



Collaborative Improvement Summary Report ADES / Education Scotland / Stirling Council June 2024

Introduction

Collaborative Improvement is an approach to bringing about improvement, where colleagues work together from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Education Scotland, and the local authority area on an identified theme. The group undertake a range of activities that result in an overview of how well the local authority is doing, along with areas that may require a further focus.

The Collaborative Improvement approach started in 2021 and all 32 local authority areas in Scotland will have participated in this process by the end of 2024. The approach to Collaborative Improvement was outlined in the Education Reform [Joint Agreement](#) (2018), and is based on the call for a “strengthened middle” in the 2015 [OECD report](#) on Scottish Education. It 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.

Stirling Context

Stirling Council’s vision is that Stirling should be a place where everyone can thrive. Children, young people, parents and carers also have a vision of a Stirling that is safe, inclusive and nurturing and where all children and young people are able to thrive.

In education, we are ambitious for our children and young people, their families and communities. We are committed to delivering excellence and equity and promoting children’s rights. We strive to listen, nurture, care and support children and young people to play, to learn, to participate and to flourish. Every child and young person in Stirling has the right to high quality education and learning. Providing an inclusive education for all children and young people ensures that everyone has the best start in life and all children and young people will learn and develop the skills they need to thrive.

The education service is committed to robust quality assurance and self-evaluation processes, to support our journey of continuous improvement, and recognises the strength in engaging with colleagues from ADES and Education Scotland to look outwards and use expertise from other local authorities and Education Scotland, as part of the Collaborative Improvement visit.

The focus of the Collaborative Improvement visit for Stirling Council was related to the inclusion of children and young people with complex additional support needs in mainstream schools, specifically asking the question, *‘Are we moving in the right direction to include children with complex additional support needs in our mainstream schools?’*

Rationale

Following the pandemic, the service reviewed what has been working well and what needs to improve. Through stakeholder feedback, consultations and focus groups with parents, carers, children, young people and staff, we learned that there needed to be more of a focus on how we best support children and young people with additional support needs in mainstream settings. We gathered data such as the increasing number of children and young people with an identified additional support need, the number of requests for additional support, the number of children and young people on staged intervention, and feedback from inspection reports. This information highlighted that an enhanced focus on the inclusion of children and young people with complex needs in mainstream schools was required.

The service is in the process of developing a 5 year strategy on Inclusion, which will outline why we need a strategy, based on data and stakeholders views, and what our steps will be over this period of time. Whilst the service had already identified Inclusion as a key priority through its own self-evaluation processes, it recognised that the Collaborative Improvement approach would provide an opportunity to work with ADES and Education Scotland colleagues, to interrogate this theme further.

Collaborative Improvement Process

The Collaborative Improvement visit took place over 3 days, 10th to 12th June 2024, and the team comprised of 4 representatives from Education Scotland, 3 representatives from ADES, and 10 representatives from Stirling's education service. The main question for the team to consider was:

Are we moving in the right direction to include children with complex additional support needs in our mainstream schools?

As part of this question, 3 themes were identified:

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
To what extent are we strengthening an ethos and culture of inclusion across the education service?	How good are our transition processes for children with complex needs?	How well are we developing inclusive learning environments?

These themes were explored through discussions, focus groups that included central education staff, school and early learning and childcare staff, parents/carers and partners, children and young people, as well as school visits to two primary schools and a secondary school.

The Collaborative Improvement team met throughout the 3 days to share and discuss key findings and on the 3rd day, some overarching findings were explored further. The following provides a summary of these findings.

Key Findings

Theme 1 - To what extent are we strengthening an ethos and culture of inclusion across the education service?

Strengths:

- There is a strong ethos and culture of inclusion in mainstream schools that is shared by children, young people, and staff.
- Young people recognise the importance of strong leadership in schools as a key factor that

strengthens the ethos and culture in their schools.

- There is a clear shared vision of inclusion, and a staff commitment that inclusion is everyone's business.
- Headteachers reported feeling that they have a sense of agency to meet the needs of their families.
- There is recognition the current structure of the central team has been a positive step in enabling more collaboration across key priorities.

Areas of Focus and Next Steps:

- Ensure Stirling's inclusion strategy has stakeholders views central to the strategy to inform next steps. The strategy will outline key actions over a 5 year period, which will include a focus on professional learning and support for all staff.
- Clarify the vision, priority outcomes, and measures of success within the Inclusion Strategy.
- On reviewing our staged intervention guidance, consider how we strengthen the universal offer for schools and nurseries as well as streamlining the paperwork.
- Further work with children and young people to explore what is working well across our schools in terms of including children and young people with more complex needs in mainstream schools.
- Consider how the central team can support the development of Inclusive Pedagogy as a key priority across sectors.

Theme 2 - How good are our transition processes for children with complex needs?

Strengths:

- There is recognition that people are our strongest resource and that it is everyone's responsibility to support children and young people's needs particularly at points of transition.
- Staff are positive about the support and professional learning provided by the central education team to support key transitions such as nursery to Primary 1.
- There are positive examples of collaboration across learning communities, services and partners to support transitions.
- Staff report that resources are identified early to support enhanced transitions from nursery to primary school.
- There is a shared recognition of the importance of relationships and having a trusted adult to support key transitions for children and young people.
- Allocation of resources such as exceptional SLA hours, is well received by many of our schools.

Areas of Focus and Next Steps:

- Consider how we develop wider training opportunities for staff, with a specific focus on transitions for learners with complex needs.
- An enhanced focus on the primary to secondary transition process would be helpful, to share good practice and to support a more consistent approach across schools.
- Build on the work with families, children and young people, to learn from their experiences, which will inform future planning.
- Review the roles of the central team, school leaders and support coordinators in secondary schools, in relation to business tasks such as the placing request process.
- Develop clearer information for families in understanding decision making processes regarding transitions and placements in specialist school/provisions.

- Consider how teams such as Community Learning and Development staff, can work in closer collaboration to provide more targeted support to children and young people for key transitions.

Theme 3 - How well are we developing inclusive learning environments?

Strengths:

- Positive examples of how early years adapt their environments on an ongoing basis to support children with a range of complex needs.
- Positive examples of how primary schools are using spaces within their settings such as sensory rooms and nurture nooks, and of how they are progressing curricular adaptations to meet learners needs.
- Secondary schools are developing nurturing spaces within their schools to provide young people with the support they need such as nurture nooks in departments, access to sensory objects, as well as separate spaces for those who require a higher level of support.
- Staff recognise the importance of nurture, attachment and trauma informed approaches and the impact of these approaches on children and young people.
- Helpful examples of secondary schools having staff with a pupil support and development role rather than a registration teacher, offering a more supportive approach for all young people.
- Staff recognition that having support staff allocated to establishments and not to individual children or young people is more effective and allows for a more flexible use of resource to meet needs.
- Although there is some variation across the sectors there is recognition that we have a good foundation with our vision, ethos and culture, to move to more inclusive learning environments.

Areas of Focus and Next Steps:

- Encouraging the creative use of all spaces within a school environment to provide a more flexible learning offer for children and young people, with a focus on nurturing classrooms.
- Through an enhanced focus on inclusive pedagogy, consider the curricular provision, learning, teaching and assessment to better meet the needs of all children and young people.
- Build on the work of the recent secondary schools Learning Festival, and consider a focus on 'The Inclusive Classroom' to share good practice on inclusive pedagogy.
- Evaluate the varied approaches across our schools, to share what works in terms of inclusive learning environments, to provide a more consistent approach across settings.

Conclusion

Stirling's education service found the Collaborative Improvement process beneficial and timely as it progresses the development of a 5 year Inclusion strategy; specifically the recognition of what is working well, and of the areas that we need to focus on. Through a process of professional dialogue and solution focused discussions with ADES and Education Scotland colleagues, the service has a clear direction in terms of improvement and of next steps.

The Collaborative Improvement team recognised the strong ethos and culture of inclusion within our mainstream schools and the commitment of staff to improve outcomes for all children and young people, whilst providing helpful and supportive recommendations for the education service to progress over the next few years. It has confirmed that as an education service we know ourselves and our schools well and are progressing in the right direction to meet the needs of our children and young people with complex needs in our mainstream schools.