

# Improving the Educational Outcomes of Care Experienced Children and Young People Framework

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# Improving the Educational Outcomes of Care Experienced Children and Young People Framework

## Introduction

1. The Independent Care Review published seven reports, one of which was The Promise. In February 2020, the Scottish Government signed up to the actions set out within The Promise and pledged to #KeepThePromise by 2030.
2. The *Improving the Educational Outcomes of Care Experienced Children and Young People* Framework ('the Framework') aims to build on actions already being taken across Scotland's education system to Keep The Promise.
3. It represents practical steps which can be taken to improve the experience, engagement in learning, achievement and attainment of those with care experience and support their transition from education.
4. The implementation of the Framework will require a multi-agency approach and therefore collaboration will be required between the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, local authorities, schools, health and social care, and the third sector. As such, the Framework highlights our priorities, how we plan to measure progress and what we want to achieve collectively. It is important to note that education services cannot be expected to operate in isolation.
5. Although the national data used in this Framework, and recorded on SEEMIS<sup>1</sup>, only includes children and young people legally 'looked after', the principles for improvement of educational outcomes should be considered for all children and young people described as 'care experienced', including those previously looked after, informally cared for, and on the edges of care<sup>2</sup>. For the purposes of the Framework we will therefore use the more inclusive term 'care experienced' rather than 'looked after'.

## Purpose of the Framework

6. The overall aims of the Framework are to:
  - support improvements of the educational outcomes of care experienced children and young people;
  - work in partnership to Keep The Promise and ensure the needs of care experienced children and young people are at the forefront of any new policies;
  - empower practitioners to focus on prevention and early intervention and select tools appropriate to the needs of care experienced children and young people;
  - support education authorities to identify priorities, progress, successes and areas of improvement;

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<sup>1</sup> SEEMIS is an education Management Information System owned by its members (the 32 local authorities) and used by all local authorities in Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> For more information see [Care Experienced Children and Young People Definitions](#)

- build a national picture across Scotland by identifying and showcasing developing and interesting practice; and
- embed cultural conditions and practices required to ensure meaningful change happens throughout the life span of The Promise Plan (2030) and beyond.

### **How the Framework has been developed**

7. The Framework has been developed by the Scottish Government in collaboration with Education Scotland. Feedback from COSLA, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) and the Centre for Excellence for Children’s Care and Protection (CELCIS) informed the development of this Framework.
8. To create the Framework, we have drawn on:
  - the calls for action in education made by The Promise;
  - an evidence base consisting of published educational outcomes data; and
  - existing developing and interesting practice across Scotland.

### **Review of Framework**

9. The Framework will be reviewed bi-annually. Refinements will also be made as progress is made and further data is obtained.



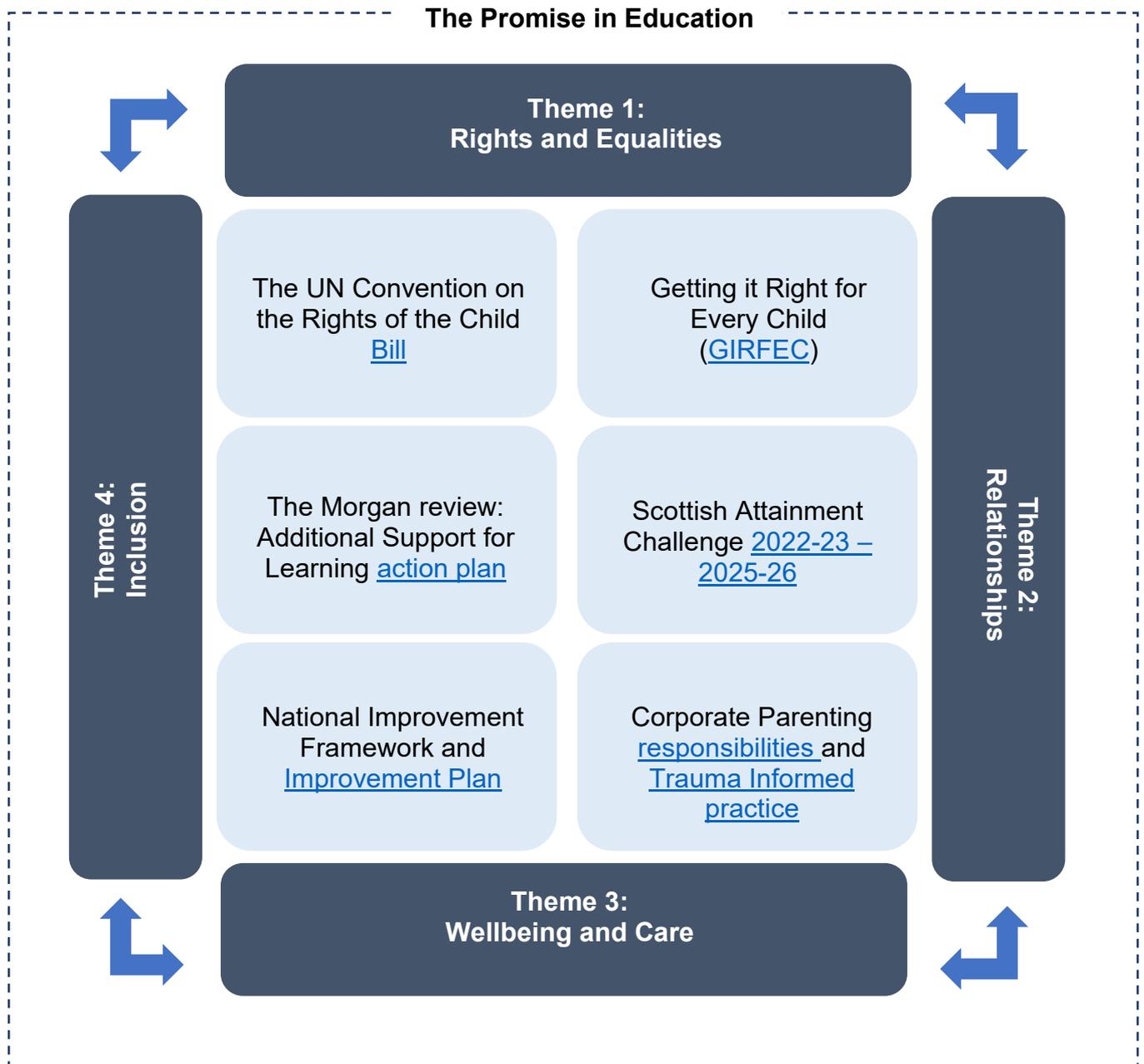
“Legislation, policy and practice are vital in assuring children’s rights. Yet those rights do not exist in isolation but in the wider context of children’s lives. They are experienced within caring relationships. They are realised by thoughtful, attentive caregivers (including teachers, foster carers, youth club workers, etc) who notice changes in health, behaviour or in educational attainment, and who help and support a child to lead a fulfilling life.”



***The Promise, p26***

## What the Framework is made up of

10. It is important that The Promise is not considered in isolation. The Framework can be viewed through the lens of four themes that support **all** children and young people. This whole system approach will support Keeping The Promise, turning policy into practice, and fulfilling legislative requirements, as set out below:



11. There is no hierarchy; the themes are of equal importance and are highly interdependent. Selecting the relevant support to be prioritised will be dependent on the needs<sup>3</sup> of each individual child.

<sup>3</sup> The [Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) Scotland Act \(2004\)](#) states that all looked after learners should be presumed to have an additional support need unless assessed as otherwise.

## Inclusion

Inclusive practice serves all children with a particular focus on those who require additional support, those who find it more difficult to access or engage with learning, or those who have been marginalised or excluded from the full range of learning experiences. An inclusive learning environment is one that is caring and can mostly meet individual needs through good universal support. Universal support is non-stigmatising and starts with a supportive ethos and culture that promotes relationships. Inclusion is the responsibility of all (everyone working with and caring for children).

1



## Rights and Equalities

All children have a right to an education that meets their needs and helps them to thrive. Children should be supported to know their rights and the education workforce should have a clear understanding of the rights of children and how to uphold them. Educational settings actively promote equality and equity. This includes the participation of children and young people in all aspects of their education. Participation supports wellbeing and individual learners development of the four capacities: to be confident individuals, successful learners, effective contributors, and responsible citizen.

2



4



## Wellbeing and Care

Wellbeing encompasses our overall social, mental, physical and emotional health. Wellbeing is essential for learning. Educational settings are places not only to learn but also places where wellbeing is prioritised. Positive connections, a sense of belonging, being valued and being offered opportunities to meaningfully participate all contribute positively to wellbeing. Educators recognise the importance of family wellbeing on a child's wellbeing and their capacity to learn. Educators also have a duty of care to safeguard learners and report all child protection concerns

3



## Relationships

Educational settings are places where children enjoy stable, nurturing relationships which prepare them for life now and in the future. Supportive, caring, trauma informed relationships can improve attendance, wellbeing, learning and positive behaviour. The education workforce should have the capacity, confidence, support and skills to develop caring, trauma informed and supportive relationships with the children they work with and care for.

## **Our Vision: To Keep The Promise**

***To close the gap between the educational outcomes of care experienced children and those who are not care experienced.***

12. To achieve our vision, care experienced children and young people should:

- receive their right to an education through approaches which support attendance and minimise exclusion;
- feel well supported and benefit from all aspects of school life, social and educational, for as long as is appropriate for them; and
- be effectively supported as early as possible to ensure they do not experience barriers to their educational progress and success throughout their time at school or leave school with poor educational outcomes.

13. Educational outcomes include increased attendance and reduced exclusion, improved staying on rates past the earliest possible school leaving date, improving achievement and attainment, and more care experienced children and young people moving into and sustaining a positive destination upon leaving school.

## **Outcomes and Measures**

14. The outcomes and measures within this Framework are largely quantitative and align to the [National Improvement Framework](#) and the [Scottish Attainment Challenge Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#) including measures, such as wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem.

### **Outcomes**

1. Improved attendance
2. Reduced exclusion<sup>4</sup>
3. Increasing staying on rates past S4

4. Decreased gap in ACEL levels between care experienced and all children
5. Sustained progression in learning between S3 and leaving school (and reduction of care experienced learners leaving school with no qualifications)
6. Improved leaver attainment

7. Increased positive post schools destination
8. Increased sustained destination

15. The Promise called for schools and local authorities to specifically track and monitor the learning of children and young people who are care experienced throughout their education to ensure equity of outcomes and experiences.

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<sup>4</sup> The Promise has called for the exclusion of care experienced children and young people to stop completely by 2030. Although this framework aims to get closer to this ambition it also recognises the very real concern amongst educators that completely removing the option to exclude may have negative unintended consequences for children and young people and the need to mitigate against this risk.

## ***Monitoring, tracking and early intervention***

*Our Children's Services Partnership has a significantly positive impact on The Promise. There is close partnership working with shared values, resources and approaches. The partnership works on a strengths based approach to support care experienced children and young people and those on the edges of care, this has involved education staff receiving professional learning in Signs of Safety and Trauma Informed Practice amongst others. There is a co-ordinated approach to supporting mental health through our highly successful Healthier Minds approach. Within the partnership data is gathered, analysed and shared to ensure that care experienced children and young are experiencing a good childhood and in particular their right to an education through tracking attendance, exclusions, wellbeing, attainment and achievements. This allows for effective supports and interventions to be put in place.*

*[name of local authority]*

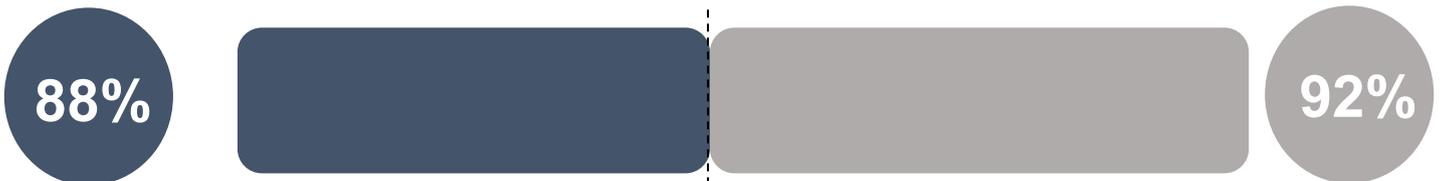
## Outcomes 1-3: Attendance, Exclusion and S4 Leavers

### What the data tells us

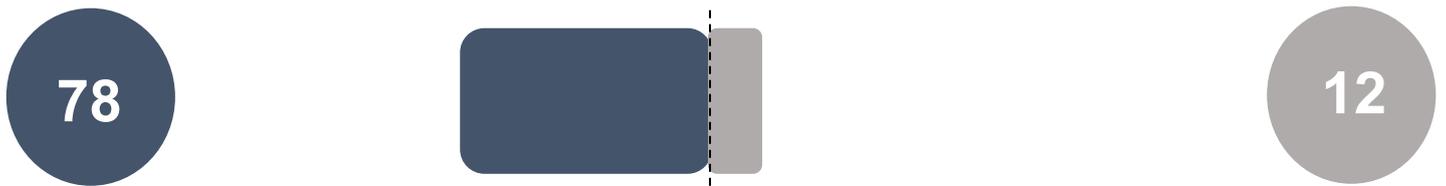
  
**Care experience  
children and  
young people**

  
**All children  
and young  
people**

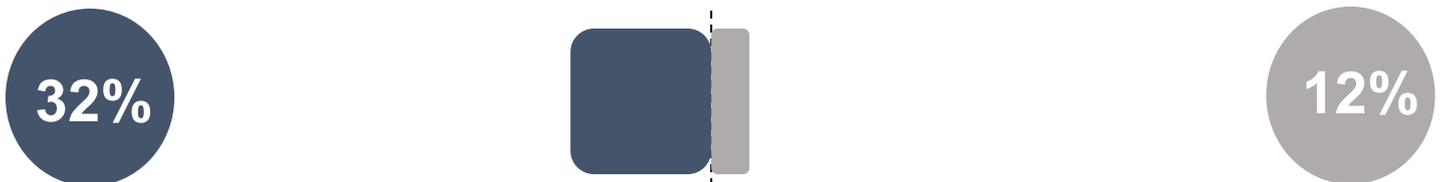
The attendance rate of young people as a percentage.



The number of cases of exclusion per 1,000 pupils.



The percentage of young people who left school in S4 or earlier.



16. Positive relationships and wellbeing are vital for good attendance and influence a child or young person's readiness or capacity to learn<sup>5</sup>. Relationships affect a child or young person's sense of 'belonging' and affiliation with school which impacts whether a young person wants to attend or stay on in school past their earliest possible leaving date. Attendance at school can be a protective factor and good attendance for any child or young people can have a positive impact on educational outcomes<sup>6</sup>. Relationships and wellbeing therefore should be priority for schools particularly for those with low attendance including care experienced children and young people<sup>7</sup>. Relationships between schools and partner organisations are just as important when it comes to providing targeted support to children and young people – for example, schools may have a member of staff

<sup>5</sup> [Developing Positive relationships in Schools](#)

<sup>6</sup> [School Attendance and the Poverty-related Attainment Gap](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Included and Engaged and Involved Part 1](#)

from Skills Development Scotland based in their school which helps to create and foster an effective relationship which allows the needs of children to be much more easily discussed and matched.

17. We know that care experienced children and young people are more likely to experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma and that the stress of such experiences can have a significant negative impact on their ability to learn and on their behaviour. We also know that that ‘resilience or ‘buffering factors’ in childhood, such as having supportive social networks and, in particular, having a trusted, stable relationship with an adult, have the effect of protecting against adverse childhood experiences (ACES) and trauma. Evidence tells us that children who do well despite experiencing adversity have had at least one stable and committed relationship with a dependable adult.<sup>8</sup>
18. Exclusion disrupts learning and should only ever be used as a last resort<sup>9</sup>. However, exclusion may be necessary in exceptional circumstances to maintain safety and order for pupils and staff.
19. Care experienced children and young people are more likely to be excluded from school<sup>10</sup>. Exclusion increases the risk of disengagement from learning, marginalisation from peers and poorer educational outcomes<sup>11</sup>. Poorer educational outcomes makes it more difficult to progress into further/higher education, employment or training.
20. Research shows that leaving school early is linked to unemployment, social exclusion, poverty and poor health<sup>12</sup>. A positive school climate and teacher-learner relationships are vital in encouraging young people to stay on in school past their earliest statutory school leaving age which is currently the end of May in S4 or December in S5 depending on a young person’s date of birth. Young people leaving at these times may miss out on further opportunities to achieve and attain. This may leave them less well prepared for entering further education, training or employment.

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<sup>8</sup> [Supportive relationships and active skill building strengthen the foundations of resilience](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Included, engaged and involved part 2: preventing and managing school exclusions](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2020/21 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [The School Experience of Young people pre & During Covid-19](#) p27-31

<sup>12</sup> [Early School Leaving](#)

## What we want to improve..



**2 percentage point (pp)** increase in the attendance of care experienced children and young people within the next three years.

Our aim is to achieve an increase in these percentages year on year up to, and beyond, 2030.

## Outcome 1

### How we will measure progress..



To measure progress against this outcome, we will look at school attendance data.

## Aspirations for the next three years..



Based on the outcome, in each year, we hope to see the following:

Year 1 – 0.66% increase

Year 2 – 0.66% increase

Year 3 – 0.66% increase

### **Please note:**

The current indicative improvements have been formulated based on the difference between the educational outcomes of care experienced children and young people and all other children and young people. The difference has then been divided over the next six years (the time between 2024 and 2030, The Promise commitment).

Whilst the indicative improvements focus on improvements which will be seen in the national data, this will require strategic change at a local level. It will be at the discretion of each local authority to set their own improvement aims in order to close their own gaps in educational outcomes for care experienced children and young people and all children. It is expected that these will vary across local authorities, and their individual contexts.

It's important to acknowledge that improvements will differ across local authorities – whilst there may be an expectation to improve year on year, it's recognised that sometimes it can take longer to evidence these improvements.

## What we want to improve..



Reduce the exclusion case rate for care experienced children by at least **33 in 1,000** pupils.

Our aim is to achieve a decrease in these percentages year on year up to, and beyond, 2030.

## Outcome 2

How we will measure progress..



To measure progress against this outcome, we will look at school exclusion data.

## Aspirations for the next three years..



Based on the outcome, in each year, we hope to see the following:

Year 1 – reduction of 11

Year 2 – reduction of 11

Year 3 – reduction of 11

## What we want to improve..



**9 percentage point** increase in the number of care experienced children and young people continuing on to, and remaining in, S5 within the next 3 years.

Our aim is to achieve an improvement in these percentages year on year, up to, and beyond, 2030.

## Outcome 3

How we will measure progress..



To measure progress against this outcome, we will look at the staying on rate of care experienced children and young people from S4 into S5 and compare that to previous years.

This outcome will be based on data from school records.

## Aspirations for the next three years..



Based on the outcome, in each year, we hope to see the following:

Year 1 – 3% increase

Year 2 – 3% increase

Year 3 – 3% increase

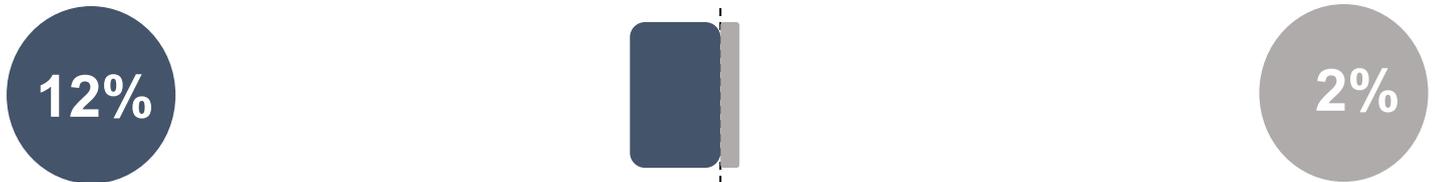
## Outcomes 4-6: Supporting Achievement and Attainment

### What the data tells us:

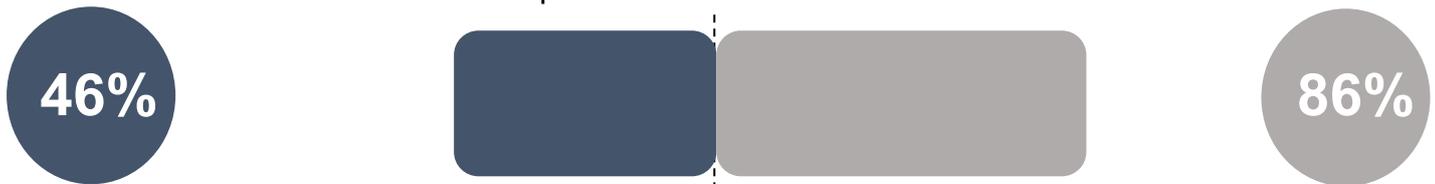
  
Care experience  
children and  
young people

  
All children  
and young  
people

The percentage of young people who left school with no qualifications at SCQF 3 or higher.



The percentage of young people who left school with 1 or more qualifications at SCQF level 5.



The percentage of young people who left school with 1 or more qualifications at SCQF level 6.



21. National data for Achievement of a Curriculum of Excellence Level (ACEL) tells us that across all stages and organisers the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level was lower for pupils with an Additional Support Need than for those without.<sup>13</sup> Legally all 'looked after' children and young people are considered as having additional support needs until they are assessed otherwise<sup>14</sup>. Currently we do not nationally disaggregate ACEL data for care experienced children from the larger group of children who require additional support. This information however will be known at school and local authority level and should be tracked and monitored to ensure any child who begins to fall behind is identified early and support is put in place to reduce any attainment gap. Data should also be tracked and monitored centrally as well in order to plan

<sup>13</sup> [Achievement for Curriculum for Excellence \(CfE\) Levels 2021/2022](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Additional support for learning: statutory guidance 2017](#) Chapter 2

for and consider any resource implications of additional or multi-service support which may be required.

#### Outcome 4

What we want to improve..



**At a local level, reduce** the gap in attainment in Literacy and Numeracy between care experienced children and all children in P1, P4, P7 and S3.

How we will measure progress..



To measure progress against this outcome we will ask local authorities to provide comparative average Literacy and Numeracy ACEL data for care experienced children with all children in P1, P4, P7 & S3.

The outcome will be based on ACEL data from school records.

Aspirations for the next three years..



Outcome will vary across local authorities but the aim will be to see improvements at a local level.

22. Our aspiration is for experienced children and young people to make better educational progress between the Broad General Education (as recorded in ACEL levels) and leaving school (as recorded in formal national qualifications). Although difficult to compare because ACEL levels and national qualification (NQ) levels do not directly articulate, it could and should be expected that a young person would make progress in their learning in some of their subject areas after a further year or more of education<sup>15</sup>. This is often not evidenced through formal qualifications.

23. Whilst the factors behind low or no progress in S4 for many care experienced young people are likely to be complex, our aspiration is for care experienced

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<sup>15</sup> Progression from the Broad General Education (BGE) to the Senior Phase – updated guidance

children and young people to achieve and attain to their potential. Every effort should be made to maintain or improve engagement in learning. For some young people this may require a more flexible curriculum or an alternative approach to how learning happens and how it is assessed. For some young people this may mean a vocational route is planned in terms of learning opportunities. Progress should be measured in terms of [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#) (SCQF) levels. Many courses and awards are linked to SCQF levels but are not formal NQs and therefore are not offered by schools.

24. For Outcome 5, no national baseline data currently exists so measures will be based on an overall increase in local data for three consecutive years.

25. National Qualification data is also published at SCQF levels 1-6. These qualifications and core skill profiles are used by further and higher educational establishments and employers as a baseline for entry into their organisations. Young people with low levels of recognised national qualifications may therefore be limited in their access to these opportunities.

### Outcome 5

#### What we want to improve..



Maintain the engagement of care experienced learners and ensure they are making progress in learning between S3 and leaving school after S4, S5 or S6.

Reduce the number of care experienced learners leaving with no qualifications.

#### How we will measure progress..



To measure progress against this outcome, we will track and monitor attainment and achievement over time to ensure progress in learning is made prior to school-leaving date.

#### Aspirations for the next three years..



Locally, demonstrating an **increase** in pp of care experienced young people showing an improvement in attainment over time from S3 into S4/5/6

Nationally reducing the % of care experienced young people leaving school with no qualifications by **2pp** per year.

## Outcome 6

### What we want to improve..



Increase the number of care experienced young people achieving an SCQF level 6 qualification (or better) by **22.5 percentage points** within the next 3 years to ensure more care experienced young people have a broader range of achievements to support progress to a positive destination.

### How we will measure progress..



To measure progress against this outcome, we will compare care experienced and all school leaver attainment in S5 and S6.

The outcome will be based on annual national qualification data.

### Aspirations for the next three years..



Based on the outcome, in each year, we hope to see the following:

Year 1 – 7.5pp increase

Year 2 – 7.5pp increase

Year 3 – 7.5pp increase

### **Please note:**

Feedback from the ADES Promise Group meeting of 15 December 2023 indicated the cohort may be small and therefore there could be unintended consequences relating to outcome 6. It is our ambition to increase the number of children and young people achieving SCQF level 6 (or better), so feedback on this particular point would be welcome, including alternative suggestions.

## Outcomes 7-8: Improved life chances by supporting young people to move into, and sustain, a positive destination when they leave school

### What the data tells us

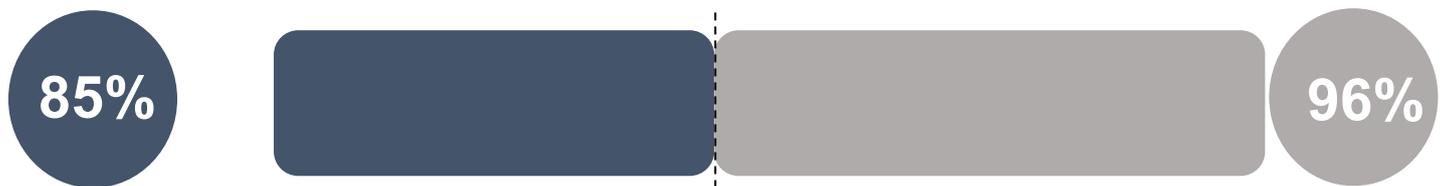


Care experienced children and young people

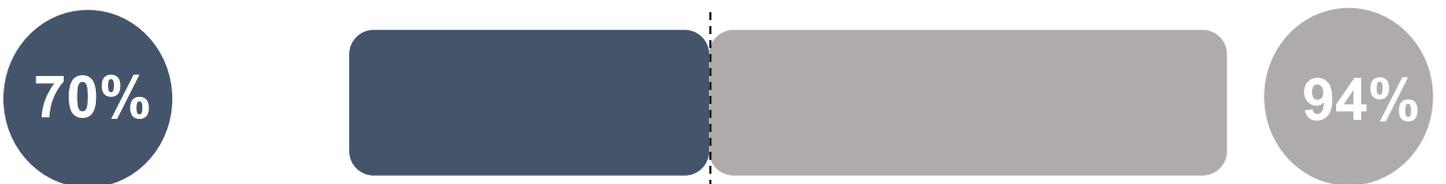


All children

The percentage of young people who went onto a positive initial destination after leaving school.



The percentage of young people who were in positive follow-up destinations 9 months after the end of the school year.



26. It is important that care experienced children and young people are supported to realise their full potential and stay on track to achieve their expected attainment levels so they can make a positive transition from education into an appropriate positive destination<sup>16</sup>. Additional focus for tracking and monitoring educational outcomes for care experienced children and young people is important in order to identify proportionate, timely support<sup>17</sup>.

27. Schools leavers destinations are followed up nine months after leaving school to see if they have sustained their destination. Sustained destinations are an indication of both how appropriate their initial destination was for them and how well they have been supported post school. Schools should do all they can to ensure destinations for care experienced children and young people are suited to their aspirations and abilities rather than an easy to access option.

<sup>16</sup> School leavers who are engaged in higher education, further education, training, voluntary work, employment or are undertaking personal skills development are classified as having a 'positive destination'.

<sup>17</sup> [Accountability - Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund: national operational guidance 2022](#)

28. Follow up leavers destinations data is known as the Participation Measure and is collated and monitored by Skills Development Scotland (SDS). Feedback about this measure should be regularly communicated to schools to help them consider how best to support care experienced leavers to ensure they enter a destination which is right for them, which is supported, and that they can sustain. As well as local authorities tracking this data, and seeking to improve this, we should also be mindful of the appropriateness of those destinations relative to the experience and aspirations of the young person.

### Outcome 7

#### What we want to improve..



**5.5 percentage point** increase in the number of care experienced children and young people entering a positive destination upon leaving school.

Our aim is to achieve an improvement year on year, up to, and beyond, 2030.

#### How we will measure progress..



To measure progress against this outcome, we will look at the destination of young people upon leaving school.

This outcome will be based on data published by Skills Development Scotland (SDS).

#### Aspirations for the next three years..



In each year, we hope to see the following increase in the % of young people entering a positive destination upon leaving school:

Year 1 – 1.83% increase

Year 2 – 1.83% increase

Year 3 – 1.83% increase

29. The final outcome below is not solely the responsibility of schools however they can have a significant impact on it by ensuring care experienced young people get the right advice and support before, during, and after they make the transition from school into their post school destination.

## Outcome 8

### What we want to improve..



**12 percentage point** increase in the number of care experienced young people sustaining their post school destination.

Our aim is to achieve an improvement year on year, up to, and beyond, 2030.

### How we will measure progress..



To measure progress against this outcome, we will look at participation measure data.

This outcome will be based on data published by Skills Development Scotland (SDS).

### Aspirations for the next three years..



In each year, we hope to see young people sustaining their positive destination and see an increase of:

Year 1 – 4% increase

Year 2 – 4% increase

Year 3 – 4% increase

### Supporting transitions into positive destinations..



*By applying an assets-based approach, nurturing strengths and redressing balance between meeting the needs of young people and cultivating and fostering their skills, knowledge and life experience the employability mentor has supported 55 young people. They each received support towards a sustained positive destination. The outcomes of this are as follows:*

- 53% of the young people supported have moved onto positive destinations
- 20% are engaging currently receiving support
- 12% have received support to maintain placements in statutory education
- 5% have received in-work support to maintain employment.



**[Insert name of local authority]**

## ***Building capacity and working in collaboration..***

*We have appointed a Promise Manager who will link Children's Services, and our response to keeping the Promise, with all other services within the Council and the third sector. We have also appointed across all services "promise keepers" who are individuals who will support and challenge policy decisions etc.*

*This has resulted in..*

*[name of local authority]*

*[note: indicative examples for now – need to engage with partners for content]*

## **Reporting**

It is our intention to report annually on progress made in response to the outcomes contained within this Framework.

*Further detail to follow following discussions with partners and internal colleagues to identify opportunities to align to existing reporting processes.*

### **Please note:**

This element has been captured in the testing phase questions.

## Foundations of framework

31. In order to see meaningful change, the following foundations will underpin the implementation of the Framework:

*Schools know who their care experienced children and young people are and consider their needs as part of all school improvement plans.*

**Identify**

*Schools robustly track and monitor learning progress, attendance, engagement and exclusions for individual children addressing any concerns at the earliest opportunity.*

**Monitoring and tracking**

### **Foundations of Framework**

*Creating and sustaining the right conditions for improved outcomes*

**Nurturing relationships**

**Outcome focused**

*Schools have the capacity to be places where children are listened to, protected, have stable nurturing relationships, and where their wellbeing and learning needs can be considered holistically.*

*Education authorities support care experienced learners to be ambitious and to plan well ahead for appropriate post school destinations.*

*Every school should have a designated manager that is responsible for the assessment and co-ordination of support for care experienced learners.*

*Most outcomes are quantitative, however will include other qualitative outcomes relevant to the context of children and prioritising their wellbeing – such as confidence and self-esteem.*

## Early Intervention and Preventative Actions

32. It is important for schools to identify opportunities to support care experienced children and young people at the earliest opportunity at a universal level with a view to preventing the need for more targeted interventions, where possible.

33. The below list provides speculative actions for schools to consider implementing in order to realise the outcomes listed in the Framework. The list is not prescriptive or exhaustive and local authorities may already have implemented other relevant and appropriate:

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Support educators to use local data to intervene at the earliest opportunity.</p>   |    | <p>Consider ways in which to improve understanding of 'care experience' for all pupils, staff and parents.</p>   |
| <p>Encourage and support schools to find creative ways to provide staff with time, space and opportunity to develop kind, supportive and trauma informed relationships with children and young people.</p> |   | <p>Encourage and develop and facilitate mentoring relationships for children and young people who would benefit.</p>   |
| <p>Support educators at every level to proactively consider all transitions (daily, across stages, and into different services).</p>   |  | <p>Recognise and address all additional support needs and, where necessary, develop robust education support or child plans.</p>   |
| <p>Encourage and support educators at different levels to undertake an assessment of needs to identify actions which would support children and young people and their families</p>                        |  | <p>Encourage and support more educational settings to offer universal family support interventions, drawing on community and multi-agency resource, where available.</p> |
| <p>Engaging in relevant Professional Learning such as the Keeping the Promise Award developed by the West Partnership and Education Scotland.</p>  |  | <p>Promote relevant professional learning programmes to practitioners, schools, local authorities, and regions.</p>  |

## **Applying Trauma Informed Practice**

*It is important for schools to take a trauma informed approach. All school staff have a unique and essential trauma informed role to play in responding to children and young people who may be affected by trauma, including those who are care experienced. Being 'trauma-informed' means being able to recognise when a child or young person may be affected by trauma, collaboratively adjusting ways of working to take this into account and responding in a way that supports recovery, does no harm and recognises and supports that person's resilience. For example, behaviours which present as disinterest, lack of motivation, lack of trust or hostility, aggression or resistance to receiving support as well as attendance issues can be reframed as survival or coping mechanisms that are triggered in the face of a perceived threat linked to past or current trauma. Through the consistent communication of empathy, warmth, respect and hope, school staff can provide powerful, corrective, relational experiences.*

*Five key principles underlie trauma-informed practice. These are: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Not everyone needs to be a trauma expert, but it is important for school staff to be aware that every interaction with someone affected by trauma is an opportunity to support their recovery and improve their life chances including their educational outcomes.*

*Some helpful, evidence based and freely available resources developed by NHS Education Scotland are available [here](#).*

*Staff may also find it useful to watch this short animation <https://vimeo.com/334642616>.*

## Signposting to Tools

It is important that The Promise is considered as part of the wider policies and practices in order to enable a whole system approach. Therefore, it is important to consider how this framework can complement existing tools which act to support *all* children and young people, such as:

- Getting it Right for Every Child (GiFREC) – the Wellbeing [SHANARRI](#)
- GiRFEC National Practice [Model](#)
- Trauma informed [resources](#), including the trauma informed practice [toolkit](#).

## Actions to Support Implementation

To support the implementation of the Framework, there are a number of actions which we aim to undertake. The outcome of these activities, where applicable, will be reflected in the Framework:

- Baseline data exercise – collate existing available data into an evidence library both at a national and local level. To also identify data gaps and cycles for reporting.
- Exemplars – collate examples of positive and impactful practice both locally/nationally to support the educational outcomes of care experienced children and young people.

## References

- The Promise, Independent Care Review – [The-Promise\\_v7.pdf \(carereview.scot\)](#)
- Keeping The Promise Implementation Plan - [Keeping the Promise implementation plan - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) - [Getting it right for every child \(GIRFEC\) - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- Getting it Right for Every Child: Wellbeing SHANARRI - [Wellbeing \(SHANARRI\) - Getting it right for every child \(GIRFEC\) - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- Getting it Right for Every Child: the National Practice Model - [Getting it right for every child \(GIRFEC\) Practice Guidance 1 - Using the National Practice Model - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- Angela Morgan's review of Additional Support for Learning - [Review of additional support for learning implementation: report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- Additional Support for Learning Action Plan - [Additional support for learning: action plan - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- Additional Support for Learning Action Plan, updated November 2022 -
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) - [Children's rights - Human rights - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- Scottish Attainment Challenge - [Scottish Attainment Challenge - 2022 to 2023 – 2025 to 2026: fairer Scotland duty assessment - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- Trauma informed practice toolkit - [Trauma-informed practice: toolkit - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- National trauma informed training - [nesd1334-national-trauma-training-programme-online-resources\\_updated2106.pdf \(transformingpsychologicaltrauma.scot\)](#)



## **Case Study Clackmannanshire**

Clackmannanshire Council have a unique Virtual Headteacher model, blending strategic direction around The Promise, tracking and monitoring the attendance and attainment of our Care Experienced young people, as well as providing a person-centred, relationship-based, in-person support to a cohort of young people in each of our Academies.

The Virtual Headteacher caseload is focused on young people who are Care Experienced, or at risk of being in care, including those who are not currently accessing mainstream school. Our model is around providing bespoke support for young people, including experiential learning opportunities such as Work Experience, working in small groups through a Qualifications Academy, Outdoor Learning Experiences and Leadership Groups. The focus of 1:1 support builds confidence and self-efficacy, further developing to group work.

Every young person and small group is unique - we have provided a set of summary samples to exemplify impact.

### **Sample 1 –Keeping The Promise award**

Working together, Clackmannanshire people Directorate have supported young people and families to improve their attendance and attainment, and we continue to work collectively to Keep the Promise. All Clackmannanshire establishments are undertaking *The Keeping the Promise Award*, a commitment which places children, young people, and families at the centre of practice.

The award focuses on embedding the language of care, developing nurturing environments, and ensuring that the voices of young people are heard and acted upon. Schools and early years settings are actively reviewing policies, classroom practice, and wider support systems to ensure they reflect the values of compassion, respect, and inclusion. Staff across establishments are receiving professional learning, delivered by our Virtual headteacher, to deepen their understanding of trauma-informed approaches, relationship-based practice, and the importance of consistent, caring adults in children's lives.

The *Keeping the Promise Award* is closely interlinked with Clackmannanshire's wider programme of trauma-informed approaches, delivered and supported by the Educational Psychology Service. Both initiatives are interconnected and designed to reinforce one another, ensuring that the principles of care, respect, and empathy are consistently applied across all services. This joined-up approach means that not only education staff, but colleagues in housing, social work, health, and elected members are engaging in similar training and development. In doing so, a shared language and understanding is created across the whole system, strengthening collaboration and ensuring that children, young people, and families experience consistency and continuity of care, regardless of which service they are engaging with.

As part of the award process, schools are working closely with young people to co-design initiatives that promote wellbeing, belonging, and positive outcomes. This includes creating spaces where children feel safe and valued, celebrating individual achievements, and building stronger partnerships with families and communities. Regular reflection and self-evaluation help establishments to measure progress, highlight good practice, and identify areas for improvement.

Through the combination of *The Keeping the Promise Award* and trauma-informed practice, Clackmannanshire schools and partner services demonstrate their dedication to improving outcomes for care-experienced children and all learners, ensuring that every child has the support, relationships, and opportunities they need to thrive

### **Sample 2: LEADERSHIP ACADEMY – PARTNERSHIP GROUP**

In 2024, a small group of young people from one of our Academies attended a Leadership Group operated in partnership with Coach My Sport Leadership Academy. The Virtual Headteacher and Depute Headteacher from their school undertook an impact of evidence study, with this cohort having an increase of over 10% of attendance over the subsequent session. This cohort worked thereafter with the local football club, to help to co-design and decorate a community youth club which is now used by over 200 young people per week.

### **Sample 3: QUALIFICATIONS ACADEMY – WORKING TOGETHER**

A pilot group operated out of a local Action for Children building has become a permanent Virtual Headteacher regular fixture based on pupil voice. Following an initial 12 week pilot, youth voice enabled us to continue the group for the full academic year. This group was utilised by around 10 young people per week, most of whom have Emotional Based School Avoidance for a significant and complex variety of reasons. The young people co-designed their curriculum, and worked together to continuously review progress. The impact was that young people outwith mainstream, traditional education managed to achieve Level 3, Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications, despite being in schools.

### **Sample 4: ‘David’ – THE POWER OF COLLABORATION**

One of our Virtual Headteacher supported young people, ‘David’, who attends one of our Academies. David has transformed his own life and is now in his dream course in college, making friends, having achieved 7 qualifications and becoming a confident young man. At the beginning of his journey, David was not attending school and did not have a wide sphere of friends or aspiration, to the point that his home interior had become his world. He has had a full wraparound support package including Virtual Headteacher on a weekly basis, a supported Education Engagement package at school, Community Learning Development, Skills Development Scotland as well as support for the family around food and fuel poverty in this time of austerity. Continued unconditional positive regard and a relentless drive to support to family has led to significantly improved outcomes.

### **Sample 5: ‘Kevin’ – BUILDING CONFIDENCE**

Kevin had lost confidence following a number of significant challenges at home, resulting in him disengaging from education for a period of time. His PT Guidance, PT Additional Support Needs, Depute Headteacher, family and Virtual Headteacher met with Kevin to create a short-term intervention to support him back into school. Kevin attended the VHT Qualifications Group and VHT Outdoor Learning Academy, building a strong relationship with the staff team and building bonds with young people – resulting in improved self-efficacy and personal sense of worth. Kevin worked 1:1 with the Virtual Headteacher for a term, gaining qualifications and confidence. He has now returned to school with attendance improving from <30% to over 90%. He checks in regularly with staff and is flourishing.

For further information, contact Forbes Maginnis.

# Educating pupils in their own community.

## Case Study

### OVERVIEW

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South Ayrshire Council, like all local authorities, holds a duty to provide education for all young people, regardless of their individual needs. The GIRFEC Allocation Resource Forum (GARF) brings together professionals from education, health, and social work to collaboratively assess and make decisions about the care and education of our most vulnerable young people. Since 2019, South Ayrshire has made significant progress in reducing the number of young people placed in residential care outside the authority, enabling many to return to their families or be supported within our own Children's Houses.

However, it became clear that while these young people were returning home, their educational needs remained complex. Attending local mainstream schools often proved difficult, and as a result, some continued to receive education in private establishments outside South Ayrshire. This approach conflicted with the principles of The Promise and failed to adequately meet the specific educational needs of these individuals. Many young people were reluctant to attend these schools or use the transport provided, leading to poor or non-existent attendance.

In response, GARF launched a pilot for a tailored education provision within South Ayrshire. This initiative aims to better support individual needs, reintegrate young people into their communities, and ultimately deliver improved outcomes.

### AIMS OF THE PILOT

#### PUPIL

To support individual pupils in their educational journey to achieve their potential, support to next steps in destinations and sustain links to their own community.

#### FAMILY

To provide holistic support to families, coaching their young people to attend education and to stress the importance of positive engagement in education.  
To provide support at times of challenge, ensuring positive relationships at home.

#### ATTAINMENT

To ensure that our most vulnerable young people achieve qualifications and reach their potential, whatever that may be.  
A team approach from staff to support all aspects of the young people; wellbeing, education and moving on to positive destinations.  
To provide a sense of belonging for the young people within their community, and have links, where possible, to their mainstream school.

## CHANGE

Through rigorous tracking and monitoring of data collated at GARF, the forum was able to identify several young people who were enrolled in education only establishments out with the authority. Further data highlighted that these individuals were not attending the planned education and thus missing opportunities to learn and achieve.

GARF panel created a proposal to South Ayrshire Council transformational budget panel to request a sum of money to cover staffing required to support a bespoke education package to meet the needs of the young people. A budget from Family Wellbeing Fund was agreed to pilot this new approach. It was decided that the Virtual School in South Ayrshire would oversee the operation of the pilot programme and staff. Precise recruitment was vital in ensuring the personnel delivering this service would meet the needs of the young people.

Recruitment of A Depute Head Teacher, Class Teacher, Welfare Officer and Social Work Support Assistant formed a new team. A building was sourced where the new team could work from. The Welfare Officer and Support Assistant work 52 weeks to ensure continuity and support during school holiday periods, avoiding a dip in engagement. Intense training took place including, Nurture, de-escalation training, The Promise in Education and various other courses to ensure that the team were highly skilled and promoting an inclusive and flexible approach to education. Links with other services such as CLD, Thriving Communities, Employability ad Skills, SDS and others were made. An information session with a host of work forces was made, to build links for work experience and modern apprenticeship opportunities.

An oversight board was created hosting Social Work Service Lead, Education Quality Improvement Managers and Virtual School Head Teacher. This board would meet regularly to assess and evaluate the impact of the pilot.

In December 2024 two young people were introduced to the team, at their pace. Very quickly they engaged and attended. They contributed to the environmental lay out of the building, the name of the provision and the ideas that they suggested would contribute to making the pilot a success. Part of their building confidence to attend; they helped decorate the building and design a logo. Routes Into Skills and Education (RISE)

Since December 2024, four new young people are now being educated at RISE, with the initial two young people now transitioning to 1) further education and 2) modern apprenticeship. The staff at RISE are supporting this transition and a providing the holistic care required to ensure attendance, understanding and guidance is there for them, and their families. The new young people are in S1 and S2 and are attending the programme well.

A total of six individual young people now gaining education input within their local community, where previously they had been placed out with, did not attend school or became involved in criminal activity whilst finding school attendance a challenge.

RISE ensures that catchment schools are fully involved in the education and progress of the young people, ensuring a sense of belonging within their schools. Links are made, resources are shared and subject specialist input is available.

## IMPACT

Since the introduction of the RISE education programme in December 2024, six young people have benefited from tailored support within South Ayrshire. Three have successfully returned from external education placements, while another three have been supported to remain within their community, avoiding the need for out-of-authority provision. Two young people have participated in work experience, building up to independent attendance.

This initiative has resulted in significant financial savings for South Ayrshire Council—averaging approximately £220,000 in education costs, with additional reductions in transport expenditure.

All participating young people are actively engaged in their learning at RISE, with attendance reaching an impressive 98% from launch to September 2025. Notably, two individuals have achieved qualifications they were previously unlikely to attain. (6x Nat 3 and 4x Nat 4 qualifications including English and Maths).

The success of RISE is underpinned by ongoing multi-agency collaboration, ensuring strong communication across services, holistic family support, and consistent delivery of the programme.

The Promise Scotland affirms that every child should grow up feeling loved, safe, and respected, with the opportunity to reach their full potential. In South Ayrshire, we are committed to turning this vision into reality. The RISE programme plays a vital role in advancing this commitment. It offers year-round support, embraces the involvement of families—including siblings—and is built on a deep belief in each young person's ability to succeed.

For further information contact Kimberley Keenan.





## **Argyll & Bute Council**

### **50 hours per week, team of 4 across 4 localities**

*Our Health and Wellbeing Family Liaison Officers (HWBFLOs) work closely with care experienced children and young people (CECYP), as well as their families and carers, to enhance engagement with education and improve outcomes.*

*Through our referral system, education settings collaborate with the Virtual School to ensure that interventions are appropriate and that desired outcomes are clearly defined. The Virtual School has access to a wide range of data, enabling us to identify opportunities and link with setting to suggest where HWBFLO support can address specific areas of need.*

*We maintain strong links with wider education teams and partner agencies to ensure that support is well-coordinated and any multi-agency approaches are effectively planned.*

*Our skilled HWBFLOs operate both reactively and proactively, offering bespoke support tailored to each young person. This includes early intervention and preventative work. Positive, nurturing, trusting relationships are at the heart of their practice. HWBFLOs often serve as the bridge between home and school, ensuring that the voices of young people and their families are heard, their needs acknowledged, and their strengths celebrated—especially during periods of uncertainty.*

*Given the unique nature of the role, our team adapts flexibly to each session. Support may range from a gentle start to the school day—perhaps with a hot chocolate and a chat—to focused sessions aimed at building emotional literacy and self-esteem. Activities are tailored to individual interests, such as learning Star Wars character names and bicycle repairs, to foster connection and engagement.*

*We are committed to aligning with The Promise, reducing bureaucracy, and ensure that our HWBFLOs spend most of their time directly supporting CECYP.*

*The work of our HWBFLO's and their unique approach is leading to improved outcomes for our young people, both collectively and individually. Over the past four years, the attainment gap between care-experienced and non-care-experienced learners has narrowed significantly, with both groups showing continuous improvement. Individual outcomes include improved attendance, support into a positive destination, increased attainment, enhanced wellbeing and bereavement support.*

*HWBFLOs provide consistency during transitions, promote inclusion, and help build shared understanding around meeting needs. This is reflected in our exclusion data and Argyll and Bute's ongoing commitment to Keep the Promise.*

*Most importantly, the impact is best captured in the voices of our young people and their families:*

*"I get it, you are just trying to help me." S2 pupil.*

*"I cannot believe I just done that! Thanks!" S4 pupil.*

*"I feel good, good, good!" P3 pupil.*

*"Supporting X with her learning has made a massive difference. We can see her confidence grow and she now is happy about going to school." Parents S3 pupil.*

For further information contact **Louise Chisholm**, Virtual Head Teacher for Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP)

## **Case Study**

### **A Story of Resilience, Relationships and Return**

#### **Background**

This is the story of a young girl who began her educational journey at a Primary School in Dundee, attending Primary 1 and part of Primary 2 before needing to be provided with alternative care due to concerns about significant neglect and exposure to harm. Over the years that followed, she experienced placement breakdowns in foster care before spending an extended period in an external residential care home some distance from the city.

During this time, her education became highly alternative and was structured around outdoor pursuits such as skiing, swimming and archery with short periods of academic learning. The child displayed many behaviours consistent with trauma, including extreme dysregulation, fear-based control and violent outbursts. Professionals from the residential setting described her as "a 1% chance of successfully re-entering mainstream education."

We did not see 1%. We saw potential. We saw a Dundee child. Our Promise Plan 2023-2026 includes a concentrated effort to return children who have been placed outside of the city to their home community believing that by working together we could reset and provide better levels of care, education and future for our children. This child was one of the first of 21 we have so far identified as needing to come home and we have worked as a partnership to support her, with her care and welfare at the centre of all decisions.

#### **Aim**

Our aim was simple. We wanted to reintegrate this child into her own community and mainstream school where she had had established relationships. We wanted to show her that she was still a Dundee child and that she was loved, wanted and safe. We knew the challenge would be significant but we believed in her and we believed in our approach. We have applied the same principles and practice to other children and young people when making decisions about their return.

#### **The Early Days: High Risk and High Emotion**

When she first returned to Dundee, there was a plan for her to move to a different area to live with an aunt through Kinship arrangements. Whilst this plan was being progressed, she lived in one of our local Children's Houses, especially configured to look after younger children. A difficult family holiday abroad and some incidents at home

contributed to a change in plan which was deeply disappointing for her and she remained living in the Children's House.

She returned to her original primary school midway through Primary 5 and the first days, weeks and months were incredibly difficult, particularly for her when navigating these huge life changes. Incidents occurred almost daily and included physical aggression using words, objects, hands, feet and spitting. There were clear efforts to manipulate and control every interaction, a pattern of behaviour rooted in a need for safety and predictability. She pushed everyone, testing the boundaries of our care and commitment.

We responded by agreeing as a team that we wouldn't break or walk away, instead we would regroup and debrief. That team included key staff from her Children's House who were to all intents and purposes, part of her family. We reached out to each other, to our Educational Psychologist and to other partners across the local authority. We stayed relentlessly focused on what this young person *needed and was capable of*, not just what she did.

### **Trauma-Informed and Relationship-Led**

Relationships were the key and remain the foundation of her ongoing success. We used scripting, co-regulation strategies and clear protocols to manage crises but none of these would have worked without a culture of nurture and consistency. Even in her most extreme moments, we told her, sometimes explicitly, that we were not scared, we were not going anywhere and we still cared. Her trauma told her to push us away but our response was always to welcome her back.

We were always fair, always honest and always empathetic. We listened to her and adapted her timetable and demand when we could. We also gave her increased space to grow. Where she found things difficult, we didn't ignore or avoid them, we worked with her to find solutions as a team – school and the staff from her house.

### **Collaboration**

The collaborative approach of working closely with her team of residential staff ensured she received a consistent, safe and predictable response across both settings. At times, when school was challenging, house staff were informed and when things were tough at home, school was prepared. This consistency helped her to stabilise emotionally and begin to trust the adults in her world.

We trialled third-sector partnerships to provide an alternative curriculum that echoed her previous learning environments. However, relationship-building remained difficult and in one case, a provision ended abruptly after a serious assault on a member of school staff. Even this became a 'turning point'.

After that incident, once calm, she voiced something deeply significant: she didn't want to leave school, in fact, *she wanted to be here*. She was remorseful, emotional and reflective in a way we had not previously seen. It marked a moment of emotional growth

and demonstrated clearly the strength of the relationships she had formed with the school team.

### **Expanding Her World: Extra-Curricular and Enrichment Opportunities**

A key part of her reintegration has been ensuring that she has access to the same breadth of experiences as her peers. Through close collaboration between home and school, she has been able to access a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities.

These have included swimming, gymnastics, ice skating and other structured activities that build confidence and physical wellbeing. Within school, she has participated in volunteering opportunities, outdoor education and taken part in trips and experiences in the local community.

These opportunities have allowed her to improve her social skills, form more positive peer relationships and discover new talents all while reinforcing a sense of belonging and self-worth.

### **Where We Are Now**

In short, the transformation has been remarkable. Although the journey is not yet complete and never linear, the changes are substantial and sustained. Violent incidents have significantly reduced. There have been no major violent events in recent months and no police involvement. The volatility that once characterised her school and home life has stabilised.

More recently there have been positive interactions with family and while contact is not always regular or consistent, she is now seeing family at least once a fortnight.

What has been most striking is how she has managed these ups and downs. Where once disappointment would lead to dysregulation and crisis, she is now increasingly able to talk about difficult feelings, reflect on them, and manage her emotions with growing maturity. Her emotional resilience has developed considerably, and her ability to maintain hope and connection, even through change and uncertainty, has been extraordinary

She still seeks control, still tests limits and continues to determine quickly who she will trust but she now does so from a place of security, not fear. She knows that when it's appropriate, we will give her agency, a safe space and a voice. In school and at home, she knows, unequivocally, that she is safe.

Today, this young person:

- Is fully engaged in her learning.
- Completes academic tasks consistently.
- Is beginning to *enjoy* challenge.

- Has a peer group and defends both herself and others appropriately.
- Tells staff when something upsets her.
- Smiles, laughs, and expresses her needs.

She has had the opportunity to have increased family time with mum and siblings, including overnights. She has also had the opportunities to explore wider family time through extended family members which have included tea visits and overnights, something that she would have struggled to manage previously.

She has been able to socialise in different clubs, some being with friends from school and others where she has made new friends.

### **Conclusion: A Return Rooted in Partnership and Relationships**

The success of this young person's return to Dundee has been rooted in strong and consistent partnership working between her residential setting, social work, and education. It is inspiring to see her happy, cared for with a sense of belonging.

A shared and unwavering commitment from all adults supporting her through regular debriefs, daily communication, phone calls, and multi-agency meetings has allowed us to adapt, respond and plan at every stage. This has also required people to think creatively and 'outside of the box' in terms of traditional roles across the services to consider what exactly she needed from who at certain times, rather than adhering to rigid role boundaries. Educational psychologists were involved at key decision points, helping to shape an approach that was both informed by research and deeply attuned to her individual needs.

This collaborative, consistent and compassionate approach has removed barriers and allowed her to grow, not just academically, but emotionally, socially and as a whole person.