

Item: 8

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 5 June 2019.

Review of Support for Learning – Follow-up Survey.

Report by Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.

1. Purpose of Report

To present the outcome of the further review of the impact of the revised allocation of Support for Learning Assistants.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That, on 14 November 2018, the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee considered a review of support for learning provision in Orkney's schools which had been carried out over an 18-month period, noting that, although the revised deployment arrangement for Support for Learning Assistants was achieved in August 2018, the full impact would not be known until early 2019 as the changes required to be phased in.

2.2.

That the Committee subsequently requested that, once the changes referred to above were in place, the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing should undertake a further review of the impact of the revised allocation of Support for Learning Assistants within schools and thereafter submit the results to a meeting of the Committee no later than June 2019.

2.3.

That, in order to evaluate the impact of the revised allocation of Support for Learning Assistants within schools, a follow-up survey of parents, carers and young people has been carried out.

2.4.

That, when reviewing the allocation and deployment of Support for Learning Assistants for academic year 2019 to 2020, an additional evaluation of "unmet need" has been undertaken, as detailed in section 6 of this report.

2.5.

That, when reviewing the allocation and deployment of Support for Learning Assistants, the largest request for additional support is being generated by the two “resourced schools”, namely Kirkwall Grammar School and Glaitness School.

2.6.

The proposal that the Resource School components of Kirkwall Grammar School and Glaitness School should benefit from a fixed portion of additional staffing, so that they can be removed from the annual review of deployment of Support for Learning Assistants.

2.7.

That consideration be given to establishing a more diverse professional team to work across the two schools, including a formal exploration of partnership working with all relevant agencies and services in Orkney.

It is recommended:

2.8.

That the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing should review the overall staffing arrangements for Kirkwall Grammar School and Glaitness School and thereafter submit a report, to the next appropriate meeting of the Committee, regarding an appropriate staffing model for the Resource School components of both schools.

2.7.

That the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing should submit a report, to a future meeting of the Committee, on how the Pupil Equity Fund is being utilised in order to meet learners’ needs.

3. Introduction

Previous Council decisions relating to this item are attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

4. Background

4.1.

On 14 November 2018, the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee considered a review of support for learning provision in Orkney’s schools which had been carried out over an 18-month period. The Committee was advised that, although the revised deployment arrangement for Support for Learning Assistants was achieved in August 2018, the full impact would not be known until early 2019 as the changes required were phased in.

4.2.

The Committee recommended approval of the recommendations of the review of support for learning provision and subsequently requested that, once the changes referred to above were in place, the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing should undertake a further review of the impact of the revised allocation of Support for Learning Assistants within schools and thereafter submit the results to a meeting of the Committee no later than June 2019.

4.3.

This report provides the detail of the work undertaken to understand the impact of the change by considering the views of parents and carers alongside an assessment of unmet need, which is based on the work carried out by head teachers within schools.

5. Follow-Up Survey

5.1.

As part of the original review, reported to Committee in November 2018, it was decided to seek feedback from parents and pupils to gauge satisfaction with the Support for Learning being provided. The most effective and efficient way of seeking this information was judged to be by means of a questionnaire.

5.2.

In March 2017, a targeted invitation was sent out by schools to parents of all children receiving intervention anywhere from Stage 1 to 5 on the Staged Intervention Framework. Parents were invited to complete a brief, anonymous questionnaire either online, or paper. The questionnaire consisted of four simple questions designed to:

- Gauge general satisfaction.
- Identify the type of support being provided.
- Find out what impact the support was having.
- Identify any further support that the parent felt their child needed.

5.3.

A total of 132 responses were received. 84% of the returns were completed by just the parent or carer, and 16% by the parent/carer in collaboration with the child/young person.

5.4.

In order to assess the impact of the changes that were made to support for learning assistant provision across schools, prior to the start of the school year 2018 to 2019, a follow up survey took place in March 2019.

5.5.

The same core questions, attached as Appendix 2 to this report, and the same approach to distribution, were used. This time, however, just 48 responses were received. 79% of the returns were completed by just the parent or carer, and 21% by the parent/carers in collaboration with the child/young person.

5.6.

A chart illustrating the key change that has taken place between 2017 and 2019 is attached as Appendix 3 to this report.

5.7.

In 2017, 78% of respondents either agreed and strongly agreed that their child was getting the support they need in order to develop, learn and achieve. In the 2019 survey this has reduced to 43%.

5.8.

Consideration should be given to a significant reduction in number of respondents being 48 compared to 132 and how this might impact on the results. The reason for the lower return rate is unclear. At the time of the original survey other work, such as discussion with pupils and staff, was also being undertaken, which may have added to the profile of the review. Whatever the reason, the lower response rate is disappointing. It should also be noted that both surveys offer a “sample” of views in so far as there are in the order of 700 children across the schools, at any one time, who are formally recognised as having an additional support need.

5.9.

Even with these caveats in mind, the reduction in confidence is significant. This is perhaps echoed in the parallel increase in the percentage of parents who now are stating that the “don’t know” if their child is receiving the support they need.

5.10.

Respondents were also invited to make comments. Section 5.11 below typifies the type of responses made in the 2019 follow-up survey.

5.11.

5.11.1

When asked ‘How is the support your child receives helping?’ some parents and carers commented positively as follows:

- Enables my child to receive an education within a school setting.
- Confidence.
- Happy and fun learning.
- Targeted skills coming on a treat.
- Time with the support for learning teacher has really helped his confidence.

- Improved English (written, reading and spoken) skills.
- Social skills and enthusiasm are improving.
- Adapting the learning environment to her needs.
- Each teacher within school adapts the way she is taught.

5.11.2.

However, others commented, as follows:

- It doesn't as the people working with her are constantly changing due to high staff absence so difficult to build a relationship of trust.
- Has not received any support.
- Mismatched to needs and not understood.
- Don't know, not been notified.
- Doesn't receive any for dyslexia.
- Some children need more one on one time to help them if they are struggling in certain areas of the curriculum.

5.12.

When asked 'is there any support that you think would further help your child with their learning?', comments included:

- More support time.
- More input from Speech and Language Therapy Service.
- Although school and staff in particular are doing their very best to be flexible, I believe they struggle at times to provide continuity of assistants, as they are short staffed a lot of the time.
- We are waiting (far too long) for an assessment.
- Support to help our child integrate into class more.
- I think that as parents we could be given more information and guidance on how to help our child. I feel although we get updates on the work being done we have not been given any advice on how we can help at home.

5.13.

When asked if they had any other comments, parents and carers stated:

- School supports my child well.
- Thank you.
- I would like support to be continued in school.
- Children need support to learn and grow. Without full time support he would not have this opportunity. SFLAs are a vital part of the school to allow him to achieve and be included within the school.
- Sitting with no help when obviously struggling is horrendous.

- The huge reduction in learning support assistants in the classroom has had a significant impact on the time spent actually teaching the children who wish to learn, and this has impacted my child's learning.

5.14.

Overall the survey results tend to confirm the finding of the original review in so far as 'when it's done well it works well', however there would appear to be more unmet needs now than previously as well as a lower level of confidence that the school will be able to meet the needs of the children and young people in it.

6. Unmet Needs

6.1.

Since February 2019, Service Improvement Officers and the Educational Psychology team have been working with schools to review the allocation and deployment of the service's Support for Learning Assistants for the academic year 2019 to 2020. This process was first applied, in order to determine the allocation for the current year, 2018 to 2019. It includes elements of moderation across the school to ensure the response to needs between settings is consistent.

6.2.

The difference between the agreed "ask" and the available resource serves as a proxy for the level of unmet need across the schools.

6.3.

Collectively schools initially requested 2960 hours of support time for 2019 to 2020. Following a moderation process, which looks to ensure that there is equity of deployment across different settings, this has been reduced to 2140 hours. This is a higher level of support than was available in 2018, prior to the number of learning support assistants being reduced in order to manage the service within the available budget.

6.4.

The current available resource in the order of 1450 hours, meaning that there is an "unmet need" equating to 690 hours.

6.5.

In setting the budget for 2019 to 2020, Council agreed to a service pressure bid of £165,000 with respect to additional support needs. How this translates into pupil focused support is being discussed with head teachers, as a number of options exist. However, the additional £165,000 would equate to approximately 320 hours of support. This means that after the moderation exercise and the application of the additional resource, there is an unmet need of around 370 hours across the schools.

6.6.

There are two significant implications that arise from this position. The first is that schools are not in a position to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care, with an associated impact on learning, progress, achievement and wellbeing. In many cases, in practice, this simply means schools are reporting that they will not be able to do everything they would like to be able to do. In some instances, however, there is residual concern about the welfare of the young people involved. Where this has been highlighted, Service Improvement Officers will continue to work with the schools to ensure priority needs are met first.

6.7.

The second is that the wellbeing of staff is adversely affected. Head teachers are reporting that the demands of the curriculum, and meeting the needs of learners, are adversely impacting on the health of some staff. In some instances, however, the impact is more difficult to describe as it is the combination of factors (staff turn-over, staff maternity leave, unrelated long term sickness) that is making the difference. These factors make providing a consistent and stable learning environment more challenging, which in itself creates a number of issues. One solution is to add additional support staff to the situation, so the context or learning environment can be improved. In these situations, it is not the needs of the learner that are the key driver, rather the needs of the setting.

6.8.

Looking across the schools, the biggest request for additional support is being generated by the two “resourced schools” which are Kirkwall Grammar School and Glaitness School. Given the role and function of the two resourced schools, it is recommended that the overall staffing arrangements for these schools is revisited so that they are not included in the annual review of Support for Learning Assistant deployment. It may be that the solution, including a formal exploration of partnership working with the relevant agencies and services in Orkney, is for a different type of professional staff/therapist requirement, which would improve the overall offer for the children and young people.

7. Pupil Equity Fund

7.1.

The Pupil Equity Fund is additional funding allocated directly to schools by the Scottish Government and is targeted at closing the poverty related attainment gap.

7.2.

Although the funding is allocated to schools on the basis of free school meal eligibility, head teachers have discretion to make decisions about which children and young people would benefit most from any particular intervention or approach, whilst keeping a clear focus on delivering equity.

7.3.

The guidance is clear in so far as Pupil Equity Fund must enable schools to deliver activities, interventions or resources which are additional to those already planned. It should not substitute or compensate for any spending reductions which arise from local authority budget efficiency savings. However, by definition, the target group for Pupil Equity Fund activity will have additional support needs. Approaches to meeting the target group's needs will benefit others within the class or group and consequently Pupil Equity Fund can be seen as part of a wider programme to help address school and staff concern over unmet needs.

7.4.

In the context of deployment of Support for Learning assistants, the quantified level of unmet needs across schools equates to a 'shortfall' of 310 hours. Pupil Equity Fund funding amounts to £232,000, which, if converted into support for learning assistant time, would provide, approximately, an additional 450 hours.

7.5.

To date, Pupil Equity Fund has not been consistently seen, across schools, in the wider context of how the needs of all learners are met. Consequently, it is recommended that the service works with head teachers and other key support staff to take a closer look at how Pupil Equity Fund is being utilised in order to meet learners' needs. This would further empower head teachers by encouraging, and supporting, them to work collaboratively to prioritise and maximise the collective benefits of Pupil Equity Fund funding by pooling resources where possible.

8. Human Resource Implications

8.1.

It is noted that this report does not detail any specific staffing changes or approach at this stage so there would not be any specific Human Resource implications at this stage.

8.2.

It is however advised that Education Leisure and Housing should; when considering the specific model/options for Support for Learning provision going forward, enter into early engagement and discussion with Human Resources to ensure that any possible implications for staff are identified and appropriate planning is able to be carried out in respect of any proposed changes.

9. Links to the Council Plan

9.1.

The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan strategic priority theme of Thriving Communities.

9.2.

The proposals in this report relate directly to Priority 3.6 – review the policy and provision for staffing, curriculum and financial management of our schools to ensure resources are most effectively targeted at ‘raising the bar and closing the gap’.

10. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from the recommendations of this report.

11. Legal Aspects

11.1.

Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 education authorities must provide adequate and efficient school education for children of school age within their area.

11.2.

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 requires that pupils with additional support needs learn in a mainstream school unless specific exceptions apply.

11.3.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended 2009) created the term 'additional support needs' and places duties on local authorities to identify, meet and keep under review the needs of pupils for whom they are responsible.

11.4.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 enshrines elements of the getting it right for every child approach in law, ensuring there is a single planning approach for children who need additional support from services.

12. Contact Officers

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13. Appendices

Appendix 1: Previous Council Decisions.

Appendix 2: Support for Learning Review – Parent Survey.

Appendix 3: Parent Survey – Key Change Chart.

Appendix 1

1.

At its meeting held on 14 November 2018, the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee noted:

1.1.

That a review of support for learning provision in Orkney's schools had been carried out over an 18-month period, with the outcome report attached as Appendix 1 to the report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.

1.2.

The key conclusion of the review of support for learning provision, namely that, when advice and guidance around assessment and planning was robustly implemented, it made a positive difference to the lives of children, young people and families.

1.3.

That the review of support for learning provision also noted:

- Inconsistencies of practice in respect of assessment, planning and delivery, within and across schools.
- That not all staff felt knowledgeable and confident regarding some of the challenges they met.
- Variability in the consistency of service provision within Education, Leisure and Housing as well as with respect to the contribution of other partners agencies and services.

1.4.

That work was ongoing to build confidence and capacity with respect to meeting the needs of all learners across staff groups and schools.

1.5.

That development and improvement work was underway and included in the service's National Improvement Framework Plan that would support the recommendations of the review of support for learning provision.

1.6.

That, should the recommendations of the review of support for learning provision be accepted, the 3-year Action Plan, attached as Appendix 2 to the report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, would be used to progress the recommendations and inform the ongoing review of the service's National Improvement Framework Plan.

1.7.

That a more specific review of the provision of Support for Learning Assistants within schools had also been undertaken in order to manage the service within the approved budget, which had increased over the last five years but not in line with the increase in the numbers of children and young people identified as having additional support needs.

1.8.

That the full impact of the review of the provision of Support for Learning Assistants would not be known until early 2019 as the changes required were phased in.

The Committee recommended:

1.9.

That the recommendations of the review of support for learning provision, attached as Appendix 1 to this Minute, be approved.

1.10.

That the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing should submit a report, to the next meeting of the Committee, prioritising the 3-year Action Plan referred to at paragraph 1.6 above.

1.11.

That, once the changes referred to at paragraph 1.8 above were in place, the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing should undertake a further review of the impact of the revised allocation of Support for Learning Assistants within schools and thereafter submit the results to a meeting of the Committee no later than June 2019.

2.

At its meeting held on 6 February 2019, the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee noted:

2.1.

That, on 14 November 2018, the Committee considered a review of the support for learning service and, on recommending approval of the recommendations arising from the review, requested a prioritised three-year action plan.

2.2.

The proposed Action Plan timeline, attached as Appendix 1 to the report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, setting out a summary overview of the priorities and actions in order that workstreams could be easily articulated but also linked and cross referenced.

2.3.

The proposed Work Plan, attached as Appendix 2 to the report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, which provided more detail on the work associated with the priorities and actions.

The Committee recommended:

2.4.

That the Action Plan timeline for implementing the recommendations arising from the review of the support for learning service, together with the detailed Work Plan, attached as Appendix 4 to this Minute, be approved.

2.5.

That the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing should submit reports to the Committee, no later than Autumn 2019 and Spring 2020, highlighting progress with the next two key stages relating to recommendation 3.5 of the Support for Learning Review, namely establishing and maintaining an effective process for allocation of resources to support the most vulnerable learners throughout their lives.

Appendix 2

Support for Learning Review – Parent Survey

1 Who is the survey being completed by

- Parent/Carer
- Parent/Carer and Pupil

2 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel that my child is getting the support they need in order to develop, learn and achieve

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3 Which of the following learning support does your child receive? (tick all that apply and add a brief description if you can)

- Teaching approaches tailored to the child's need
- Special resources, materials or equipment
- Support for particular people

Description of support (optional)

4 How is the support your child receives helping?

5 Is there any support that you think would further help your child with their learning?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

If Yes, please describe the support:

6 Any other comments

Appendix 3

Table of Survey Results – March 2017 and March 2019

The chart below illustrates the key change that has taken place, as highlight by the follow up survey (March 2019):

