

**COLLABORATIVE REVIEW OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS EDUCATION**

Report by Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to provide information to the Comhairle about the process and outcome of the second Three-Island Collaborative Improvement Review that took place in May 2024 as a partnership between Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) and Education Scotland.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Under the leadership of ADES and in partnership with Education Scotland, all local authority areas in Scotland have made a commitment to work together to undertake Collaborative Improvement Reviews.
- 2.2 The critical role of cross-authority collaborative improvement work has been recognised for several years as a key approach to improving outcomes for Scotland's learners, strengthening professional practice and decreasing inequalities. The following Reports specifically recognise the vital role of collaborative improvement activity.
- The Muir Report (2022) Putting Learners at the Centre.
 - Education Reform – Joint Agreement (2018).
 - OECD Report (2015) Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective.
- 2.3 Working closely with ADES and Education Scotland, it was identified that the three island authorities of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council would form a strong partnership to undertake a review, recognising the similarities, cross-cutting themes and issues, that delivery of education in island settings face. The collaborative review that took place in May 2024 was the third in a series of three.
- 2.4 Senior officers from the three authorities worked with ADES and Education Scotland staff to identify an agreed focus on additional support for learning (ASN) and inclusive education. The overarching review question was: ***In the context of island communities, how well does the provision for Additional Support Needs and Inclusion engage and support the needs and voices of all children and young people, equipping them for learning, life and work?*** To help answer this question it was necessary to have a better and shared understanding of three related themes:
1. How do we define ASN?
 2. What are our resources and how do we use them?
 3. How effective are our pathways for both universal and targeted learners?

These three themes which the focus groups considered are consistent with the factors which ADES members have recognised as being central to decision-making at all levels in the system.

- 2.5 To undertake the review, a team of senior officers from the local authority, ADES and Education Scotland began to scope, process, structure and identify suitable colleagues to join the team. The collaboration was organised over three days in May 2024, with all focus groups taking place online except for children and young people who were met with on their own islands.

- 2.6 Focus groups were established for each of the three themes and membership was drawn from the review team and a broad range of stakeholders. Each authority also provided access to documentation including curricular programmes and attainment and performance information.
- 2.6 Following conclusion of the review activities, the lead senior officers from the three authorities have continued to meet to evaluate the findings and plan approaches to take forward the feedback. A summary of strengths and areas of development have been collated and recognise areas where issues are common across the island areas as well as unique aspects relevant only to one partner authority. The findings of the review will be incorporated into respective National Improvement Framework plans for the next academic year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle note the Report, recognise the findings of the review and support the improvement priorities it identifies.**

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Appendix:

Background Papers:

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None
Legal	<p>The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) Section 4(1) states that the Comhairle must, <i>'in relation to each child and young person having additional support needs for whose school education the authority are responsible, make adequate and efficient provision for such additional support as is required by that child or young person.'</i></p> <p>The Comhairle has a duty under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (2000) Section 3(2) to, <i>'secure improvement in the quality of school education in the schools managed by them.'</i></p> <p>Section 3D (2) of the same act requires education authorities to carry out their duty with a view to achieving the strategic priorities set out in the National Improvement Framework.</p> <p>The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Scotland) Act 2024 was enacted on 16 July 2024. The act will ensure that children's rights are respected and protected in Scotland. All public bodies and organisations that provide services on behalf of a public body must comply with the legislation.</p>
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	Applicable UNCRC Articles: 23 - If I am disabled, I have the right to special care and education
Corporate Strategy	<p>Strengthen the Local Economy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support skills development across communities and workforce. <p>Support Children, Families and Young People:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure schools and lifelong learning are at the heart of our communities, with particular emphasis on Gàidhlig, digital skills and new technologies.
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	The action plan developed from the findings of the review will be subject to consultation with participants and stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

5.1 The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) requires local authorities in Scotland to identify, assess and provide tailored support to children and young people with additional support needs. Local authorities must continuously adapt to secure better educational outcomes for all learners and create greater consistency in the experiences of every child and young person. This is embedded in Scottish education policy and, in particular, the National Improvement Framework and the government's aim of excellence and equity for all. There is a legislative duty on education authorities under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (2000) to secure improvement in the quality of education and strong collaboration between authorities is recognised as an important approach to both identifying areas for improvement and addressing development needs.

- 5.2 In addition to legislative requirements, several reports on Scottish education have identified the importance of collaboration for improvement and a need for education authorities to be outward-looking in seeking collaboration with other authorities, professional bodies and stakeholders.
- 5.3 With the support of ADES and Education Scotland, all thirty-two authorities committed to work together to undertake a programme of collaborative reviews that would see education authorities working in pairs or trios to agree areas of focus and to undertake supportive joint reviews of their services.
- 5.4 In recognition of the many common aspects and cross-cutting themes faced by island authorities in the delivery of high-quality education, it was agreed that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council would form an effective collaboration to undertake a review. This collaboration was successful in delivering the first review in 2022 and it was agreed to retain the same structure for a second review in 2023. The 2024 review is the final part of the cycle of three reviews and follows the same structure.
- 5.5 ADES and Education Scotland staff worked with the three authorities to identify a focus area and develop a review programme that would provide evaluative evidence, strengthen partnership working and provide findings that would allow an improvement action plan to be developed upon completion.

DETAIL

- 6.1 The Collaborative Review Project Team was reconvened in May 2024 with a remit to reflect on the 2023 review, agree the focus for 2024 and design a delivery programme. The project team involved a senior officer from each of the three authorities along with a senior representative from ADES and from the Education Scotland Northern Regional Team. The majority of focus groups took place online apart from the learner groups who met with local staff on their own islands.
- 6.2 Following on from the focus on the Broad General Education (BGE) last year, the project team agreed that this year, the evaluation should consider additional support needs (ASN) provision and inclusion across our island communities. To that end, the review question was agreed to be:
In the context of island communities, how well does the provision for Additional Support Needs and Inclusion engage and support the needs and voices of all children and young people, equipping them for learning, life and work?
- 6.3 To help answer this question it was necessary to have a better and shared understanding of three related questions:
 1. **How do we define ASN?**
To identify/explore the disparities in recorded and perceived need and facilitate a wider understanding of children and young people's additional support needs at universal and targeted levels.
 2. **What are our resources and how do we use them?**
Identify and explore the nature of 'resources' which includes our teaching and support staff and our partners; learning and teaching practice; curriculum accessibility; and how we allocate such resources fairly based on robust evidence/data.
 3. **How effective are our pathways for both universal and targeted learners?**
Explore how we implement staged intervention, taking account of compliance of our Additional Support for Learning (ASL) and GIRFEC duties.

The three themes which focus groups considered are consistent with the factors which ADES members have recognised as being central to decision-making at all levels in the system.

- 6.5 Focus groups were drawn from a broad range of stakeholders and each session included representatives from the three authorities alongside a member of the project team. There was representation from Early Years, Primary and Secondary in attendance and from across all geographical areas. Membership of various groups included:
- ADES representative
 - Education Scotland staff
 - Local Authority (LA) education department staff,
 - School Staff
 - School leaders
 - Learners
 - Parents
 - Community delivery partners
- 6.6 Feedback from the focus groups was taken together with other performance evidence provided by the three authority leads on the project team and a verbal feedback session with ADES and Education Scotland which took place after the review.

FINDINGS

- 7.1 In the overarching feedback from the review, the following common strengths were identified collaboratively across the three-island partnership:
- All staff, partners and parents are highly committed to getting it right for children and young people with a range of additional support needs. They showed enthusiasm, creativity and clear insight into the challenges and opportunities in supporting all children's additional support needs.
 - All three island groups are developing universal resources and approaches, with the intention to roll out the *Child Inclusion Research into Curriculum Learning and Education (CIRCLE)* resource across all schools to have a universal standard of inclusive learning and teaching.
 - All three island groups have a similar Educational Psychology Service delivery model who recognise their role in capacity building of staff skills and knowledge, as well as using their research to support organisational development.
 - ASN specialists and central education staff collaborate to develop the skills of practitioners and packages of support for schools and pupils.
 - There is a recognised benefit in having specialist leads in schools.
 - The Promise and analysis of data for Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) is well-established and could provide a model for extending data analysis for other factors which give rise to additional support needs.
 - Where Trauma-Informed Practice is being implemented, it has had a significant impact on staff and children. Similarly, the nurture framework and relationships-based approaches are either being implemented or are being planned for in all three island authorities.
 - Where digital technology is well embedded it makes a significant difference to accessibility for pupils at all levels.
 - There is use of tools for tracking progress to know what is making a difference and this can be further developed to support improvement planning, e.g. wellbeing profile; milestones; National Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) awards; participation scale; tracking spreadsheets of interventions and development needs.
 - There are case studies in every island authority which illustrate how things are going well for children and young people and the staff who support them. These methodologies could be shared between authorities.
 - Parents highlighted that consistency was an important factor in supporting learners.
 - At transition points there is a benefit in having a parent forum to support the process.

- It is identified as a strength when parents feel treated as partners. Success is achieved when staff are flexible and collaborate with parents around the best support for the learner.

7.2 Feedback also identified common areas of challenge or areas for further exploration or development collaboratively across the three-island partnership:

- Sharing of resources across the three island authorities on GLOW to promote consistency of practice.
- Establishing networks of promoted staff who can share and moderate their practice with peers.
- Shared staff training and development plans which are prioritised in improvement plans, e.g. *Relationships-based Practice, CIRCLE, Dyslexia Pathways and Social Communication Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support (SCERTS)*.
- Using action research methodology to inform the implementation of our collaborative plans using support from Educational Psychology Services.
- Identify a range of meaningful measures of change/success, taking account of the national ASL Action Plan.
- Sharing models of staffing allocation formulas and how they are implemented at school and cluster level.
- Workforce Planning: review career pathways and opportunities for Support for Learning Assistants (SfLAs).
- Review processes and practice at key transition stages, particularly when transitioning into adult services, taking account of national developments like Compass.
- Utilise early intervention practices for children in the early years to build inclusive and nurturing classrooms that meet their social, emotional and communication needs.
- Establish a collaborative parents' forum/reference group.
- There are appropriate digital technologies available, and staff have the knowledge and skills necessary to engage learners effectively through its use.
- Refresh current policies in place so that they ensure we continue to have robust systems and processes that are fit for scrutiny and challenge.
- Continue to work with health colleagues to develop the Neurodevelopmental Pathway.

7.3 The Comhairle project team has considered the findings of the review. The following areas have been identified as local strengths and challenges for consideration in future improvement planning. These are linked to the three questions of the review:

1) How do we define Additional Support Needs in CnES?

Strengths:

- The Comhairle recognises that there are a vast number of needs and circumstances that can be barriers to a young person's learning including being a looked after child, social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBN), learning needs, physical disability and neurodivergence.
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has a well-established Staged Assessment and Intervention process that identifies additional support needs and provides intervention for children with a range of additional support needs to remove barriers to learning.
- There are key strengths in the process of identifying and meeting a range of needs effectively such as partnerships with health visiting teams when planning for pupils entering the education system, the use of appropriate referral pathways and the dyslexia pathway to help define and pinpoint the needs of individual pupils.

- Partnerships and consultation with other Allied Health Professionals and external agencies work extremely well with well-established relationships across teams to establish our professional understanding of additional support needs.

Opportunities for development:

- Online meetings and the digital sharing of resources need to be utilised further to ensure that there is consistency in definitions and identification of differing needs across the geographical challenges of the Comhairle.
- The informed use of data is in its initial stages and needs to be used more efficiently to ensure we are tracking of types of need, progression and areas for development based on this.
- Multi-agency forums are established and need to be further developed to fulfil their potential in identifying and defining additional support needs.

2) What resources do we have and how do we use them?

Strengths:

- Staff throughout the Comhairle are learner focused and there is a wide breadth of knowledge and expertise.
- There is an audit process in place to ensure equity of staffing and there are systems in place to request any additional resources.
- ASN service staff work well with partners to identify where additional resources are needed and to ensure resources are used to maximise their use and benefit.
- The Comhairle can support learners with complex needs within their own schools and communities through careful resource planning.
- The Comhairle has an important Gaelic culture, and this is recognised as a strength of the authority.
- There is a Gaelic ASN teacher in the authority supporting those with additional support needs who are in GME and providing guidance and advice to staff.

Opportunities for development:

- Good practice in our schools needs to be shared widely throughout the authority to ensure that the principles and culture of inclusion are fully embedded across all settings.
- Geographical differences in resource availability need to be examined regularly to ensure equity of access to resources and support across islands.
- Staff training and development needs to be robustly planned, particularly as key members of staff like SfLAs and ASN Support Workers need to be able to access appropriate training opportunities.
- Finding opportunities for system change and for changes in approach to resourcing to allow managers to work within budgets to meet needs and to ensure all children have the right support.
- There should be further opportunities to provide Gaelic-specific training to learning support teachers and SfLAs.

3) How effective are our pathways?

Strengths:

- We comply with Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP) legislation, and we review our processes to ensure co-ordinated support follows the correct pathway and timelines.
- Schools and the Team Around the Child (TATC) plan well to meet the needs of individual learners in all our settings using the staged intervention and assessment process.
- There is a Comhairle Dyslexia Pathway that has made the identification of needs more transparent and resulted in an increase in dyslexia identification.

- There are pathways available to schools and the Team Around the Child to request additional help through the Multi Agency Request for Help form and through the Request to Commit Resources form.

Opportunities for development:

- The learner pathway through from early years into post-school destinations is becoming smoother and more streamlined at transition points. However, there is further work to be done on this to ensure we are planning within appropriate timeframes and sharing all necessary information well in advance.
- Qualification and accreditation pathways are in place and should be further utilised. Partnerships between providers and educational establishments need to be strengthened and embedded.
- Ensure that the principles and practices of GIRFEC are being followed by all stakeholders.

- 7.5 Findings of the review will be shared with senior managers across our early years, primary and secondary schools and actions for delivery will be taken forward into the next iteration of our integrated LA Improvement Plan/National Improvement Framework Plan.

CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Participation in the Collaborative Review has allowed the Comhairle to receive high-quality collegiate feedback on its own work within ASN and inclusion as well as to contribute to evaluation of the work of colleagues in Orkney and Shetland, including finding areas of strength and good practice that we can develop locally. The collaboration has fostered links between staff across the three island areas and forms a platform for further networking and collaboration into the future.

- 8.2 Consideration of the original question posed by the Collaborative Review: **In the context of island communities, how well does the provision for Additional Support Needs and Inclusion engage and support the needs and voices of all children and young people, equipping them for learning, life and work?**

The evidence points towards there being many areas of good practice in our additional support needs provision and that these need to be shared widely, not only across the Comhairle, but between the Three Islands Collaborative. There should be opportunities created for professional collaboration, utilising training and upskilling of practitioners across the three authorities. The evidence further suggests that future development plans should have a focus on improving universal support to fully embed inclusive practice and improve school experiences for all learners as well as reducing pressure on central resources. We must also, in line with UNCRC, ensure that we listen to our children and young people by expanding and developing appropriate ways of capturing pupil voice. Finally, the expansion of relationships between educational settings and post-school destinations should prepare children with additional support needs for their future learning, life and work.

- 8.3 This is the third and final collaborative review as part of this cycle of three reviews, but the networking and collaborative working will continue between the three island communities.