

## **Collaborative Improvement – Dundee City Council – January 2023**

### **1. What is Collaborative Improvement?**

The overall aim of Collaborative Improvement is to share what works well at a local authority level and to support improvement in areas of local authority activity that have been identified as in need of further development. Collaborative Improvement aims to promote partnership working to ensure that we achieve sustainable improvements for all children and young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In short, it is consistent with the national goal of achieving excellence and equity. Collaborative Improvement can also help to promote increased consistency of outcomes for learners.

Collaborative Improvement is an approach to bringing about improvement through shared work involving staff from the host local authority, Education Scotland, and Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES). Together, the team should work together to establish the focus for the Collaborative Improvement visit and then undertake activities in the local authority (LA) that will result in an evaluative summary of where there are strengths and where there are areas that may require further focus.

### **2. What was the focus for the Collaborative Improvement in Dundee?**

The focus for Collaborative Improvement process in Dundee was on improving outcomes in the Senior Phase.

Our rationale for focussing the Collaborative Improvement visit on improving outcomes in the Senior Phase centred around our self-evaluation which evidences that, despite improvements related to several key measures,

- the proportion of school leavers entering a positive destination is consistently below our virtual comparator,
- performance in key senior phase measures (e.g., Overall tariff points; 5+ Awards at SCQF 5 or better; 5+ Awards at SCQF 6 or better; Literacy SCQF 4+; Literacy SCQF 5+) is consistently lower than almost all local authorities in our LGBF family group; and
- about 20% of our fourth-year pupils leave school by the end of S4.

The Executive Director, Children & Families Service, and the Chief Education Officer met with key colleagues from ADES and Education Scotland to discuss and agree the scope, process, and intended outcomes in the weeks prior to the fieldwork phase of Collaborative Improvement.

To ensure maximum impact and to ensure that the scope was manageable and not unnecessarily wide, we agreed to focus on the following key themes: curriculum design and delivery; data use; and central support and challenge (including support for learning, teaching and assessment). We felt that exploration of these crucial themes would enable us to develop a clear analysis of areas of success and of areas requiring further attention.

As a result, the focus for Collaborative Improvement in Dundee was based around the following broad question:

*“To what extent are our approaches to curriculum design and delivery; learning, teaching and assessment; data use; and central support and challenge helping us to achieve improved outcomes for our young people?”*

Having such a focus was aimed at identifying what was working well, and what needed/ what could be done to improve overall performance in the identified areas.

Whilst the Executive Director, Children & Families Service, and the Chief Education Officer agreed the overall scope, process and intended outcomes with key ADES and Education Scotland leads, it was agreed by all that an agile and iterative approach to the fieldwork phase would help achieve maximum impact. Therefore, the Chief Education Officer designed a programme which built in regular opportunities for core team discussions and debriefs which would help inform aspects of the fieldwork phase.

### 3. Fieldwork

The fieldwork phase of Dundee’s Collaborative Improvement (CI) took place in-person in Dundee from Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> to Friday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023

After a series of meetings between Dundee’s Executive Director, Children & Families Service, the chief Education Officer and the ADES and Education Scotland key leads, a fieldwork core team was agreed. It consisted of:

<b>Dundee City Council</b>	Executive Director
	Head of Service – Education, Learning & Inclusion (Chief Education Officer)
	Education Manager
	Education Officer x 2
	Senior Information Analysis Officer
<b>ADES</b>	ADES Executive Officer
	Head of Service, Glasgow
	Director of Education, Renfrewshire
	Head of Education (Secondary), West Lothian
<b>Education Scotland</b>	Senior Regional Advisor (Tayside)
	HM Inspector
	NIF Officer (Tayside Regional Improvement Team)
	Attainment Advisor (Forth Valley and West Lothian Regional Improvement Team)

#### Purpose of the initial meeting of the core group

An initial meeting of the CI Core Team took place on Friday 13 January 2023. Dundee’s Executive Director and Chief Education Officer, along with the ADES and Education Scotland key lead, gave an overview of the outline scope, activities and intended outcomes, as well as the practical arrangements for the three-day fieldwork phase. This meeting gave everyone the opportunity to ask questions and give their views in relation to the outline scope, activities and intended outcomes, which in turn helped further refine these areas in advance of the fieldwork phase starting on 25 January.

It was important to the Children and Families Service that secondary Head Teachers had a central role at all stages, to ensure that the CI was not *done to* them. Therefore, two Head Teacher reps attended the scoping discussion with the CI Core Team. In addition to this, the

Chief Education Officer held two drop-in sessions for all secondary Head Teachers in advance of the fieldwork phase in order to ensure that Head Teachers understood what CI was, and the purpose of CI in Dundee. In addition to being involved in several focus groups, all Head Teachers were invited to join the CI Core Team in-person throughout the three-day fieldwork phase. Four of the eight mainstream secondary Head Teachers joined the Core Team for part of the fieldwork phase.

### Review of documentation

Key documentation – including the school improvement framework, policies and attainment data - was gathered and shared with core team members in advance of the fieldwork phase. In addition, throughout the process all members were encouraged to request any information or meetings with personnel which would help inform their thinking and challenge throughout the process. Team members took up this offer which added to the strong sense of openness and engagement.

### Setting the scene

The fieldwork phase started with the Executive Director and Chief Education Officer setting the scene – sharing Dundee’s context as well as the purpose and focus of Dundee’s collaborative improvement; this was followed by Dundee Officers giving a high-level overview of each key theme: curriculum design and delivery; data use; and central support and challenge (including support for learning, teaching, and assessment). Thereafter, the CI Core Group – with Head Teachers – engaged in a whole-group discussion to discuss initial thoughts, connections, strengths, potential gaps, or weaknesses / areas in need of attention in the process, and any further information that was required to move forward. This type of discussion took place throughout the three days. Team members found this initial meeting open and transparent through the support and challenge which arose during discussions.

### Methodology and activities during the three core days

Over the course of the three days, the CI Core Group engaged in desktop exercises (i.e., opportunities to examine and ask questions about paperwork, e.g. Every Dundee Learner Matters papers and other core related policy documents), and one-to-one discussions (e.g., discussions with Education Manager (Schools) regarding school improvement framework; engagement with Senior Information Analysis Officer regarding data). However, most of the fieldwork involved speaking directly to practitioners, young people, and leaders through a mix of in-person and online focus groups. In total, there were fourteen focus groups with staff from a range of positions across all 10 schools (8 mainstream and 2 special) and from central teams:

- 1 senior phase pupil focus group,
- 1 pedagogy team focus group,
- 2 class teacher focus groups,
- 2 principal teacher focus groups (mixture of subject PTs and guidance PTs),
- 2 depute head teacher focus groups,
- 2 education officer focus groups,
- 4 head teacher focus groups.

Whilst there were opportunities for ongoing feedback throughout, the fieldwork phase finished with a two-part ‘Blue Sky Thinking – Towards Action session’: Part 1 centred on overall feedback from each individual theme group (i.e., what is working well and areas for development) and Part 2 sought to address the question ‘How can this translate into action?’ (As well as discussing potential opportunities for collaboration e.g., between Education

Scotland and Dundee, and/ or between partner local authorities and Dundee). As was the case throughout, these sessions were open, honest, and rigorous.

#### **4. What is working well?**

At the end of the fieldwork phase of the Collaborative Improvement in Dundee several areas were identified as strengths. These included:

##### **4.1 Relationships – *'I like who I work for, and with'*.**

- It is very clear that colleagues – across school and central teams – enjoy working in Dundee and in the Children and Families Service. Staff in schools – particularly Head Teachers – felt very well supported by their peers and by officers from the service. Staff regularly referred to positive relationships, and that they know who to go to for support, as well as their confidence that this support would be forthcoming.

##### **4.2 Knowledge of context & Readiness for challenge.**

- In general, staff know their school context, and the context of Dundee, well. They are aware of the opportunities and the challenges that this context provides. Head Teachers are clear that they feel they can meaningfully influence service priorities. Senior leaders (Deputes and Head Teachers) are aware of the improvements that need to be made. They report that they are receptive to 'challenge' – from each other, from central officers and from partners – to help further improve outcomes for young people, at pace.

##### **4.3 Pedagogy Team and Information Analysis (Data) Team**

- A range of school staff spoke very highly about the quality of support they receive from the Information Analysis Team; in terms of the data received and the support around accessing and analysing data. The Pedagogy Team is used much more in the primary sector. Where staff in secondary schools engaged with the Pedagogy Team, they spoke highly of the quality of this engagement. The process also evidenced the potential of the Pedagogy Team to affect change on a greater scale, by working at departmental and/ or school level and informed by data.

#### **5. What areas need to be further improved and/ or developed?**

At the end of the fieldwork phase of the Collaborative Improvement, several areas were identified as areas for further evaluation, development, and improvement. These have been grouped as the following key themes:

##### **5.1 Every Dundee Learner Matters (EDLM) should be strengthened so that it is seen as the key and overall Improvement Strategy.**

- The local authority is now at the stage whereby Every Dundee Learner Matters should be further strengthened so that it serves as the authority's overarching Improvement Strategy. EDLM should clearly outline the strategy for raising attainment and improving outcomes, and the expectations of all. The Children and Families Service will ensure that self-evaluation processes and local authority improvement groups align with this strategy, and that they are focused on the things that matter most.

##### **5.2 Improve the Broad General Education (BGE), and in particular the S3 experience.**

- The Broad General Education (BGE) in secondary currently leads to disengagement for a significant minority of our young people. We need to revisit and refresh the narrative for curriculum and the rationale for the BGE to ensure that it meets the needs of all our young people. Transition from P7 into S1 and from S3 into S4 should also be a focus for further improvement. Young people's voice should be central to this area for improvement.

### **5.3 We need to reimagine and relaunch secondary education as a 6-year experience.**

- Currently too many young people leave school in S4 in Dundee and do not sustain positive destinations. We need to ensure that our senior phase curriculum builds on the BGE and provides flexible learning pathways which lead to raising attainment through meeting the needs and aspirations of all our learners. We need to further enhance how data is used to inform this work. The Children and Families Service will work closely with key partners to ensure that young people access the most appropriate learning pathway for them.

### **5.4 Enhance how central teams support school improvement through 'challenge'.**

- Through our Improvement Strategy (EDLM) we need to better articulate the role, purpose, and expectations of central officers in relation to supporting and challenging school improvement. We need to define and agree what we mean by 'challenge' and ensure that functions are carried out consistently, with a relentless and rigorous focus on improving outcomes. Central officers and teams, including Education Officers and the Pedagogy Team, will adopt a more proportionate and targeted approach to ensure that there is challenge, and subsequently clear impact, in the most important areas. This work will be data informed and recorded in an agile improvement action plan, which will clearly articulate what success will look like and how this will be measured.

## **6. What will happen next?**

- The findings from Collaborative Improvement will help inform the new Children and Families Service Improvement Plan 2023-26, as well as actions within schools' individual School Improvement Plans. This will also feature strongly in the Service's annual education plan.
- The Executive Director and the Chief Education Officer will work with the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change, the EDLM Strategy Group and central officers to strengthen the EDLM Improvement Strategy to ensure a shared understanding of the central strategy and expectations for raising attainment and improving outcomes for all.
- The Chief Education Officer will engage with ADES colleagues re opportunities to collaborate on shared areas for improvement. The Chief Education Officer will also liaise with Education Scotland regarding support for driving forward aspects of the Improvement Plan.
- A more detailed citywide Senior Phase Improvement Plan will be developed – informed by Collaborative Improvement and outcomes of other work and processes e.g., College Partnership working group and recent inspections of secondary schools by Education Scotland. It is anticipated that this will be led by a Head Teacher, working closely with the Education Manager (Schools), and overseen by the Chief Education Officer.

- Core members of the Collaborative Improvement team will be invited back to Dundee towards the end of the 2023/ 2024 academic session to review progress in relation to implementing the changes that are required to achieve sustained improvement in outcomes.