting this is one of the most used Power Bi reports across Education and Children's services.

In collaboration with the National Improvement Framework (NIF) officer, professional learning, aimed at upskilling staff in moderation practices, began in September 2021. Over 100 primary and secondary practitioners took part. Evaluations, completed at the start and end of the programme, suggest increased knowledge and confidence in moderation practices. Following on from this professional learning took place to re-engage previously trained staff; supporting staff to re-engage with available support and resources. A consultation is underway to inform the professional learning offer for session 2022-2023. Due to the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, cross authority moderation has been paused.

The Corporate Parenting Leads Group, in collaboration with agencies, developed a service design and delivery implementation plan in direct response to The Promise and Plan 21-24. Educational Psychology and Children's Services, in partnership with the VHT, have also taken forward the education

recommendations from The Promise, alongside promoting trauma informed practice; supporting schools to identify and meet the needs of their CECYP. Attendance figures indicate advice, advocacy and signposting to relevant resources is supporting schools to increase attendance and reduce exclusions; improving access to the curriculum.

Motivation, Commitment and Resilience Pathways, aimed at promoting increased well-being and positive mental health, continues to be a growing feature in Aberdeenshire. 10 academies now have funding from the CECYP fund to host the mentoring programme. Work is currently underway exploring the use of the new Power Bi data system, in further identifying support areas and the impact of this work specific to the needs of CECYP.

Aberdeenshire are focused on improving outcomes for learners. An effective element of their strategy has been the involvement of the strong Community Learning and Development team in supporting aspects of the NIF and other plans. The local authority has some of the lowest poverty related attainment gaps in Scotland and senior phase outcomes are strong in a number of areas. Increased focus on tracking and monitoring has paid dividends with headteachers being supported and challenged more effectively. Central officers, cluster business managers and attainment advisor continue to support PEF planning though guidance and training. This has resulted in more consultative planning, evidence based decision making, data driven evaluation and reporting of impact.

Over the last two years, there has been significant focus on self-evaluation around the 'Child & Young Person's Plan', resulting in an upskilling of a multi-agency workforce and enhanced support for learners; with an increased focus on children and families impacted by poverty. Aberdeenshire has a strong track record of children and young people's participation in system's leadership; pupil voice is valued and contributes to service design, delivery and improvement.

2.2: Leadership – Governance and Management

Aberdeenshire Education and Children's Services Improvement Framework is based on key areas of development at national and local levels, with current attainment challenge planning reflected in the National Improvement Framework (NIF) plan 2021-22. The NIF plan is seen as an evolving set of developments based on a wide range of priorities across the service. Stakeholders and partners continue to be consulted as the plan progresses. Four education priorities, under pinned by ensuring wellbeing, inclusion and equity, are:
- Improving learning, teaching and assessment
- Partnership working to raise attainment
- Developing leadership at all levels
- Improvement through self-evaluation

Over the last year quality assurance processes have been developed to consider a universal, targeted or intensive approach, ensuring appropriate support and challenge to all schools. This includes the ongoing development of empowered system through their Self-Improving Schools programme. This work has recently been reviewed with the support of an ADES/Education Scotland Collaboration and has evaluated the progress to date and supported the identification of next steps; supporting consistency across the service with a clear focus on improving outcomes for young people.

Scrutiny of the work of the authority takes place through area committees where elected members are briefed on aspects for improvement including:
- Review of performance information including attainment and achievement and positive destination statistics.
- Review of PEF processes and impact to date

- Review of identified actions for improvement within NIF planning with termly updates provided on agreed actions for improvement.
- Regular reporting on impact of Covid-19 on both pupil and staff attendance within school.

Authority wide approaches to school improvement planning ensure all schools have a focus on recovery; as evidenced in school standards and quality improvement plan returns. Support and challenge is offered to schools around this through the previously described universal, targeted or intensive offer.

Section 3

3.1: Progress towards setting Stretch Aims and implementing the SAC refresh

The local authority is making progress towards setting stretch aims and implementing the SAC refresh. The head of education has assigned a lead officer to drive forward this work. Plans are in place to support close partnership working with stakeholders, headteachers and the attainment advisor to develop local authority stretch aims that are relevant, ambitious and achievable. Collaboration with other local authorities through networking events is supporting ongoing work to ensure the creation of core stretch aims and core plus aims meet national guidance and align with local authority and school priorities.

School standards and quality improvement planning reports (SQIP), and current local authority tracking and monitoring data has been reviewed to identify possible stretch aim themes such as attendance. Current attainment and poverty-related attainment gap data gathering is ongoing, to further support the creation of core stretch-aims and core-plus aims. There are plans in place to work with all stakeholders, including partners to re-examine the barriers and supports needed to close the poverty-related attainment gap. The plan is for collation of feedback from HTs and a presentation of draft stretch aims to HTs in August; with final stretch aims published in September. The attainment advisor has been involved in discussions; providing support and guidance where appropriate.

Aberdeenshire has robust data collection and monitoring processes in place and are confident in their understanding of what works for them. Once their stretch aims are agreed, these processes should support them in delivering their identified stretch aims.

3.2: Next steps

- Continue to support the effective use of PEF and CECYP funding.
- Further support schools in data led decisions about: poverty-related attainment gaps, driving forward school improvement and closing the gap.
- Extend moderation practices, including partnership working.
- Develop core and plus stretch aims that are relevant, ambitious and achievable and will support recovery and progress.
- Support schools in meeting local authority stretch aims.
- Ensure stretch aims are monitored, tracked and impact reported.

Section 4

4.1: Glossary

Term/ acronym	Meaning
AA	Attainment Advisor
ACEL	Achievement of a Curriculum for Excellence level
ADES	Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
ASF	Attainment Scotland Fund
BGE	Broad General Education
CECYP	Care experienced children and young people
CLPL	Career Long Professional Learning
ES	Education Scotland
HT	Head Teacher
Insight	Insight is a benchmarking tool designed to help bring about improvements for learners in the Senior Phase (S4-S6). The system is updated twice annually, around September for attainment results and February for school leavers' data.
LA	Local authority
PEF	Pupil Equity Funding
NIF	National Improvement Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QAMSO	Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officer
QIM	Quality Improvement Manager
QIO	Quality Improvement Officer
RIC	Regional Improvement Collaborative
SAC	Scottish Attainment Challenge
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SEF	Strategic Equity Funding
SEO	Senior Education Officer
SNSA	Scottish National Standardised Assessments
SQuIP	Standards and Quality Improvement Plan
SRA	Senior Regional Advisor

4.2: Appendices
    Appendix 1a – SAC Refresh Logic Model

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SAC Logic Model - Local/Regional

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES	LONG TERM OUTCOMES	VISION	MISSION

Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs)
- Development of regional plan and work programme
- Supporting collaborative working
- Professional learning
- Sharing of good practice

Local authorities
- Prepare plans and stretch aims
- Tracking, monitoring and data analysis tools
- Professional learning around planning, interventions and approaches
- Practical support to schools on finance and HR
- Support and challenge schools to achieve stretch aims
- Active monitoring of plans and reporting on progress
- Collaborating with services and communities
- Development of local authority wide approaches
- Targeted investment in funding

Public services - health boards, social work, etc.
- Youth Work
- Community Learning and Development
- Family Link workers
- Sharing data
- Partnership agreements
- Community Planning Partnerships

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

Leadership
Actively developing leadership capabilities in the education system with embedded structures in place to improve learning, teaching and self-evaluation

Professional learning
All practitioners engage in professional learning with a focus on equity and reducing poverty related attainment gap

Collaboration
Established collaborations with local authorities, schools, the third sector and families and communities identifying key priorities across education delivery.

Data and evidence
Practitioners are able to use data effectively to identify the needs of their learners and improve learning and teaching

Shared understanding
There is shared understanding and shared work amonst all LAs, practitioners and partners on the Scottish Attainment Challenge aims/mission

Engagement
Meaningful engagement with children and young people and their families and communities embedded in decision making in relation to the SAC

Focus
Sustained focus on physical and mental health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy using pedagogical skills to improve achievement, attainment (and positive destinations) for CYP living in poverty.

Approaches
All parts of the system are aware of the range of approaches to support equity, can apply them in their local context and identify impact evidence.

CYP outcomes
A sustained focus on children and young people's readiness to learn through focusing on engagement and attendance, confidence and wellbeing.

MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES

Leadership
Strong leadership in the education system, using skills developed through continuous professional learning focused on equity and closing the poverty related attainment gap

Professional learning
Professional learning focussed on equity is embedded and practitioners use these skills to improve outcomes for children and young people

Collaboration
Strategic collaboration across the education system results in innovative, impactful and sustainable approaches to closing the poverty related attainmet gap

Data and evidence
An embedded use of data and evidence is used to build and share an understanding of what works in closing the poverty related attainment gap

Culture and ethos
An embedded culture and ethos based on educational equity exists in the education system that promotes high aspirations and recognises broader achievement for all children and young people and their families.

Engagement
Increased engagement and participation of CYP, families and communities in the learner journey

Learning and teaching
Higher quality learning, teaching and assessment, focussing on achieving equity for learners, across HWB, literacy and numeracy

Approaches
Evidence based approaches embedded in the system with continuous refinement / adaptation based on 'what works' in the local context

CYP outcomes
Improvements in engagement, attendance, confidence and wellbeing of children and young people

LONG TERM OUTCOMES

Embedded practices
An embedded culture focused on equity continuously supporting and developing practice at all levels of the system addressing impacts of the poverty related attainment gap.

Educational outcomes
Children and young people have equal opportunity and rights to positive and excellent educational outcomes regardless of their background

Education system
An education system which actively addresses poverty, removing barriers through inclusive ethos, practice and approaches for children and young people, parents and carers and practitioners

Achievement
An education system which reflects the breadth of achievements that contribute to improved outcomes for children

Closing the gap
Closing of the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people

VISION

Excellence through raising attainment: ensuring that every child achieves the highest standards in literacy and numeracy set out within the Curriculum for Excellence levels, and the right range of skills, qualifications and achievements to allow the to success

Achieving equity: ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed with a particular focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap

MISSION

To use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty with a focus on tackling the poverty related attainment gap to deliver on the Government's vision of equity and excellence in education.

Assumptions

- The identified short and medium term outcomes will lead over time to improved attainment and a narrowing of the poverty related attainment gap
- There is no hierarchy of outcomes in terms of importance to the programme
- The logic model is a visual tool for showing how a programme produces change, summarising the aspects that are critically important in explaining how the programme produces the change
- Resources are available and targeted to support activities and outcomes
- Collaboration with partners will lead to innovative and impactful approaches
- Engagement with Children and Young People and their families will lead to better decision making
- Leadership and professional learning will support development of a positive culture and ethos
- Use of data and evidence leads to better targetting of those who need support and monitoring of progress

Contextual factors

- Impact of Covid
- Increase in cost of living/ poverty
- Curriculum Reform
- Changes in funding models
- Family engagement
- Political change
- Focus on Health and Wellbeing
- Voice of Children and Young People
- Focus on wider achievement
- Role of local authorities
- Partnership working
- Local context

Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

From mountain to sea

ADES, Education Scotland & Aberdeenshire Council Collaboration Event Summary Report.

Collaborative Improvement

Collaborative Improvement is an approach to bringing about improvement through shared work involving staff from the local authority, Education Scotland and ADES. Together, the group establish the focus for the Collaborative Improvement visit and then undertake activities in the local authority that will result in an evaluative summary of where there are strengths and where there are areas that may require further focus. The approach to collaborative improvement was outlined in the joint agreement and is based on the call for a "strengthened middle" in the 2015 OECD report on Scottish Education. The approach is also intended to address the recommendation in Audit Scotland's report on education that Councils should work with schools, Regional Improvement Collaboratives, other policy teams and partners, for example in the third sector, to reduce variability in outcomes.

Focus for Aberdeenshire: "How effective are our approaches to the use of data for improvement in primary schools?"

The focus for the visit to Aberdeenshire Council was broad and considered the progress made in improving the outcomes, specifically in our primary school sector. The question for the collaborative improvement team was in relation to how data is being used to support improvement in our primary schools. At the time of the visit, several different areas of work were being progressed to support improvement in the use of data, both in supporting HTs to use data effectively within their own settings as well as its use by central officers to promote improvement in a universal, targeted or intensive approach, as appropriate.

Areas the authority has focused their improvements on include:

❖ Data packs for individual primary schools and subsequent development of Power Bi system to provide an analysis tool for every primary school on both ACEL and SNSA data.

❖ Universal, targeted and intensive offer to all primary schools including a key focus on high quality learning, teaching and assessment.

❖ QAMSO - Moderation work.

❖ Self-Improving Schools – Trios/Quads.

❖ Best Value audit Response – Targeted support in response to local authority Best Value Report

❖ Development of approaches to School Improvement Planning and Standards and Quality Reports.

Aberdeenshire has four key priorities for Education agreed in 2018 which remain key areas to focus on going forward. These are:

- Improve learning, teaching and assessment
- Partnership working to raise attainment
- Improvement through self-evaluation
- Developing leadership at all levels

The collaborative improvement visit therefore contributed to confirming progress made to date and also work in collaboration with Education Scotland and ADES to identify the next steps in our improvement journey. It was considered an appropriate time to take stock of progress and potential areas where more limited progress had been made, which could then be addressed as we move forward with our local authority priorities.

Planning and process

A team including Aberdeenshire, ADES and Education Scotland were brought together to discuss the scope, ethos, process and outcomes on a number of occasions before the start of the engagement. The scoping meeting clarified the background and enabled Aberdeenshire senior officers to present some key information. ADES and Education Scotland leads set out the process, ethos and intended outcomes for the full team. Our Director and Chief Education Officer prepared information on the profile of Aberdeenshire including demographics and inspection information. A Glow and Teams site was prepared for the team members providing them with information on each of our six key areas. These online spaces also provided all with agendas for meetings and relevant recording documents.

The visit was coordinated by an ADES officer and Senior Regional Adviser working with the Director and Chief Education Officer responsible for education in Aberdeenshire. In addition, the team for the Collaborative Improvement visit included four members representing ADES who were all senior managers or heads of service coming from Edinburgh, Orkney, East Lothian, Dumfries and Galloway and East Dunbartonshire; a team from Education Scotland who were predominantly from the North Team alongside an experienced member of Education Scotland Inspectorate team.

The visit was carried out entirely remotely due to Covid restrictions. The visit was over a number of days and started with a presentation by our Director and Chief Education officer. A QIM from within the team shared the developments to date in all six key areas. These presentations set the scene and context and led into a discussion about the actions that had been taken and strengths and areas of challenge. A series of focus groups was then arranged and groups were joined by Education Scotland and local authority colleagues. An agreed agenda was used for each stakeholder meeting which was facilitated by a member of staff from Aberdeenshire. Notes were also taken by Aberdeenshire colleagues to support the collation of evidence during the visit. Each

stakeholder group explored where the authority was doing well what the challenges were; what would help moving forward and what next steps might be. At the end of each day a team discussion took place with sharing of information and an opportunity for clarification. Recording sheets from each focus group were collated and shared to form the basis of discussions on the focus for that day or any gaps in the information.

Arriving at conclusions

A meeting of the full team took place at the end of the visit which was followed up with a two-hour meeting at the end of the following week. During this meeting all involved in the visit engaged in a discussion to arrive at a broad consensus on the main strengths and areas for consideration by the authority.

In general, the feedback was positive and mentioned much of the good work on-going across Aberdeenshire. The feedback focused on what was working well in Aberdeenshire and what areas we should consider focusing on next to ensure future improvement. The strengths and challenges were identified as follows:

Strengths

- Building blocks are in place and good progress has continued to be made despite the challenges of the past two years.

- Relationships between schools and the centre are strong; genuine sense of trust and respect. Central team know their schools well and have a clear insight into performance of individual schools and clusters.

- Those schools who are engaging most with the work are benefitting from the experience; there is a genuine enthusiasm and commitment.

- HTs referred to being empowered, valued and respected.

- QAMSO moderation work has been successful and should continue to be built on.

- Trios are at an evolutionary stage and could be more successful with more opportunities for schools to focus on challenge as well as support.

- Power Bi development viewed positively with data (in this form) helping to shape focused improvement. Data sets are working well for schools who are engaging with it.

- SQuIP is perceived as a live document used throughout the year; reduction in number of SQuIP priorities was well received.

- A clear and focused plan had been developed in response to the Best Value report. As a team, the QIOs, attainment advisers and HTs are working well to improve attainment for the most deprived.

Challenges

- Not all schools have "bought-in" to the current model; there requires to be a strategic priority to address this. A consistency of approach by QIO/M team will lead to greater consistency in schools and across clusters. Central team to consider and ensure consistency in universal, targeted and intensive offer to schools. This will also include a review of all evidence gathered from engagement with schools on agreed areas including SQUIP, leadership, learning, teaching and assessment, and attainment information.

- Making more consistent use of data to evaluate impact and inform school improvement priorities with a focus on closing the gap and challenging all leaners to achieve.

- Clarity on Local Authority and schools' targets; ensuring all children and young people receive a high-quality educational experience; this includes a clear focus on what is considered to be high quality learning, teaching and assessment within Aberdeenshire. Work on this area is due to be launches with all Aberdeenshire Schools in August 2022 which will give a clarity and a shared understanding across all schools about the core entitlements and expectations for learners.

- Taking the learning from the work in the North (Best Value response) and apply this to other areas of Aberdeenshire.

- How we share good practice across the authority.

Planning for Improvement

- Launch the work of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Executive group in order to ensure a clear focus on all schools having an agreed statement on what constitutes a high-quality experience for learners within their setting. Central officers will be tasked with ensuring this is in place following a range of high profile CLPL events throughout session 22-23.

- Develop a clear and consistent approach to universal, targeted and intensive offer from the central team to all schools. All to be clear on processes and expectations.

- Continue to develop the use of data for improvement and link this work with authority stretch aims to ensure all schools are critically analysing all relevant data and clear goals are in place for both individual schools and the local authority.

- Continue with areas of work that support attainment and achievement of all learners including the Best Value response work plan and QAMSO approaches already started.

- Following the last two years of disruption, re start Self Improving Schools Trios work with a focus on Validated Self-Evaluation(VSE) and high-quality learning, teaching and assessment.

What will happen next?

- On 29 June QIO/QIMs will meet to engage in professional dialogue around consistent approaches to universal, targeted and intensive approaches with all schools. This will be followed by a further event in August 2022. Clarity on expectations will be agreed and shared with schools following these events. Chief Education Officer and Director will offer support and challenge to QIMs on agreed approaches to support both consistency and accountability across the service.

- All schools across Aberdeenshire will receive a CLPL offer linking to high quality learning, teaching and assessment to support them in ensuring there is an agreed statement within their individual school setting. The work of the Learning Teaching and Assessment group will be launched on 31 August 2022. This will be followed by a series of events throughout the session, with high profile speakers leading training with all schools. Both Mark Burns and Shirley Clarke will be delivering training to all schools during In-Service days.

- Aberdeenshire Council will incorporate key aspects of the collaborative improvement visit into National Improvement Framework and Scottish Attainment Challenge planning for session 22-23.

- Education Scotland Locality team will continue to work alongside Aberdeenshire Council to support the delivery of the relevant actions.

GLOSSARY

Acronym	Meaning
ACEL	A Curriculum for Excellence Level
ADES	Association of Education Directors in Scotland
CLPL	Career Long Professional Learning
HTs	Head Teachers
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QAMSO	Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officer
QIM	Quality Improvement Manager
QIO	Quality Improvement Officer
SNSA	Scottish National Standardised Assessment
SQuIP	Standards and Quality Improvement Plan