

Children, Education and Justice Services
June 2023

1. Introduction: What is Collaborative Improvement?

Collaborative Improvement is an approach to bringing about improvement through shared work involving staff from the Local Authority, Education Scotland (ES) and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES). Together, the group establishes the focus for the Collaborative Improvement Review and then undertakes activities in the Local Authority that will result in an evaluative summary, identifying strengths and 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.

2. Rationale

- 2.1 Inclusion has been high on the agenda across the education system for decades and the National Additional Support for Learning Review and Action Plan (Morgan Review) has set clear actions for all professionals. The Promise and our duties under the Equalities Act combine as calls to action to ensure our learners are loved, safe and respected within their playrooms and classrooms. Within Edinburgh, Headteachers have been discussing ways in which inclusion could be improved, particularly post-COVID, as mental ill health and dysregulation are increasing.
- 2.2 Although most schools evaluate Quality Indicator 3.1 as ‘good’ or better, there remains a perception that the allocation of resources to support inclusion should be reviewed. Initial analysis of the city’s data, including SEEMIS ASN, attainment and attendance, found anomalies and inconsistencies which also directed the local authority to take a closer look at inclusion and how it is resourced and supported.

3. Edinburgh Learns for Life

- 3.1 ‘The best teaching and learning for all’ has been the key driver for improvement across all of the city’s schools for the past 5 years. Two years ago, the Edinburgh Learns Strategy was further developed to set out the vision for education to 2030 as Edinburgh Learns for Life. Under one of the goals, ‘Transform,’ the vision for inclusion

was given increased emphasis: ***We will provide inclusive, equitable, valuable learning opportunities for everyone.***

3.2 This sits alongside the Edinburgh Learns vision of Inclusion:

In Edinburgh every child or young person irrespective of identity, background or ability is part of a resilient and positive learning community where they feel:

We belong, We contribute, We learn, We are supported and we help others.

3.3 Although Inclusion has been raised as a development need, consistently by Headteachers, data tells us that the persistent poverty-related attainment gap, as opposed to ASN-related attainment gap, is our most significant cause for concern. This review also sought to understand how inclusion is being used as a vehicle for raising attainment, and what needs to be done to increase the pace of improvement. Leadership at all levels was therefore also in scope for the review.

4. Planning, Structure and Process

4.1 To undertake the Review, a team of senior officers from the local authority, ADES and Education Scotland began to scope process and structure and to identify suitable colleagues to join the team.

4.2 The collaboration was organised over three days in April 2023 in the City of Edinburgh Council Education Service Headquarters and included 3 Senior Education Managers (Edinburgh and Dundee), 3 Directors of Education (Edinburgh, Fife and South Ayrshire), the Senior Regional Advisor for SEIC and Education Scotland/HMI colleagues. The core team also included the Headteachers and an Early Years Manager from the Inclusion Review Advisory Group from each sector.

4.3 The review included 3 main phases:

- Scoping and information gathering
- Review including focus groups of headteachers and specialist staff
- Feedback and further analysis by the local authority

5. Key Themes

We agreed the following key themes and related questions to explore:

5.1 How effective is our vision for inclusion?

- How well is our vision for inclusion understood by school leaders and staff in schools?
- How is our vision lived in our playgrounds and classrooms?
- Does this vision meet the needs of all learners, including closing the attainment gap?

5.2 How well do our resources deliver our vision?

- What support and resource is available to ensure good levels of inclusion?
- Do we use our resources wisely? To what extent do our approaches to resource allocation improve outcome for learners?
- How well are staff equipped to provide universal and differentiated support?

5.3 How effective are our processes supporting learners to be included?

- Do our policies and procedures support leaders in schools to make decisions which ensure every learner is fully included?
- How well are the role and responsibilities of GIRFEC carried out to ensure all learners are supported?
- Are our Transition processes meeting the needs of learners? Are they clear and timeous?

5.4 How effective is our leadership to support inclusion?

- What enables you to effectively lead the inclusion agenda in your own context?
- How does the local authority support and challenge senior leaders to retain the focus on inclusion?
- What actions have you taken in your learning community to collaborate to achieve best value and Inclusion?

5.5 The main evidence was gathered during focus group meetings which were set up to support professional dialogue between the review team members and cross-sector staff, including Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Additional Support Needs (ASN) Services and Educational Psychologists. Recording sheets from each focus group were collated and overall feedback was then shared with the core group at the end of each day.

6. Key Findings

Strengths

- 6.1 The City of Edinburgh Council schools and early years settings are very well resourced with committed, dedicated, and skilled staff who show commitment to meeting the needs of all learners. Policies are in place which underline the national vision of inclusion within a Children's Rights context. The overall vision for inclusion is clear and strong across the range of policies and practices and Headteachers endorse the authority values and ambition to raise attainment for all.
- 6.2 At the Universal Level, the significant resources include the high level of quality professional learning set out in Edinburgh Learns Teachers' Charter: Differentiation. At the Targeted level resources include fully funded Support for Learning Teachers, Transition Teachers, Wellbeing Hubs, Enhanced Support Bases, ASL specialist staff and Educational Psychologists. At the Intensive Level there are Special Schools and third sector-supported 'alternative pathways'. The Circle Document provides very high-quality guidance and support and is well used by many staff.

- 6.3 The added value of staff in specialist roles such as ASL Service and Psychological Service was seen as very helpful by the majority of senior leaders who engaged in discussions. In the best practice, they knew the learning communities well and supported schools to be highly inclusive; in other examples senior leaders felt empowered to find local solutions to improve inclusion rather than reaching out to other services.
- 6.4 Well established partnership working is in place with strong, links to the third sector, enabling many learners to benefit from enhanced, targeted and/or intensive support. This is being further developed through establishing Teams around the Learning Communities which may provide Best Value for the local authority by reducing duplication and fragmentation. Some concerns were raised that this approach continues to focus on the 'Inclusion as Resource' vision, rather than the vision of inclusion as an approach ranging from universal to intensive approaches that change over time.
- 6.5 Recent work to embed collaboration across learning communities is strengthening the sense of 'all Edinburgh's children' by encouraging assessments of need at pupil, school and learning community level.
- 6.6 More strategic approaches to improving inclusive supports through the establishment of Wellbeing Hubs in every secondary school are showing early signs of impact through the continued decline in exclusions.
- 6.7 There is a commitment from all to meet the needs of learners, and for some leaders a growing willingness to embrace a more creative approach to the universal learning offer, e.g. vocational courses, work with librarians and outdoor learning, in contrast to the entrenched references to 'alternative timetable'
- 6.8 The successful impact of play pedagogy in some schools has positively impacted developmentally appropriate learning experiences and the inclusive curriculum, and is supporting early years – primary transition.
- 6.9 Some networks exist that, through moderation and self-evaluation, support consistency of implementation of policies.

Development Needs

- 6.10 Although the values and vision of inclusion are clear for senior leaders, there was a concern that this is not felt at all levels of the system. The vision should be seen as something within the gift of all to deliver through clearer understanding of how the curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment, and the learning environment can support. Inclusion should 'flipped' to fully underscore the importance of getting it right at the universal level.
- 6.11 The various roles and duties inherent in GIRFEC were not suitably clear, including that of Named Person, learner at the centre and a meaningful embedding of children's rights. Refreshing GIRFEC to clearly establish roles, remits and responsibilities from the perspective of UNCRC in the minds of all staff should support a more consistent understanding of inclusion. Similarly, many senior leaders reported that inclusion could best be achieved only through accessing a service or support, rather than through supporting teachers and support staff, and through adaptations to the curriculum and learning environment. Refreshing the CIRCLE document and ensuring, through support and challenge, that this is more widely used will help to establish inclusion as a universal entitlement. There is role for each school's Support for Learning Coordinator, supported by EPs and ASL staff to further embed this.

- 6.12 Policies are comprehensive, however the range and language used may be causing confusion for staff. Similarly, parents, carers and learners may not be able to fully understand how inclusion needs are met in each school. Increased clarity of **continuum** of pathways – and the staged intervention **triangle** to support an understanding of resource allocation should also be clarified.
- 6.13 Procedures to support leaders to make decisions which ensure every learner is fully included should be streamlined and simplified to support a strategic, coherent approach to meeting needs. There should be greater emphasis on the quality assurance of these processes through the local authority Supported Self-Evaluation Reviews.
- 6.14 The disparate nature of Edinburgh’s population signals that efforts to rebrand under ‘all Edinburgh’s Children’ may need to be clarified to cohere with the Teams around the Learning Communities. Leveraging the skill and capacity of school staff to own and shape local solutions would be the best use of resource.

Next Steps

Revisit the Vision Values and Aims of Edinburgh Learns for Life to clearly emphasise the service vision and the inclusive, equitable pathways for ‘All Edinburgh’s Children’

Ensure that all are involved in the discussions about the core purpose of learning in Edinburgh and how inclusion is embedded within all curricula and wider achievement

As part of the Inclusion Review

- revisit the Edinburgh Learns Inclusion Framework to update the roles, remits and responsibilities; now include those of learners and their parents and carers; incorporate those into annual calendars and S&Q reporting
- Clarify the guidance to HTs about self-evaluation of inclusion and carrying out their Named Person duties
- Refresh the Staged Intervention Pathways to rebalance understanding of universal, targeted and intensive
- Simplify and declutter the paperwork around supporting inclusion

Incorporate the refreshed narrative into all developing work with (Teams around the) Learning Community

In conjunction with the Children’s Partnership, refresh GIRFEC, including guidance and professional learning, quality assurance, clear processes and a communication strategy

Conclusion

The Inclusion Review project will now be updated with the above listed actions. Clear performance indicators, dates, and accountable officers will be published and reported to the Edinburgh Learns Inclusion Board, the Inclusion Review Board and the Education, Children and Families Committee within one year.

