

## Highland Children's Forum

### Not in Full Time Education Consultation Briefing 2018



#### Background

Highland Children's Forum undertook a consultation about the issue of children and young people not in full time education in response to anecdotal evidence of an increasing number of young people in Highland with additional support needs who were not accessing their right to a full-time education.

The aim of the Not in Full-time Education (NIFTE) consultation was to explore with young people, parents and professionals the main issues facing young people's ability to access school-full time. Three separate reports from each of these consultations are available from [Highland Children's Forum website](#).

**"I felt a lot of teachers were just there to do a job - they didn't know or understand the pupils, didn't know you personally."**

**Summary of Findings: The overarching theme of the responses, from young people, parents and professionals, was about attitude: the solution was to build positive relationships built on empathy and understanding.**

Each consultation sought examples of good practice, barriers/challenges, and suggestions for improved practice. Young people and parents were asked about the impact of school experience. Young people were asked about what helped them get back to school. Professionals were asked to reflect on aspects of their practice. While each report had particular emphasis, there were some clear cross-cutting themes emerging.

Good practice examples were when Highland Practice Model policy and guidance were adopted. While some innovative and flexible ideas were shared, examples mostly focused on when young people and parents experienced empathy, respect, understanding and a solution focused willingness to be flexible to meet need. Good partnership working and good communication were key too.

Challenges identified by all three reports, were about a failure in this approach. Some school staff had a negative attitude towards children and families and did not listen, understand, or involve them in planning. Barriers identified included aspects of accessibility of the building, the social environment and of the school timetable.

The greatest impact of negative school experience was on young people's mental health, although their achievement and friendships were also affected. Families were impacted both financially and emotionally.

Suggestions for improvements are already in Highland policy and guidance, but need to become part of consistent practice. The recommendation is that practice should be audited against policy to ensure the best outcomes for young people.

## Overview

The three linked consultations were carried out across Highland between January and June 2017. Consultation took place through focus groups, one to one interviews or questionnaire.

The consultation with young people involved 30 young people aged between 10-21 years, half of whom were on part-time tables. Young people self-identified a range of additional support needs, almost half (14) included mental health issues. The consultation with parent involved 21 parents, 17 of whom had young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The consultation with Professionals involved 24 professionals from both public and third sectors including NHS Highland, Highland Council, Barnardo's Scotland, Women's Aid, Children in Highland Information Point (CHIP+) and young carers groups.

**"She asks me how I'm doing every day. I look up to her, her opinion matters to me, she helps me with my personal issues." (comment from young person)**

**"Everyone should be trained in emotional literacy, all of us singing from the same hymn book in a positive manner even if things are not positive." (comment from professional)**

**"He would be allowed to lie down in the class or library for half an hour and it was no problem. He could come in on a limited timetable. He could be outside and have a rest if he wanted." (comment from parent)**

## Good Practice

Young people were asked about a "good day" rather than for "examples of good practice". Gaining qualifications and being with peers were the positives mentioned most often. In terms of comments that reflect good practice, young people described staff who were understanding and responsive to individuals (i.e. person-centred) and schools with flexibility in timetable and curriculum.

This compares with the priorities of parents, who, in order of preference, commented on person-centred staff, flexibility within schools, staff from the wider Family Team and good partnership working. The good practice mentioned by professionals was overwhelmingly about good person-centred practice also mentioning good partnership working.

The description of good person-centred practice was when staff were understanding and kind; when they listened and were willing to be creative to meet individual need. The flexibility described was in terms of individual adaptations to timetable and curriculum. Other examples given were about good partnership working between schools or between schools and other professionals/providers.

## Barriers and Challenges

Young people were asked about a “bad day” rather than “barriers and challenges”. Most young people (27 out of 30) identified the attitude of school staff as a reason for a bad day. In order of preference other barriers/challenges were about the school environment, peer and social interactions, bullying being the most common issue, and a lack of flexibility and understanding of individual needs.

Staff attitude, towards both parents and young people, was the barrier most mentioned by parents (it was the fourth barrier identified by professionals). An equal number (20) of parents and professionals listed a lack of resources as a challenge, where only a handful of young people commented on this.

An equal number (14) of parents and professionals commented on the school environment being a barrier.

Parents and professionals recognised the challenge of peer and social interactions, but it was a lower priority compared to the young people. Professionals saw this in terms of the huge challenge to young people in re-establishing peer relationships when returning to school.

The Child’s Plan process was a particular barrier for parents (15). Only parents mentioned a lack of consistency as a barrier, although consistency had been recognised by professionals as good practice.

Across the reports, barriers and challenges reflected the opposite of the person-centred and flexible approach mentioned in good practice.

## Impact of School Experience

Young people and parents answered this question. Both listed mental health issues, particularly anxiety, as the biggest impact on young people. While anxiety was the most frequently mentioned mental health problem, some parents reported that their children had expressed suicidal thoughts.

Young people also said their own educational attainment was impacted. They also recognised the emotional and financial impact on their families.

Parents put less emphasis on attainment and more on the impact on family life, which affected siblings as well as parents. A third of parents had been forced to give up work, making a huge financial impact.

Parents also mentioned the impact on the young person’s social interactions and engagement with the school.

## What helped young people return to school

Young people identified what helped them get back to school. Schools and services who listened, supported and provided options helped. Families who supported but also pushed the young person into attendance helped. The young people recognised that much of what helped was the effort they made themselves trying to get back to school and making it work.

## Professional Reflection on Practice

Less than half of professionals felt sufficiently supported and listened to in the Child’s Plan assessment, review or planning process, and did not always get the information they needed. Training was said to be sufficient.

Professionals reported part-time timetables could be useful if well managed, but there was insufficient resources or alternative activities available.

# Report Recommendation: Audit of Practice

- 1. Audit practice against the Highland Practice Model** In consultation with young person and parents, before a part-time timetable or exclusion is considered or when a young person first begins to struggle with school attendance, ask the following questions.
- 2. How person-centred is practice?** Does the young person, and do the parents, feel listened to and respected? Has there been as much focus on strengths as challenges? How individualised is support?
- 3. How flexible is the structure of the school day?** How well balanced is consistency and flexibility in the school day? Are adaptations made to meet the young person's needs? How well planned are transitions?
- 4. How wide are options for learning?** Are different learning opportunities sought, both from within and out with the school, to ensure all young people have access to learning that is effective in enabling each individual to achieve?
- 5. How well does physical environment meet needs?** Does the learning environment meet the young person's needs? Are there quiet spaces to withdraw to? Are young people able to move in corridors when less crowded?
- 6. How well is any time out of school managed?** Is a proposed part-time timetable or planned exclusion solution focussed towards re-integration to school? Is support for young person struggling with full time attendance solution focussed towards re-integration?
- 7. How good is communication and partnership working?** How up to date with the young person's progress are all partners to the Child's Plan? Does information sharing between partners, including relief teaching staff, enable consistent support?
- 8. Are current resources put to best use?** Working in collaboration with partners, is there best value from resources? Are there alternative approaches or opportunities that could work better?
- 9. How positive are relationships across the school?** Does the school ethos ensure a compassionate, respectful and non-judgemental approach from all school staff? How well is bullying dealt with?
- 10. How mentally healthy is the school?** How well are young people supported to deal with stress, challenging behaviour or poor mental health? Does the school have a whole school approach to mental health promotion, early intervention and timely access to care?

Links to relevant policy and guidance:

['The Highland Practice Model Guidance'](#)

['Pupils Not in Full-time Education Guidance for Schools'](#)

['included, Engaged and Involved: Management of Exclusion in Schools'](#)

['Care & Learning Service Accessibility Strategy', 2016-2019](#)

['Positive Relationships and Bullying Prevention Policy, Guidance and Toolkit'](#)