



## **From mountain to sea**

### **ADES, Education Scotland & Aberdeenshire Council Collaboration Event Summary Report.**

#### **Collaborative Improvement**

Collaborative Improvement is an approach to bringing about improvement through shared work involving staff from the local authority, Education Scotland and ADES. Together, the group establish the focus for the Collaborative Improvement visit and then undertake activities in the local authority that will result in an evaluative summary of where there are strengths and where there are areas that may require further focus. The approach to collaborative improvement was outlined in the joint agreement and is based on the call for a “strengthened middle” in the 2015 OECD report on Scottish Education. The approach is also intended to address the recommendation in Audit Scotland’s report on education that Councils should work with schools, Regional Improvement Collaboratives, other policy teams and partners, for example in the third sector, to reduce variability in outcomes.

#### **Focus for Aberdeenshire: “How effective are our approaches to the use of data for improvement in primary schools?”**

The focus for the visit to Aberdeenshire Council was broad and considered the progress made in improving the outcomes, specifically in our primary school sector. The question for the collaborative improvement team was in relation to how data is being used to support improvement in our primary schools. At the time of the visit, several different areas of work were being progressed to support improvement in the use of data, both in supporting HTs to use data effectively within their own settings as well as its use by central officers to promote improvement in a universal, targeted or intensive approach, as appropriate.

Areas the authority has focused their improvements on include:

- ❖ Data packs for individual primary schools and subsequent development of Power Bi system to provide an analysis tool for every primary school on both ACEL and SNSA data.
- ❖ Universal, targeted and intensive offer to all primary schools including a key focus on high quality learning, teaching and assessment.
- ❖ QAMSO - Moderation work.
- ❖ Self-Improving Schools – Trios/Quads.
- ❖ Best Value audit Response – Targeted support in response to local authority Best Value Report
- ❖ Development of approaches to School Improvement Planning and Standards and Quality Reports.

Aberdeenshire has four key priorities for Education agreed in 2018 which remain key areas to focus on going forward. These are:

- Improve learning, teaching and assessment
- Partnership working to raise attainment
- Improvement through self-evaluation
- Developing leadership at all levels

The collaborative improvement visit therefore contributed to confirming progress made to date and also work in collaboration with Education Scotland and ADES to identify the next steps in our improvement journey. It was considered an appropriate time to take stock of progress and potential areas where more limited progress had been made, which could then be addressed as we move forward with our local authority priorities.

## Planning and process

A team including Aberdeenshire, ADES and Education Scotland were brought together to discuss the scope, ethos, process and outcomes on a number of occasions before the start of the engagement. The scoping meeting clarified the background and enabled Aberdeenshire senior officers to present some key information. ADES and Education Scotland leads set out the process, ethos and intended outcomes for the full team. Our Director and Chief Education Officer prepared information on the profile of Aberdeenshire including demographics and inspection information. A Glow and Teams site was prepared for the team members providing them with information on each of our six key areas. These online spaces also provided all with agendas for meetings and relevant recording documents.

The visit was coordinated by an ADES officer and Senior Regional Adviser working with the Director and Chief Education Officer responsible for education in Aberdeenshire. In addition, the team for the Collaborative Improvement visit included four members representing ADES who were all senior managers or heads of service coming from Edinburgh, Orkney, East Lothian, Dumfries and Galloway and East Dunbartonshire; a team from Education Scotland who were predominantly from the North Team alongside an experienced member of Education Scotland Inspectorate team.

The visit was carried out entirely remotely due to Covid restrictions. The visit was over a number of days and started with a presentation by our Director and Chief Education officer. A QIM from within the team shared the developments to date in all six key areas. These presentations set the scene and context and led into a discussion about the actions that had been taken and strengths and areas of challenge. A series of focus groups was then arranged and groups were joined by Education Scotland and local authority colleagues. An agreed agenda was used for each stakeholder meeting which was facilitated by a member of staff from Aberdeenshire. Notes were also taken by Aberdeenshire colleagues to support the collation of evidence during the visit. Each

stakeholder group explored where the authority was doing well what the challenges were; what would help moving forward and what next steps might be. At the end of each day a team discussion took place with sharing of information and an opportunity for clarification. Recording sheets from each focus group were collated and shared to form the basis of discussions on the focus for that day or any gaps in the information.

### Arriving at conclusions

A meeting of the full team took place at the end of the visit which was followed up with a two-hour meeting at the end of the following week. During this meeting all involved in the visit engaged in a discussion to arrive at a broad consensus on the main strengths and areas for consideration by the authority.

In general, the feedback was positive and mentioned much of the good work on-going across Aberdeenshire. The feedback focused on what was working well in Aberdeenshire and what areas we should consider focusing on next to ensure future improvement. The strengths and challenges were identified as follows:

### Strengths

- Building blocks are in place and good progress has continued to be made despite the challenges of the past two years.
- Relationships between schools and the centre are strong; genuine sense of trust and respect. Central team know their schools well and have a clear insight into performance of individual schools and clusters.
- Those schools who are engaging most with the work are benefitting from the experience; there is a genuine enthusiasm and commitment.
- HTs referred to being empowered, valued and respected.
- QAMSO moderation work has been successful and should continue to be built on.
- Trios are at an evolutionary stage and could be more successful with more opportunities for schools to focus on challenge as well as support.
- Power Bi development viewed positively with data (in this form) helping to shape focused improvement. Data sets are working well for schools who are engaging with it.
- SQulP is perceived as a live document used throughout the year; reduction in number of SQulP priorities was well received.
- A clear and focused plan had been developed in response to the Best Value report. As a team, the QIOs, attainment advisers and HTs are working well to improve attainment for the most deprived.

## Challenges

- Not all schools have “bought-in” to the current model; there requires to be a strategic priority to address this. A consistency of approach by QIO/M team will lead to greater consistency in schools and across clusters. Central team to consider and ensure consistency in universal, targeted and intensive offer to schools. This will also include a review of all evidence gathered from engagement with schools on agreed areas including SQUIP, leadership, learning, teaching and assessment, and attainment information.
- Making more consistent use of data to evaluate impact and inform school improvement priorities with a focus on closing the gap and challenging all learners to achieve.
- Clarity on Local Authority and schools’ targets; ensuring all children and young people receive a high-quality educational experience; this includes a clear focus on what is considered to be high quality learning, teaching and assessment within Aberdeenshire. Work on this area is due to be launches with all Aberdeenshire Schools in August 2022 which will give a clarity and a shared understanding across all schools about the core entitlements and expectations for learners.
- Taking the learning from the work in the North (Best Value response) and apply this to other areas of Aberdeenshire.
- How we share good practice across the authority.

## Planning for Improvement

- Launch the work of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Executive group in order to ensure a clear focus on all schools having an agreed statement on what constitutes a high-quality experience for learners within their setting. Central officers will be tasked with ensuring this is in place following a range of high profile CLPL events throughout session 22-23.
- Develop a clear and consistent approach to universal, targeted and intensive offer from the central team to all schools. All to be clear on processes and expectations.
- Continue to develop the use of data for improvement and link this work with authority stretch aims to ensure all schools are critically analysing all relevant data and clear goals are in place for both individual schools and the local authority.
- Continue with areas of work that support attainment and achievement of all learners including the Best Value response work plan and QAMSO approaches already started.



- Following the last two years of disruption, re start Self Improving Schools Trios work with a focus on Validated Self-Evaluation(VSE) and high-quality learning, teaching and assessment.

### What will happen next?

- On 29 June QIO/QIMs will meet to engage in professional dialogue around consistent approaches to universal, targeted and intensive approaches with all schools. This will be followed by a further event in August 2022. Clarity on expectations will be agreed and shared with schools following these events. Chief Education Officer and Director will offer support and challenge to QIMs on agreed approaches to support both consistency and accountability across the service.
- All schools across Aberdeenshire will receive a CLPL offer linking to high quality learning, teaching and assessment to support them in ensuring there is an agreed statement within their individual school setting. The work of the Learning Teaching and Assessment group will be launched on 31 August 2022. This will be followed by a series of events throughout the session, with high profile speakers leading training with all schools. Both Mark Burns and Shirley Clarke will be delivering training to all schools during In-Service days.
- Aberdeenshire Council will incorporate key aspects of the collaborative improvement visit into National Improvement Framework and Scottish Attainment Challenge planning for session 22-23.
- Education Scotland Locality team will continue to work alongside Aberdeenshire Council to support the delivery of the relevant actions.