

Interim Report on the Progress of Collaborative Improvement June 2021 – June 2022

Purpose of this report

This short report, on the progress of Collaborative Improvement, provides information to date on the process, including successes, areas for development and proposed next steps. It also raises some important questions for the Collaborative Improvement Strategic Group to consider.

Collaborative Improvement in short

- The first Collaborative Improvement took place in June 2021.
- As of June 2022, 11 local authorities have now been involved in Collaborative Improvement. (A list of these is included at the end of this report.) Nine of these took place online.
- It is important to recognise the impressive pace at Collaborative Improvement is being developed and delivered.
- All local authorities are included in a three-year Collaborative Improvement plan covering the period 2021- 2024.
- A wide range of colleagues from across the education system have been part of the Collaborative Improvement teams to date, as team members of one type or other.
- Guidance on Collaborative Improvement has been developed to help inform the process and should now be communicated formally by the respective organisations.
- Effective governance arrangements are in place to oversee the process.
- Through engagement in Collaborative Improvement, strong and effective working relationships are being further developed across local authorities, Education Scotland and Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES).

Background to Collaborative Improvement

The overall aim of Collaborative Improvement is to share what works well at a local authority level and to support improvement in areas in need of further development. Collaborative Improvement aims to promote partnership working to help ensure sustainable improvements for all children and young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is consistent with the national goal of achieving excellence and equity.

The target audience for Collaborative Improvement is local authority staff working in support of schools, establishments, services and education staff. This process aims to bring together the expertise and knowledge from across the system to secure improvement and share good practice. A significant number of officers from different local authorities have taken part in Collaborative Improvement across Scotland as part of the core Collaborative Team who engage with a host local authority team.

The intended benefit of local authorities being involved in Collaborative Improvement is that the host local authority should receive focused and specific support and challenge around

those areas which senior officers have identified as in need of development or improvement. This should have been identified previously through ongoing self-evaluation and local standards and quality reporting / improvement planning arrangements.

The 2018-2020 report of the International Council of Advisers (2020), recommended that Scotland should move still further beyond what has become known as a self-improving system to become a Networked Learning System (NLS).

An Networked Learning System is:

- connected through networks across physical, professional and virtual boundaries; and
- driven by design-based research and collaborative inquiry to innovate, test and refine practice and build leadership capacity through practice-based professional learning.

Collaborative Improvement is playing an integral part in delivering this important objective.

The Interim Review of Collaborative Improvement: Survey, summer 2022

How did we approach this and how did it work?

The Education Scotland Corporate Performance Team undertook a survey of colleagues from Education Scotland, ADES and local authorities more generally who have had direct involvement in Collaborative Improvement, guided by key personnel from the Collaborative Improvement Strategic Team.

The survey invited responses to nine key questions, some of which contained a further series of questions. (See Appendix 2)

What key messages emerged from the survey?

Almost all respondents either strongly agree or agree that:

- the focus for the Collaborative Improvement (CI) was appropriate
- the purpose and process clearly explained
- time spent on the CI process was appropriate
- colleagues from different organisations worked well together
- discussions were open and honest.
- the process felt like an equal partnership
- they enjoyed participating
- they have taken/will take specific actions in response to participating
- they gained a lot from the process as an individual
- they believed that learners and educators would benefit from the CI as well as their own organisation; and that
- the process is worthwhile and worth developing further.

The majority were unsure if the host authority wrote and published a report following the CI. A few commented that there was a risk of always celebrating successes.

A few would also have liked to engage more with different authorities.

Other comments included that the process could have benefitted from involving a wider range of stakeholders.

Areas of focus to date

Local authorities have identified a range of different areas to review and improve performance. These have included the following:

- closing the poverty-related attainment gap and ensuring that all children and young people achieve their potential- identifying practice as to why some schools are having more success than others within similar localities;
- addressing downward trends in attainment for learners in primary schools;
- looking at ways to improve outcomes for learners in numeracy and mathematics and the related learning and teaching;
- understanding the challenges for different groups of learners who have additional support needs, particularly at S2/ S3;
- discussing how the collection and analysis of data informs improvement priorities and asking if these are the right priorities? Exploring evidence for success for this recovery approach;
- exploring ways in which central and local quality assurance systems support improvements in attainment and achievement at school and establishment level;
- reviewing curricular pathways and the impact for learners at key stages in secondary, including the BGE and the Senior Phase;
- improving the work of local support groups to help improve outcomes for groups of children and young people; and
- analysing evidence of approaches to inclusion, reviewing the impact and identifying possible next steps.

Overall, the areas of focus have allowed in-depth and important discussion of significant aspects of each local authority's development and plan for continued improvement. It is important, moving forward, that the selected focus should be very firmly rooted in each local authority's self-evaluation findings.

From both the survey and all other sources of feedback on Collaborative Improvement to date, what are the emerging key strengths?

- All thirty-two of Scotland's local authorities are signed up to participation in Collaborative Improvement and a planned programme is in place to undertake these.
- In a period of one year, (approximately) Collaborative Improvement has been conceived, planned, launched, implemented and now reviewed.
- Almost all local authorities which have been involved directly to date (host local authorities) are very positive about the process and impact of Collaborative Improvement.
- Host local authorities value the level of 'ownership' the process affords.
- The emphasis on self-evaluation as the basis of Collaborative Improvement is positive and welcomed.
- Collaborative Improvement has involved large numbers of colleagues across the country.
- In most Collaborative Improvements to date, local authorities have involved directly colleagues from schools and centres. This helps spread understanding of Collaborative Improvement and, potentially, its impact.
- Colleagues who have been directly involved in Collaborative Improvement are very positive about the experience and the level and quality of professional dialogue encountered.

- Almost all have commented on the how quickly disparate individuals from different organisations 'hit the ground running' in terms of teamwork and trust.
- Related to this, colleagues from Education Scotland and ADES who have been on teams together have had very positive working relationships.
- Many comment on the value of having 'protected time' together during which they can address an important and relevant topic.
- Every local authority has produced a written report; almost all of these have been shared in one form or another with local elected members.
- These reports are a valuable source of practice-sharing and learning for colleagues across the country.
- Each Collaborative Improvement leads to a written action plan and an agenda for moving forward.
- Involvement in Collaborative Improvement has stimulated and enhanced connections and relationships between and amongst local authority personnel in Scotland.
- There is emerging evidence of the Collaborative Improvement model being embraced and applied in a number of local authorities as a result of their direct involvement in CI and the value they place on it.

How can we ensure further improvement in Collaborative Improvement?

Guidance:

The Collaborative Improvement Guidance now needs to be agreed, shared, highlighted, understood and applied effectively across all of the engagements.

Based on self-evaluation:

Part of the original rationale for Collaborative Improvement was that the area of focus should be intelligence-led and based on clear self-evaluation. This now needs to be re-emphasised and applied consistently in each of the Collaborative Improvements.

Reporting:

- Agree, share and implement brief advice on reporting generally and steps required in drafting the written report.
- This advice should include guidance on the structure of a report - for example, length of the report, any standard text to be included, statistical information, action planning, timescales.
- The guidance should make it clear who sees the draft reports, and at what stage, in order to comment on the accuracy of the content, including use of evaluative language.
- In framing the report, where possible, reference should be made to the intended/resulting improved outcomes.

Size of teams

- The size of respective teams appears to vary quite considerably. We now need to decide and agree on the parameters for team-size, ensuring that teams are relatively tight in numbers.

- In early Collaborative Improvements, Education Scotland provided a brief but very helpful summary (based on intelligence in the public domain) of ‘what we know about’ the area of focus selected by the host local authority e.g. inspection outcomes. This should now be re-introduced.

Further evaluation

- The Strategic Group has identified the need for a further, external evaluation of the impact of Collaborative Improvement on improving outcomes across those participating local authorities. This should be undertaken at an appropriate point in the future: to be agreed.

Key questions for further discussion and exploration by the Collaborative Improvement Strategic Group

- Governance arrangements – do we have these right?
- The scope and parameters of Collaborative Improvement: deciding what is in scope and what is not?
- Education Scotland has targeted work with identified local authorities: how to make the most of this situation? Where does Collaborative Improvement sit with targeted intervention?
- Resourcing future Collaborative Improvements

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Host local authorities which have engaged in, and undertaken, Collaborative Improvement to date

- South Ayrshire – pilot
- Fife- pilot
- Perth and Kinross
- Inverclyde
- Clackmannanshire
- Aberdeenshire
- Western Isles
- Orkney
- Shetland
- East Renfrewshire
- Glasgow
- Scottish Borders Council (August 2022)

Next Local Authorities to be involved with planning already underway:

- South Lanarkshire (September / October 2022)
- Highland (October 2022)
- Midlothian (November 2022)
- Dundee (January 2023)

Appendix 2

The Questions asked in the survey:

- *Which organisation do you work for?*
- *What is your job role?*
- *What was the focus of the Collaborative Improvement (CI)? (If you were involved in more than one CI, please list all themes)*
- *How was your CI undertaken?*

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

- *The area of focus agreed for the CI was appropriate*
- *The purpose for the CI was clearly explained*
- *The process for the CI was clearly explained*
- *The time spent on the CI process was appropriate*
- *Colleagues from the different organisations worked well together*
- *Discussions in the CI environment were open*
- *Discussions in the CI environment were honest*
- *The process felt like an equal partnership*
- *I enjoyed participating in the CI*
- *I have taken/will take specific actions in response to participating in the CI*
- *I gained a lot from the process as an individual*
- *I believe that learners will benefit from the CI*
- *I believe that educators will benefit from the CI*
- *My organisation benefited from involvement with the CI*
- *The process is worthwhile and worth developing further*

- *Please use the box below to provide any comments on the statements in question above.*

- *Did the host authority write and publish a report after the CI?*

- *In what ways could the process be improved?*

January 2023