



1. Introduction: What is Collaborative Improvement?

Collaborative Improvement is a national approach to bringing about improvement through shared work involving staff from a local authority, Education Scotland and ADES. This approach was secured through the Education Reform Joint Agreement published in June 2018, and all local authorities are committed to the process. The local authority provides a range of evidence, underpinned by a self-evaluative statement, to highlight what works well, and areas requiring improvement, within an agreed area of focus. This then becomes the focus of the collaborative improvement activity.

Throughout the Collaborative Improvement visit the team engaged in professional dialogue with officers from across North Lanarkshire Council, including frontline staff and central officers; they also met with young people, as part of field visits, to exemplify aspects of the Service's self-evaluation document. This enabled the Collaborative Improvement Team to explore the identified areas and themes, and to support the Service to identify strengths and possible areas to drive forward future improvements.

2. Context

North Lanarkshire is committed to ensuring all children and young people achieve their full potential; to give them the tools to make their way in life through quality, exciting, and challenging learning. That means a commitment to improving attainment and achievement, closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and securing positive and sustained post school leaver destinations. North Lanarkshire believes that their schools are inclusive, energetic places that take into account the needs of all children and young people.

In North Lanarkshire, the vision is to support all children and young people to achieve their potential, ensuring they are loved, nurtured, and empowered to thrive in all aspects of their lives, including upholding the rights of each and every child and young person as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Through the Children's Services Partnership, they work collaboratively with children, young people, their families, and partners to ensure they get the best start in life and support families to provide loving care. They do this by making sure the right supports are available, at the right time, for as long as needed, and delivered in the right places to ensure equity for all and reducing inequalities throughout.

The Service is committed to rigorous self-evaluation that supports continuous improvement and recognise the significant benefit of engaging with colleagues, as part of the collaborative improvement process, to support and accelerate progress.

3. Rationale

In 2019, North Lanarkshire Council commissioned a Service review to critically examine Additional Support Needs (ASN) policy, practice and provision, and the subsequent

member level review looked at all three aspects. It led to the development of twelve recommendations for future action, which in turn was translated into a strategic implementation plan. Recommendations centred around the following key themes; improving practice, empowering staff, and managing resources.

Holistically, the recommendations amounted to a system redesign, overhauling current practice, and charting a future course that enabled change. This change was about improving the experiences of children and families by creating a coherent system that strengthens GIRFEC processes and provides more opportunities for the Service to respond to the needs of children and families. It was also about improving the contexts in which young people with ASN experience learning and how North Lanarkshire Council deploys its resources to support learners. It included redesign of buildings, which continues across the estate.

The recommendations primarily focused on the ASN specialist provision, however, importantly, the Service continued to develop effective systems and supports to progress inclusive pedagogy across all settings, recognising the importance of this across all establishments.

Whilst the Service's own self-evaluation has determined that the twelve initial recommendations have now been fully or partially met, NLC's Education and Families Service recognise the ongoing requirement for review and change to build on the strong foundations established. Therefore, the Collaborative Improvement team, in collaboration with colleagues from NLC, were asked to explore the impact of system level changes on learner outcomes and to identify what further action could be taken to accelerate progress and support future improvements.

4. Planning structure and process

To undertake the Collaborative Review, a team of senior officers from the North Lanarkshire Inclusion Team, ADES and Education Scotland began to scope process and structure and to identify suitable colleagues to join the team. The collaboration was organised over three days in November 2023. The team were based in Motherwell Civic Centre, Drumpark Primary School, and Buchannan High School.

The review included 3 main phases:

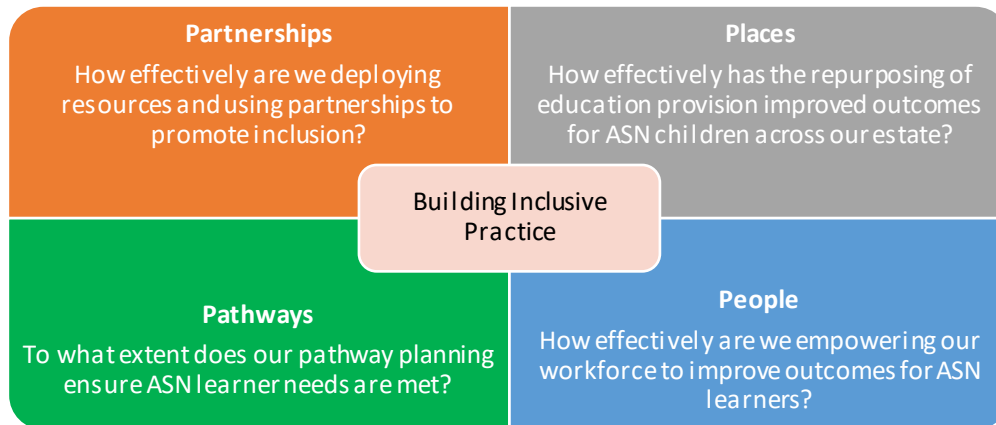
- Scoping and information gathering
- Review, including focus groups of headteachers and specialist staff
- Feedback and further analysis by the local authority

5. Key themes

To ensure a clear focus for the visit, the Collaborative Improvement team worked closely alongside NLC colleagues to consider the following overarching question:

- To what extent are we developing inclusive practice in North Lanarkshire Council that improves outcomes for learners with Additional Support Needs, enabling them to thrive within an appropriate learning environment?

To enable the team to explore this question in depth, the following four key themes were identified:



6. Key findings

Partnerships

How effectively are we deploying resources and using partnerships to promote inclusion?

Key Strengths:

- Very strong partnership working is intrinsic across education and social work and is a benefit of belonging to the one Service Directorate – Education and Families. This was further highlighted in the recent report from the Children’s Services Inspection which attributed a **very good** to partnership working.
- The Empowering Clusters Model is recognised as a key function in ensuring integrated partnership working that is centred around the wellbeing of children and young people, within their local communities. This model supports collaboration and empowers key staff to delegate additional resources and budget, at local level, to meet the needs of children and families. The structure around the model supports consistency around key factors, while providing enough flexibility for clusters to respond to the needs of their own contexts. The defined management of the cluster model ensures individual and collective accountability built around the shared vision and approach. The synergies between partnerships are growing and becoming increasingly more impactful.
- The development and integration of the *We Aspire College* demonstrates North Lanarkshire’s creative approach to providing an inclusive educational and vocational experience for young people experiencing adversity who require a more flexible and nurturing approach to learning. The impact of this new model and cultural shift has seen reductions in both exclusions and incidences of physical intervention for these young people.
- NLC’s ambition of having children closer to home and attending NL schools is being realised through alignment of a number of key processes and partnerships. Examples include: Curriculum and pedagogical development work with NLC’s

Learning Hub staff, and close partnership working with the Virtual School Team, We Aspire staff and social work colleagues.

- The Virtual School team's strong partnership working with key stakeholders across the Service, to support care experienced children and young people, is impacting positively and there has been a significant reduction in exclusions of care experienced young people in the last 5 years. The model used by the Virtual School team supports capacity building across staff teams, which in turn strengthens the sustainability of supports and improves outcomes for identified learners.

Areas for Development and Next Steps:

- Continue to adopt a strategic approach to developing inclusive practice across the Service, at all levels. By working collaboratively with young people, staff, parents/carers and partner we aim to create a shared vision and understanding of inclusive practice. This will ensure all partners understand their roles and responsibilities in developing and implementing inclusive pedagogy.
- By strengthening universal approaches to inclusive pedagogy, they can continue to empower staff and build sustainable approaches that enable learners with ASN to be supported within the mainstream setting, when appropriate.
- North Lanarkshire is developing collaborative approaches to quality assurance across the Empowering Clusters. The use of the Cluster Dashboard is enabling key staff to identify trends and to use data effectively to support improvements. Further monitoring of this data, at Authority level, will help to ensure equity of support across North Lanarkshire. It will further support them to manage the balance between delegated empowerment and equity and ensure approaches taken continue to add value and promote equity.
- Recent expansion of the “We Aspire College” to incorporate an Outreach Team will provide the Service with further capacity to support pupils with social and emotional needs to maintain their mainstream placement. The Service should now maximise the use of the newly formed Outreach team to create further opportunities for staff to collaborate, and share expertise and knowledge, to improve outcomes for learners.

Places

How effectively has the repurposing of education provision improved outcomes for ASN children across our estate?

Key Strengths:

- The Council's ambitious programme of repurposing current learning spaces, in addition to incorporating ASN spaces in future builds, is ensuring that North Lanarkshire has fit for purpose, 21st century learning spaces for all learners. By using space in an agile way, increased opportunities are being provided for learners and their families to be supported within their local community. It is building capacity within local resources and supporting the realisation of the closer to home agenda. It is also impacting positively on staff morale.

- The system level changes within Place have enabled North Lanarkshire to review the outcomes for out of authority pupils, and to consider next steps in the repatriation of young people back into North Lanarkshire.
- A clearly defined North Lanarkshire framework (Universal, Additional, and Intensive) has helped to structure the delivery of appropriate supports for children in mainstream settings.

Areas for Development and Next Steps:

- Continue to strengthen inclusive approaches within mainstream settings to enable and empower staff to develop appropriate curriculum pathways, within and out with the traditional learning environment. This will ensure mainstream children with ASN benefit from inclusive pedagogical approaches and curriculum opportunities that are relevant and progressive, linking to positive pathways and post school destinations, where possible.
- Continue to review and evaluate the need for the current number of individual ASN establishments in NL, to align more closely with other LAs, and national policy.

Pathways

To what extent does our pathway planning ensure ASN learner needs are met?

Key Strengths:

- The system level changes and processes implemented since the 2019 ASN Review have strengthened pathway planning for all children and young people across North Lanarkshire, particularly for learners at the additional and intensive levels.
- The Needs Based Pathway Review (NBPR) process has resulted in the number of children/young people having their needs met within their own locality increase, and the number referred for a placement out with their own community decline. NBPR data is being used increasingly effectively to inform planning for future Service needs, including the provision of targeted support to individual establishments, to build capacity.
- We Aspire College, part of the ASN Re-configuration of Intensive Services, brings transformational change to the educational experiences of vulnerable secondary young people who are most at risk of becoming disengaged from their learning and of being excluded from their own communities. The incorporation of We Aspire SEBN provisions into new purpose-built facilities within mainstream campuses provides increased opportunities for inclusion and sharing of resources and expertise.
- The new Transition Policy “Supporting Effective Child Centred Transitions” provides a comprehensive approach to transition planning, in line with GIRFEC principles. It offers a framework to ensure that all education establishments provide “equity and consistency” in transition planning for children and young people throughout their educational journey, in order to achieve positive school leaver destinations. We will continue to review the impact of the Transition Policy to ensure positive outcomes for children and young people.

Areas for Development and Next Steps:

- North Lanarkshire should evaluate the impact of professional learning and current staffing resources to ensure that these are having the expected impact, in order to make decisions on future funding of these resources.
- Further development and coherent messaging to strengthen the expectation that inclusion should permeate all facets of Education and Families and that is the responsibility of everyone, beginning at the universal level.

People

How effectively are we empowering our workforce to improve outcomes for ASN learners?

Key Strengths:

- The clear strategic approach and alignment of roles and responsibilities within the Inclusion team has facilitated improvements and impacted positively on the pace of change, particularly at the additional and intensive levels.
- Development of creative ways of engaging all staff in high quality CLPL, has impacted positively on staff knowledge, skills and confidence and motivation. Bespoke packages of training have enabled the Service to support identified ASN training needs for all staff in schools, addressing needs at universal, additional and intensive levels. Continuous Lifelong Professional Learning has been enhanced through partnership support from the Open University.
- The development of a career progression pathway which provides the opportunity for progression from Modern Apprenticeship (SVQ 2 and 3), to Learning Assistant (NLC4 grade), to Enhanced Support Assistant (ESA, NLC7 grade) is beginning to support the Service to build a workforce for the future, creating increased opportunities for young people and new staff members.
- A range of headship models have been introduced as part of the strategic changes to ASN. This supports the overall management of specialist ASN schools by aligning management structures and increasing opportunities for staff collaboration, building individual and collective staff expertise to improve outcomes for learners.

Areas for Development and Next Steps:

- As staff career pathways develop, North Lanarkshire should ensure that staff remain clear about the roles within the system to avoid ambiguity and maximise impact of staffing structures.
- The Service should continue to embrace opportunities to share and learn from good practice within NLC, across the West Partnership, and nationally.
- NLC will conduct a full review of the 2019 recommendations from the ASN review and provide a report to Committee outlining the outcome. This report will be contained within the ASN update.

7. Conclusion:

The Service found participation in the collaborative improvement process extremely beneficial in terms of validating self-evaluation processes and outcomes and supporting and challenging thinking to accelerate future progress. Through robust professional dialogue and creative, solution focussed discussions, the Service is in a strong position to identify strengths and clear next steps to drive forward further improvements. Through the process of Collaborative Improvement, we have developed useful networks have been created that will facilitate wider collaboration and sharing of best practice, particularly in relation to further developing the empowering cluster system.

The Collaborative Improvement Team recognise the progress made by the Service to respond to recommendations within the ASN review and to significantly improve outcomes for learners with additional supports needs within specialist provisions. They acknowledge the strong cultural shift. Staff understand and are committed to supporting children within their local communities, where possible. The Service should now capitalise on the positive ethos and motivation of colleagues to strengthen inclusive policy, practice, and pedagogy. Having rightly focussed improvement efforts towards the additional and intensive levels in the first instance, the service should now shift the focus towards strengthening universal approaches. By focusing on developing universal pedagogical approaches and curriculum pathways that enable all learners, including those with ASN, to be educated in their mainstream establishments, where possible and appropriate, the Service can develop and embed inclusive practice. This will allow for improved cohesion and alignment with NLC's vision and values. It will reflect the Service and wider Council's commitment to working collectively to ensure young people with additional support needs are educated in the most appropriate learning environment to meet their needs.

North Lanarkshire Council will continue to seek to address the above listed actions within their programme of work. Clear measures, outcomes and completion dates will be identified, and accountable officers will report to North Lanarkshire's Senior Management Team, North Lanarkshire Inclusion Board and the Education, Children and Families Committee, within one year.

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