

Highland Children's Forum Briefing

Date: 13th May 2019

Report Title: Briefing in response to Transformational Change in Highland Education

Report by: Policy Lead



1. Summary:

- 1.1 The purpose of this briefing is to respond to the ["Transformational Change in Highland Education"](#) report tabled at the Care, Learning and Housing Committee 14th March 19, with reference to the later ["Additional Support Needs \(ASN\) Transformation"](#) paper and the ["Detailed Sheets – All Themes"](#) savings summary of the Highland Council meeting of 14th February.

2. Recommendations:

- i. The voice of children/young people should be built in to every level of the transformational change programme - children should be meaningfully engaged and involved from the beginning.
- ii. Get it right for every child: **every** child should benefit from the transformation from day one and no individual child should be impaired by the process of change.
- iii. Clarify the Pathway to Inclusion: how children will be involved in its development; how it will be delivered, how it will be resourced, how those who have resisted inclusion so far will be brought on board; what is a realistic timescale.
- iv. Build in independent evaluation and monitoring of the transformational programme.

3. Foundations

- 3.1 Highland Council was the leader of Getting it Right for Every Child approach. GIRFEC has been the foundation of all service improvement in Highland for a decade. The Scottish Government endorsed the approach in the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#).
- 3.2 The GIRFEC approach begins with the child at the centre, living within a family and within a community. The approach seeks to build resilience by recognising the strengths as well as the pressures on the individual child, family and community and working with each as equal partners to identify ways to move forward.
- 3.3 The SHANARRI wellbeing indicators provide a social model with the same desired outcomes for all and recognition that most children will experience adverse circumstances at some point in their childhood and will need short term additional support.
- 3.4 Highland Council became the first [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) (ACE) aware council in Scotland. To follow through on that awareness, adversity needs to be recognised and support put in place to minimise the life long impact of multiple adversity in childhood.
- 3.5 Under [UNCRC](#), children have a **right** to having a say in decisions that affect them.
- 3.6 It is from these foundations that the transformation should be built.

4. Transformational Change in Highland Education

- 4.1 The background of the report provides data from the [Local Government Benchmark Framework](#). In this data the Highland Council does achieve a slightly lower tariff in terms of attainment (848 compared to national tariff of 891). However, in the data about positive destinations post-school, Highland is fifth highest in the country (and indeed is the highest in the comparator group of

- councils) with 96% compared to the national average of 94.4% In a council that has focussed on the wellbeing of all children it might be argued that positive destinations after school is a more relevant measure than the number of young people able to pass exams.
- 4.2 Highland exclusion rate is lower than the national average, but ideally exclusion would be the exception. There are excellent Highland policies on exclusion and part-time timetables. The issue raised in the [HCF Not in Full Time Education \(NIFTE\) 2018](#) consultation report is that these policies are not always adhered to. HCF continues to work with young people and professionals to help identify ways that good practice could become more consistent.
 - 4.3 Engagement with Councillors and Head Teachers will not provide a full picture. Highland is a GIRFEC Council, the voice of children and young people should be central to any review of children's services. Families and the whole school community are also key partners. From the [Christie Commission Report 2011](#) (to [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)) it has been recognised that "reforms must aim to empower individuals and communities receiving public services by involving them in design and delivery of the services they use." (Christie 2011, pVI)
 - 4.4 Efficiency of staff management is clearly a priority for any organisation. Reduction of school staff absence costs might be made more difficult if staff feel that they are not being consulted about proposed changes.
 - 4.5 The review of Additional Support Needs (ASN) education is something that Highland Children's Forum would support, based on the responses from the [NIFTE reports \(2018\)](#). However, this review would need to begin with engagement with children and young people with ASN in the first place, their families and school staff. In the NIFTE consultation, which listened to young people, parents and professionals, the good practice identified was when the Highland Practice Model (HPM) policy and guidance was used and challenges to accessing a full time education were often when there was a failure in this approach. It is not a new approach that is needed but one where every member of staff and every school consistently follow the HPM.
 - 4.6 The recently published [Promoting Positive Relationships Policy and Guidance](#) contains lots of training options on emotional literacy, nurture etc to improve teacher understanding and capacity to work in a more trauma informed and relationship based way. Training for the Highland Practice Model has been available for a decade and everyone who works with children/young people should have that training and renew it every three years. Making training available on its own has not yet led to culture change and consistent inclusive practice as the NIFTE report demonstrates.
 - 4.7 Young people from Highland Children's Forum are keen to be involved in developing training resources for schools. Highland Children's Forum is working towards this and would welcome the opportunity to speak to the Change Team about what we might be able to offer.

5 Additional Support Needs (ASN) Transformation

- 5.1 Percentages of recognised ASN in Highland are higher than other local authorities. This does not indicate that Highland are over counting additional support needs, it is because there has been a major push by the Head of Additional Support over the last four or five years to get school staff to record on Seemis every individual child with ASN, whatever the level of such need.
- 5.2 The recording of additional needs is not consistent across Local Authorities. [Scottish Children's Services Coalition](#) recognises this and includes in its recommendations to Scottish Government: "*Deliver better recording and reporting of ASN – there must be clearer guidance from the Scottish Government to local authorities to ensure the consistent and meaningful identification and recording of*

pupils with ASN given the significant variation between local authorities in the number of those identified with ASN. This is a vital first step in ensuring that spending is in line with the level of need in their area.”

- 5.3 When Highland Children’s Forum carried out its report on [“Inclusion: What difference would there be if children’s experience framed policy?” 2005](#), the level of children with ASN in Highland was unknown. As cited in HCF [“Are we there yet?” Interim Report 2006](#) “For Highland Children’s 2 (2005-2008)” produced a diagram estimating that at any one time 34% of children would have no additional support needs. In 2019, after the tremendous push to measure every level of need, 59% are considered to have no additional support needs.
- 5.4 It is reasonable to expect that when you start counting and recording a level of need in the population that existed but was not previously counted, you will find a percentage of people within that population with needs and as recognition of ASN improves, that number will go up.
- 5.5 There is evidence of a growing number of additional support needs in the population at large. The prevalence of autism in the UK is 1 in 100 today ([National Autistic Society](#)). The [Center for Disease Control’s Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring \(USA\)](#) report on the prevalence of autism notes a 14% increase in the last 2 years, 47% increase since 2012. Mental health problems are increasing in young people, an estimated 1 in 5 young people ([Mental Health 2019](#)). [Health Affairs \(2014\)](#) describes an increase in both the number of children with complex disability surviving through childhood and an increase in the number of children with chronic conditions.
- 5.6 There is anecdotal evidence in Highland of families who choose to move here when they have a child with additional support needs, thinking the lifestyle will be more suitable. So the proportion of children with ASN living in Highland may be higher as well as better recognised.
- 5.7 The engagement listed does not include children and young people with ASN, the most important group to listen to as it is their experience and outcomes the review is seeking to transform.
- 5.8 Engagement with parent carers is also essential.
- 5.9 The plan to “focus on embedding professional practice and skills within the school system” is a good focus. However, the HPM training has been undertaken by all staff and the [NIFTE \(2018\)](#) report would suggest that not all staff put that training into practice. Training alone will not change practice.
- 5.10 A review of the PSAs in Highland schools is welcome. It is in everyone’s interests to have the right support in the right place. Young people have made clear to HCF in the [NIFTE 2018 report](#) and as part of the HCF Young People’s Action Group that PSAs have been critical to the ability of many to access school. The engagement of children/young people and parents is essential to ensure that any reduction in the level of PSA support in schools does not negatively impact any child’s ability to access full time education.
- 5.11 It is said that teachers and PSAs will be supported through the change process, but no details are given of how this will be done and given the current financial pressures, how it will be resourced.
- 5.12 Highland Children’s Forum would welcome any move that would make good practice in inclusion more consistent across Highland. It is not clear how this will be delivered with the planned reductions.
- 5.13 “our assessed need is the highest of our benchmark group” This is something to be proud of. Highland is ensuring that the Getting it Right for **Every** Child approach is being put into action.

6 Detailed Sheets – All themes (from pages 75-99)

- 6.1 **Savings reference 3.8:** it should be clear that any comparison between Local Authorities about the number of pupils recorded as having ASN shows wide variance because Local Authorities record ASN very differently.
- 6.2 HCF would welcome: school cluster approaches to support where that works; community based approaches to supporting young people with mental health and other challenges; a whole school approach to Specific Learning Disorders, so long as it does not detract from the individual child-centred GIRFEC approach.
- 6.3 The equality impact assessment highlights the need for the transformation process to be properly resourced to mitigate against the potential negative impact of the changes across many of the equality characteristics. Transformational Change may bring about efficiencies and cost savings in the long term, but the change process may be costly. **No individual child or young person** should suffer a negative impact from the transformation programme.
- 6.4 **Savings reference 3.9:** adapted transport to school. It is important to take into consideration mental/emotional barriers to travel as well as physical ones. HCF has heard from children over the years who through bullying, sensory overload or other reasons could not manage the school bus.
- 6.5 **Savings reference 3.11:** The principle of providing children with the right support to stay in Highland close to their family and community is one HCF would uphold. However, no child is sent out of authority lightly. These children have very complex needs that Highland were not able to meet. Often this can be due to a level of specialism that is required that is just not available in Highland due to our smaller population. To meet these complex needs, packages need to be bespoke providing the right support and specialism. This requires involvement of the child, family and community in the planning process. No child should be brought back to Highland without the right individual package in place.
- 6.6 **Savings reference 3.13:** the plan to move children going into foster or residential care into the local school (rather than transporting them to their previous school) might well be the right move. But it might be too much transition for the child all at once. In the HCF ["Ideas about Sadness report" 2011](#) children recognised the stress of an initial trauma being compounded by many aspects of life changing at the same time. These decisions should be based on the needs of the individual child, not a transport saving.
- 6.7 **Savings reference 4.1:** The use of Local Government Benchmarking is only one way of planning support in schools. The relative weight given to the data about attainment compared to the data about positive destinations after school needs to be carefully considered.
- 6.8 As previously stated the higher number of ASN recorded is not comparable with other local authorities. Recognition of need is essential to fair allocation of additional resource.
- 6.9 The transformation is heavy reliant on staff training leading to a change in culture and better inclusion. The inclusion children and young people are asking for is already embedded in the Highland Practice Model for which everyone has had training. It is consistent practice that is needed and perhaps the ASG focus on quality improvement may support this.
- 6.10 The engagement of children and young people is essential to any improvement process in schools and HCF have proposed development of a framework of Young Ambassadors for Inclusion to be actively involved in development of school improvement plans in every ASG.
- 6.11 **Savings reference 4.2:** the equality impact assessment points out that training will need to be effective in bringing change to prevent a negative impact. Engagement with children as well as staff is essential in the re-design.