

## **Summary of Findings**

**September 2021**

### **Fife Education & Children's Services, ADES and Education Scotland**

**Focus:** How Fife supports and challenges its schools, school leaders and their teams, and the impact this is having on school improvement and outcomes for children/young people.

**Dates:**

*Introductory Meeting – Setting the Context: Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2021, 9am (Virtual)*

*Fieldwork (Virtual) – Monday 13<sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> September – 9-430pm*

*Key Findings & Next Steps – Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> September, 9am – 12 noon*

### **Collaborative Improvement – ADES & Education Scotland**

In September 2021, managers and officers from the Education Service engaged in a collaborative improvement approach with colleagues from ADES and Education Scotland. The focus of this collaborative improvement was to consider aspects of the approach taken in Fife to supporting and challenging our schools, school leaders and their teams, and the impact this is having on school improvement and outcomes for children/young people.

**Context:**

In Fife Education Service, we are currently taking steps to:

- streamline improvement support from across teams to more clearly define what the universal, additional and intensive offers of support are for schools and practitioners.
- ensure that we are focusing resources on key priority areas.
- consider the nature of the improvement support to ensure that there is a focus on building capacity across the system in key areas, e.g., assessment and moderation, improvement methodology, etc.
- review delivery models, learning from the last two sessions on what has worked (virtually) and what we need to revisit that has been missed.
- improve communication around what is available to staff and schools.
- reflect on our income generation models and consider next steps as Covid restrictions ease.

### **Key Questions used to support professional dialogue and feedback:**

- What is working well?
- What could we do better?
- Are there ways in which we could build on the success of some of the approaches taken during the last 18 months?
- Are there aspects of our approaches to improvement support prior to the pandemic that we need to reinvigorate?

### **Structure & Format**

The introductory meeting on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> September afforded the opportunity for Carrie Lindsay (Executive Director) and Angela Logue (Head of Service) to set the context for the Collaborative Improvement in Fife. An overview of current attainment (CfE & SQA), attendance, exclusions, positive destinations and inspections data was shared with the CI

group to outline clearly areas of strength, where progress had been made and those areas requiring improvement, particularly in relation to the impact of the pandemic.

Strategic leads with responsibility for co-ordinating and delivering key aspects of improvement support to our schools, early learning centres and practitioners then provided more in-depth detail around specific systems, frameworks, networks and professional learning opportunities. For some aspects shared, approaches were well-established and potentially requiring a review, refresh and renewal to ensure they remained relevant to the current context, for others, they were at an earlier stage in their development and could benefit from an external perspective on the proposed direction of travel in these areas.

Themed groups were established around Self-Improving Systems, Equity, Literacy & Numeracy, and Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy. Each themed group consisted of the relevant Fife strategic leads, a colleague from ADES, Education Scotland and another local authority. These groups remained consistent throughout the collaborative improvement.

Over the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> September, 20 focus groups took place involving Fife managers, officers, Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers, Principal Teachers, class teachers, probationers and also partners from other services.

Theme group meetings also took place on both days to allow ample time for professional dialogue around the specific systems, frameworks, networks or professional learning opportunities being considered and the emerging feedback from focus group discussions.

Overall feedback was then shared as part of a full CI group meeting at the end of each day. In order to pull together the key findings and reflections from the Collaborative Improvement, the group convened finally on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> September. Angela Logue (Head of Service) provided an overview of the key strengths and next steps, in each of the themed areas, that had emerged from the discussions over the two and a half days.

These key strengths and identified next steps have now been considered further, following a closer analysis of the written feedback by Fife managers and officers. An overview of these is outlined below:

## **Findings**

### **Theme 1 - Self-Improving System**

#### Strengths Identified:

- Confident, empowered school leaders.
- School leaders have ownership of the system and supporting guidance which has evolved in line with national and local context.
- School leaders are actively seeking the support and the challenge that the system is designed to provide.
- Impacting positively on the quality of approaches to improvement within schools/ELCs.
- Strong culture of Professional Learning supported by a comprehensive Professional Learning & Leadership framework.

#### We need to consider in our next steps:

- Areas where there may be inconsistencies in approaches that are perceived to be/or are weakening the system.

- Communication Strategy around Directorate Priorities to ensure shared understanding and strengthening connectivity in the system.
- Engagement of Professional Associations to ensure they understand all stakeholders role in using a self-improving system to improve outcomes for all learners.
- Building capacity with all school leaders and Local Authority officers to ensure a shared understanding of expectations for evaluative grades, with a particular reference to returning to external scrutiny.
- Continuing review of approaches to data gathering to evaluate the impact of programmes on improving outcomes for children & young people.

## **Theme 2 - Equity & Quality Improvement Capacity Building**

### Strengths Identified:

- Commitment at LA level to building capacity in the use of improvement methodology to support improvement activity across the system.
- Use of QI methodology has grown from 'Grass roots' level - may have been a bit of a slow burner but now the potential to build pace and momentum – test small, with rigour, spread and scale learning at pace.
- Headteachers identified that Attainment Scotland Funding (ASF) network meetings were a good support and those who had received feedback on their PEF plan welcomed this.
- Learning with Care Strategy has moved at pace and staff were glad to hear of its strategic direction and how this can support care experienced young people in schools.
- Some schools were able to demonstrate how they had a continued focus on the cost of the school day as well as closing the poverty related attainment gap.

### We need to consider in our next steps:

- Use of QI methodology – still perceived by some as additional rather than fundamental to approaches to improvement – support across the system to link QI methodologies to SIP planning and approaches to addressing priorities.
- We need to include the voice of those with lived experience of care and the practitioners who support them in the evaluation of impact of the learning with care plan and setting the strategic direction of future plans.
- Building on the strength of the PEF (ASF) networks to provide more challenge to schools. Increase these opportunities to share good practice.
- To plan sustainable support and build capacity, schools need to continue to empower class teachers to take ownership of identifying the learning gaps, planning supports and tracking progress.

## **Theme 3 - Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy**

### Strengths Identified:

- Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy support materials are easily accessible in a structure/format that is used effectively by clusters, schools and practitioners to support PL and improvement activity, e.g., use of reflective questions are supporting self-evaluation activity and professional dialogue amongst practitioners, good practice is being highlighted, and links are made across Fife and beyond to relevant additional professional learning and self-evaluation materials.
- Promoting Playful Pedagogy (PPP) is having a positive impact on attainment, transitions and engagement of children in learning. Capacity is being built across the system through the sharing of practice, access to resources, opportunities to network

and development of skills, knowledge and understanding of how play supports learning across the curriculum.

- Assessment & Moderation Networks have been revitalised and are linked to training for existing and new QAMSOs (Quality Assurance & Moderation Support Officers). Raised profile of this through new networks and engagement with SEIC networks, increased engagement and ongoing communication of purpose/intended outcomes.

#### We need to consider in our next steps:

- Refresh, renew and relaunch Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy and supporting materials, emphasising key features of high-quality LTA that remain, developments in approaches during pandemic (digital), and also area of need that have increased that we will have a greater focus on.
- Assessment and Moderation – ensure that the expectations and expertise of QAMSOs are shared with all practitioners to achieve consistency in support available across LIFs, clusters, ELCs and schools. Spread and scale learning and developments resulting from quality improvement projects.
- Playful Pedagogy – Guidance on planning for progression as children move through stages to maintain momentum.
- Further engagement with data to analyse what characteristics of play pedagogy are having an impact on attainment to spread and scale, and to address areas where positive impact is not being observed.

### **Theme 4 - Literacy & Numeracy**

#### Strengths Identified:

- Enthusiasm for the Workshop for Literacy & Conceptual Understanding in Numeracy programmes from leaders and practitioners. These are well planned with up-to-date research evidence, regularly updated, and improved and are professionally delivered and well adapted to online delivery.
- The programme content is meeting the needs of practitioners with through a mix of professional discussion, dialogue and examining issues in depth with practical and easy to resource ideas for trying out in class and sharing with colleagues.
- Online PL has broadened accessibility for staff across Fife and is well used, adapting to different methods and models of delivery.

#### We need to consider in our next steps:

- We need to review our offers to school/practitioners and establish what is a universal offer for all and what is an additional offer for those with a particular focus.
- Develop guidance and support for schools to share with parents/carers and young people on the conceptual numeracy approach.
- Clarity of information, and further engagement with school leaders and central officers to secure a shared understanding of the approaches. This will support signposting; address improvement needs and ensure programmes are given adequate time and resource to achieve sustainable improvement in schools.
- Develop guidance and support for assessment within the approaches working with colleagues from Education Scotland and practitioners in school.
- As appropriate, develop impactful blended models of delivery where the best parts of online learning are complimented by the well-planned use of face-to-face engagement opportunities, for the right purposes at the right times.