REPORT TO: **CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES – 23 OCTOBER 2023**

REPORT ON: **EVERY DUNDEE LEARNER MATTERS (EDLM) STRATEGY – UPDATE**

REPORT BY: **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVICE**

REPORT NO: **296-2023**

1   PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1   This report provides an overview of the Children and Families Service's 'Every Dundee Learner Matters' (EDLM) strategy; an update on the implementation of the strategy; and a summary of next steps.
.

2   RECOMMENDATION

2.1   It is recommended that the Committee:
- notes the contents of the report, and
- instructs the Chief Education Officer to provide a further progress update in twelve months about the impact of the strategy during academic session 2023/ 24.

3   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1   The development and implementation of the EDLM strategy has been supported by the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change (ROC) at the University of Glasgow, funded through the Strategic Equity Fund (Scottish Attainment Challenge).

3.2   The cost of support provided by ROC since the launch of EDLM has been £98, 000.

4   BACKGROUND

4.1   The Children and Families Service's 'Every Dundee Learner Matters' (EDLM) improvement strategy was launched in May 2021, as Article V of the Minute of Meeting of the Children and Families Services Committee of 21 June 2021 Report No 172-2021 refers.

4.2   The ongoing development and implementation of EDLM is supported by researchers from the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change (ROC) at the University of Glasgow.

4.3   EDLM is an innovative effort to foster equity across a city-wide education system. EDLM aims to make better use of the existing expertise of teachers, Head Teachers, and other stakeholders to address the challenges facing early learning and childcare (ELC) settings and schools. It sets out to break the link between the home backgrounds of pupils and their attainment outcomes.

4.4   The improvement strategy is driven collectively by school leaders and involves practitioners at all levels of the education system in taking shared responsibility for improving the quality of education provided for all pupils across the city. Its aim is to develop a self-improving school system.

4.5   In order to provide an improvement focus that is clear to everyone involved, the 'Every Dundee Learner Matters' strategy focuses on the 'Three Ps':

- **Presence** – ensuring that all pupils attend regularly and promptly.
- **Participation** – creating a climate within schools where all pupils feel welcome and valued.
- **Progress** – developing policies and practices that maximise the achievement and ambitions of all pupils.

4.6   EDLM has 10 design principles, which have been refined for 2023/ 24 and are:

- The strategy is coordinated by a group of headteachers, with support from local authority and ROC staff. This is known as the EDLM Strategy Group.

- All schools and early learning and childcare (ELC) settings must have at least one School Inquiry Group (SIG) which is sponsored by but may not necessarily be led by a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

- Regular meetings of the SIGs within each partnership are held, during which they share progress on their action research and developmental activities.

- All ELC settings/schools have a programme of collaborative action research and development that is coordinated by a SIG and is focused on its own improvement priorities in relation to the Three Ps (presence, participation, and progress).

- All establishments are part of a School Improvement Partnership (SIP). SIPs consist of three or four schools and ELC settings that are at different stages of development. All SIGs meet at least once per term.

- Termly meetings are held of lead members from all the SIGs to draw and share lessons across Dundee.

- The strategy is a standing item at termly Head Teacher Learning Together days, with direct input from Professors Mel Ainscow and Chris Chapman, as well as other researchers from ROC.

- Termly Leadership Seminars for Head Teachers and senior education officers are held to analyse leadership roles in creating the organisational conditions necessary for the success of collaborative action research.

- Each establishment will prepare accounts of practice which outlines the impact of their work on improving outcomes in relation to the three Ps.

- A programme of meetings between ROC and central officers provides professional learning opportunities for central officers as they further develop their roles in supporting school improvement.

4.7   The 10 design principles can be distilled into three key priorities that now guide the EDLM strategy:

- **Professional Learning -** *to build capacity and shape culture across the system.*
- **Networking and Collaboration-** *to move knowledge and expertise around the system.*
- **Evidence-** *to assess implementation and impact and refine the strategy.*

5   PROGRESS

5.1   The Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change (ROC) produced a second annual progress report in August 2023. This report is shared in full in Appendix 1.

5.2   Progress so far includes:

School Inquiry Groups

All early learning and childcare (ELC) settings and schools have established one or more school inquiry groups (SIGs). These SIGs have used collaborative action research to identify and address barriers to the presence, participation, and progress of some of their pupils. Three SIG Case Studies are included in this report:

- Camperdown Primary School had a SIG focused on improving the punctuality and attendance of a targeted group of pupils. See appendix 2. Overall, the 2022/23 school attendance rate for Camperdown Primary increased by 1% to 90.8%. Camperdown has now shared their 'lessons learned' with other schools.
- Sidlaw View had a SIG focused on closing the vocabulary gap in Primary 1. See appendix 3. The targeted group of pupils saw a vocabulary age increase of 10.9 months on average during a 6-month period. Learning was shared across their School Improvement Partnership.
- Morgan Academy had a SIG focused on improving school attendance. See appendix 4. The attendance rate for the targeted group of pupils improved by 6%. Whilst overall school attendance declined in year 1, the school saw a 1.5% increase in school attendance in 2022/23, despite an overall decline across the secondary sector. Learning has been shared across schools.

School Improvement Partnerships.

- All early learning and childcare (ELC) settings and schools are members of a school improvement partnership (SIP), set up to share experiences and practice, and to encourage innovation.
- All Head Teachers did not initially engage in peer inquiry. However, all Head Teachers have now taken part in professional learning about engaging effectively in peer inquiry, with a view to all Head Teachers engaging in a round of peer inquiry by December 2023.

- Education Officers and members of the university research team have worked together to support these school-led improvement efforts.
- A programme of learning events has taken place to provide support and advice for Head Teachers.
- The improvement strategy continues to be driven by the EDLM Strategy Group involving Head Teachers, an Education Officer, the Chief Education Officer, Executive Director, and researchers from ROC.

6   NEXT STEPS

6.1   In order to agree next steps, the following key questions were considered:

- How can each ELC setting, and school maximise the impact on all pupils?
- How can the school improvement partnerships be further developed as a means of supporting and challenging expectations and practices within their constituent schools?
- How can the work of central team best support developments in the schools and ELC settings?

6.2   The focus over the next academic session is to:

- Strengthen the school inquiry groups (SIGs) to ensure impact on the Three Ps in every ELC setting and school, with a particular focus on those pupils 'missing out,'
- Use peer inquiry – through the school improvement partnerships - to challenge practice and move knowledge and expertise around the system.

6.3   Every ELC setting and school should have at least one school inquiry group (SIG) focused on one or more of the Three Ps (presence, participation, progress) as a result of their contextual analysis. The role of the SIG is to:

- Facilitate and engage in collaborative action research,
- Support and challenge one another in relation to these activities,
- Present and discuss their experiences at various and cross-school events.

6.4   All Head Teachers will engage in peer inquiry through their school improvement partnership (SIP). Peer inquiry, which involves visits to other schools, is a process that encourages the sharing of expertise, whilst also offering challenge to existing thinking and practices. Every Head Teacher will engage in a round of peer inquiry by December 2023, which reflections shared at a Head Teacher Learning Together day in January 2024.

6.5   ELC settings and schools will complete accounts of practice to evidence impact of their SIGs and their engagement in SIPs and the use of peer inquiry on staff practice as well as the impact on improving outcomes for pupils in relation to the three Ps. These accounts of practice will be shared across all sectors.

7   POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1   This report has been subject to the Pre-IIA Screening Tool and does not make any recommendations for change to strategy, policy, procedures, services, or funding and so has not been subject to an Integrated Impact Assessment. An appropriate Senior Manager has reviewed and agreed with this assessment.

8   CONSULTATIONS

8.1   The Council Leadership Team has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

9   BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1   None.

AUDREY MAY   PAUL FLEMING
Executive Director of Children and Families Service   Head of Education, Learning & Inclusion

Appendix 1 Every Dundee Learner Matters Progress Report – The Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change August 2023

A summary of what happened during the second year of the Every Dundee Learner Matter strategy and examples of progress and challenges

Every Dundee Learner Matters

August 2023

University *of* Glasgow | Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change

EVERY DUNDEE LEARNER MATTERS

9.2

'Every Dundee Learner Matters'

A second annual progress report, August 2023

'It's shifted our focus around school improvement. In the past it would be, right, what do we think needs to improve? Let's do it. Whereas now it's, right, what is the data telling us, what are the perceptions telling us?'

'The best part has been our SIP meetings, and being able to listen to what other people are doing. And even although the work they're doing is maybe not solely the same as someone else's, it's listening to a hurdle they've come over, or something that's worked really well.'

'… being a headteacher can be a really lonely job at times. And having that collegiate support is huge.'

These comments are illustrative of the views of teachers and school leaders about their experiences of implementing the *Every Dundee Learner Matters* strategy. This report summarises what happened during the second year of the initiative and highlights examples of progress and challenge. It builds on an earlier progress report that explained developments during the school year 2021-22[i].

9.3   The strategy

Launched in 2021, *Every Dundee Learner Matters* is an innovative effort to foster equity across a city-wide education system. As such, it involves many stakeholders in a complex process of collaborative development and research. This process is supported by researchers from the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change at the University of Glasgow who have partnered with practitioners in the early years centres and schools, and colleagues within the local authority.

Seen as the local authority's overall school improvement strategy, *Every Dundee Learner Matters* is driven by the principle of equity, defined as:

'A process of improving the presence, participation and progress of all children and young people in nurseries and schools by identifying and addressing contextual barriers'

In order to provide an improvement focus that is clear to all the partners involved, the *Every Dundee Learner Matters* strategy focuses on the 'Three Ps':

> • **Presence** – ensuring that all pupils attend regularly and promptly;

> • **Participation** – creating a climate within schools where all pupils feel welcome and valued; and

> • **Progress** – developing policies and practices that maximise the achievement and ambitions of all pupils.

In addressing these intended outcomes, the project is underpinned by a set of design features informed by a ten-year research programme of research on system change carried out previously by members of the University of Glasgow team[ii]. Consistent with the participatory approach adopted, the details of these features have been negotiated with a strategy group made up of headteachers and local authority officers. In carrying out this role the strategy group is supported by university staff.

9.4   The rationale

Every Dundee Learner Matters attempts to make better use of the existing expertise of teachers and other stakeholders to address the challenges facing nurseries and schools across the city. In particular, it sets out to break the link between the home backgrounds of pupils and learning outcomes.

The initiative requires schools to have flexibility to determine how resources can be used to address local circumstances. It also builds on international research which suggests that involving teachers in decision-making is likely to promote a stronger culture for learning within schools[iii].

Based on these findings, the strategy envisions a more equitable city-wide educational system by building schools' capacity for self-improvement, creating a culture that embraces innovation and increasing practitioner leadership for inquiry-based developments in practice.

9.5   The methodology

The aim, then, is to increase the agency of schools regarding decisions about priorities for improvement. The methodology used is 'design-based implementation research'[iv]. This innovative approach is guided by four principles:

- A focus on problems of practice from multiple stakeholders' perspectives;
- A commitment to collaborative design;
- The development of theory and knowledge related to both classroom learning and implementation informed by systematic inquiry; and
- Developing capacity for sustaining change in systems

Strengthening the capacity of schools begins with the sharing of ideas, knowledge and practices through the use of collaborative action research[v]. This is intended to encourage new thinking and experimentation with alternative ways of working. Research shows that this can be stimulated through engaging with the views of different stakeholders, bringing together the expertise of practitioners, the insights of pupils and their families, and knowledge from

academic research in ways that challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, not least in respect to the progress of vulnerable groups of learners.

This methodology combines activities linked to both development and research, with the expectations that these two will feed off each other during their implementation, and are adjusted accordingly, as needed. This requires a new set of expectations regarding roles, responsibilities and relationships amongst stakeholders in the field and university researchers.

9.6   Leadership

The improvement strategy is driven collectively by school leaders and involves practitioners at all levels of the education system – early years, primary and secondary education – in taking shared responsibility for improving the quality of education provided for all pupils across the city. An engagement with evidence generated by teachers, through mutual observations and considering the views of pupils, is a key factor in making this happen. In addition, schools work in improvement partnerships made up of three or four schools from different parts of the city, using peer inquiry visits to stimulate the sharing of practices and mutual professional learning.

Another key element involves the development of leadership capacity in the middle tier: a role that in Scotland is undertaken by local authorities. This involves a significant change in roles and responsibilities, summed up by an education officer during an earlier project: *'The job of schools is to improve themselves; our job is to make sure it happens'*.

9.7   Progress

Our first progress report, published in November 2022, focused on the initiation phase of the strategy. It concluded that, across the education system, there was widespread awareness of *Every Dundee Learner Matters* and what it had set out to achieve. More specifically, it stated that:

> • All schools and nurseries have established one or more school inquiry groups;
> • These groups had used collaborative action research to identify and address barriers to the presence, participation and progress of some of their pupils;
> • All schools and nurseries are members of a school improvement partnership set up to share experiences and encourage innovations;
> • Education officers and members of the university research team have worked together to support these school-led improvement efforts; and
> • A programme of events has taken place to provide support and advice for key people in the field.

That report concluded that the evidence collected so far had suggested that these developments were beginning to have an impact on the presence, participation and progress of pupils. There was, however, much more to do to ensure that an education system that does well for many Dundee learners can do well for them all.

9.8   Assessing implementation

During the second year of the initiative (i.e. 2022-23), the Robert Owen Centre team collected and analysed further evidence regarding the implementation of the *Every Dundee Learner*

Matters strategy across all nurseries and schools in the city. This evidence was generated by the following methods:

- Informal observations during meetings of the school improvement partnerships, headteachers, education officers and the strategy group;

- Group interviews with representatives of each of the school improvement partnerships;

- Data collected through a social network analysis survey of all headteachers and other relevant stakeholders; and

- A scrutiny of relevant statistical evidence.

Together, this evidence leads to the following assessment regarding the extent of the implementation of the strategy, focusing in particular on two aspects:
1. The use of collaborative action research within schools; and
2. The extent to which school partnerships are supporting these developments.

9.9   1. Within-school developments

1.1 Overall views. It is interesting to note the varied views and interpretations of the strategy. For example, comments from various senior leaders included:

> *I think, the overall theory is absolutely spot on, because it is about getting young people into school. But a lot of young people have found out, actually, you don't have to be in school all the time now, you know. (secondary)*

> *It can't be every Dundee learner matters in certain schools. So, it has to be about far more individuality, rather than just, that school needs that, that school needs that, because that's the majority. (secondary)*

> *I don't think it's the school improvement strategy, because every school is different. I think it's part of the school improvement strategy, and we're all trying to get as many young people being present. (primary)*

1.2 The work of the SIGs. The progress in using school inquiry groups (SIGs) to coordinate evidence-based school developments that we reported at the end of the first year of the strategy has continued. Indeed, for many schools this has now become an established way of coordinating strategies for change – part of the *'way we do things around here'*. Significantly, this pattern is evident across early years, primary and secondary schools, despite ongoing contextual challenges.

For example, a senior colleague in an early years setting explained:

> *I would say that we had a false start. But now that we do have our area of focus, we have completed the first cycle and we are just moving into that second cycle now. I feel that we've not only had an impact on, sort of, the research project and the small group of children that we were working with, but I think it's had an impact on our wider nursery environment as well.*

She added:

I think I would have liked to have been a little bit further forward at this stage, however, we have had a particularly challenging few years and, you know, I think had we been doing this without those challenges, we perhaps would all be sitting in a different place. But we've all had to deal with quite high levels of staff absence while we've been in that recovery period and I don't think we're out of it yet. So, you know, I think we have to acknowledge that this has hindered progress to an extent.

A primary school teacher commented:

So, the group has changed over time, as teachers have come in and out, based on what projects that we'd been running last year and this year.

1.3 Responding to contexts. It is encouraging to note that, as the *Every Dundee Learner Matters* approach has developed, it has been adapted to suit particular contexts and specific areas of concern. So, for example, some schools now have a number of School Inquiry Groups (SIGs), each of which is focused on particular areas of development. There is also variation regarding the leadership of the groups.

For example, the depute head of a secondary school explained:

I lead it but the Headteacher often comes along as well. The group members are subject leads. And the Ed Psych sometimes comes too.

A primary head commented:

Our group is made up of myself, and our currently primary three/two teachers. And well, when it started, they were all in different classes. So, we've got three teachers and myself, they're all currently in infants, but when we started, they were spread more widely throughout the school.

A colleague in another primary school commented:

… every group now is doing an inquiry-based project. So, if it works, great, we'll scale it up and roll it out. If it doesn't, we can stop it where it is and kind of change direction.

1.4 Roles. The active involvement of senior members of staff is particularly important to the successful implementation of *Every Dundee Learner Matters*. For example, one primary teacher said:

So, obviously, because it is so high profile within the school, it's on the radar, and I meet the headteacher every week, just to talk about my remit. And that's a standing item for us: where are we with the project, what's happening?

Another feature is the way that involvement in the SIG has opened up career opportunities for some individuals. For example, a senior member of staff in a primary school explained:

It was quite interesting who was leading: one of our probably more anxious members of staff, but because this was her field, she's just stepped up and is leading that priority. It's done her the world of good actually,

The evidence also points to some of the difficulties that schools have experienced in implementing the idea of SIGs. These include factors such as: finding time within the busy school day; changes in personnel, particularly senior staff; and pressures to implement externally imposed priorities.

1.5 Establishing a focus. Across the schools there is evidence of a variety of ways of focusing the school initiatives. Examples include:

> *Raising standards in maths and science…. (primary)*

> *…. trying to use a different way to teach numeracy, and see if that would allow the young person to enjoy, and if that will also raise attainment within numeracy. So, bringing something different to the process. (primary)*

> *…we set up adaptations to the curriculum. So, the people who were the members of the SIG were the members of staff who were delivering that adaptation. And that was principal teachers in the school. (secondary)*

> *Where I think we also saw a good kind of bit of positivity was the involvement of external agencies. And we made quite a lot of use of external partners, in order to deliver the curricular adaptations. (secondary)*

Some schools have chosen to focus on particular groups of pupils:

> *…. like, where are the learners you're most concerned are missing out? Or who are the learners that you think could do much better with you changing something? That was, sort of, the bit that stuck with me, so that's where our thinking went. (primary)*

> *…we found that a lot of the children were struggling with writing. Whether that is partly a consequence of COVID, and not doing any writing for a long period of time, we're not sure. (primary)*

> *We basically looked at our primary one SNSA data over the previous few years, looked at areas where the children were maybe consistently falling behind, or there were pockets of children not performing well. We also looked for resources that would be suitable for the older kids to work with the younger kids. (primary)*

Linked to this last comment, an education officer commented on another primary school's use of pupil voice to determine priorities for investigations:

> *One of the key things which is quite unique about (school name), is their pupil leadership. It's pretty phenomenal. They have pupils doing lesson observations, and they have a pupil sort of parliament, that I've met….*

1.6 Impact. In making sure that the work of the SIGs has an impact, we have encouraged them to focus more specifically on those pupils who are a cause for concern. Where this has been the approach, it is clear that this has led to innovations that have the potential to have a wider impact on standards across a school. For example:

> '*Well, some are from disadvantaged backgrounds, some not. It is quite interesting, that if you look at the demographic of the pupils in the group, it's*

representative of the school. And there's some of them that are from kind of lower SIMDs, there are some that do have additional support needs, and there are some who are from very wealthy, leafy suburbs, with, you know, two parents and three cars. (secondary)

1.7 External pressures. To varying degrees, nationally determined priorities have influenced the way that some schools have focused their collaborative action research projects. For example:

> *… it's one of the national indicators that we have to measure: handwriting. (primary)*

This raises questions regarding the extent to which schools have the freedom to determine priorities that are relevant to local circumstances and the particular needs of their pupils. Commenting on this, a primary head explained:

> *I think, for me, staff don't respond well to top-down. You know, they will go with it and do it, but I think we're now starting to see that if this is changed that we've identified and that we are researching and analysing what works,*

Given these pressures, it is hardly surprising that there is considerable variation with respect to the way that the approach used by the SIGs has developed. The design and principles of *Every Dundee Learner Matters* enables practitioners and their colleagues to use data and evidence to inform flexible and varied approaches. In the guide provided at the outset of the strategy it was recommended that the approach should involve collecting evidence to inform efforts to improve the presence, participation and progress of those pupils 'missing out'. This involves generating and analysing evidence about the experiences of these learners to determine areas of practice for attention.

1.8 An inquiring stance. This key idea within the rationale of *Every Dundee Learner Matters* is known to be a feature of schools that are effective in including all pupils. Evidence regarding the development of inquiry in Dundee, viewing it as way of thinking or being, rather than as an 'inquiry project' is particularly encouraging, although it is expressed in a variety of ways. For example, a senior colleague in a nursery commented:

> *…. where are the learners you're most concerned are missing out? Or who are the learners that you think could do much better with you changing something? That was, sort of, the bit that stuck with me, so that's where our thinking went.*

Meanwhile, the headteacher in a secondary school seemed to have a similar idea in mind when he said:

> *You know, I often say that, right from the beginning, one of the problems we had, is we were forcing the square pegs into the round holes. And now, we're trying to get the square pegs into the square holes, and the round pegs into the round holes, and the quirky pegs into the quirky holes, right.*

Other comments included:

> *As a school, we have always been quite keen on the practitioner led inquiry, which is action-based research. And these are all kind of equivalents of empowering practitioners to make change, evaluate change, and for that to then become an institutional change. And that approach, I think, the idea of empowering staff at all*

levels, to take ownership of improvement in their context, is the real kind of positive. (secondary)

I think, as well, it's the flexibility to realise that you might go down one route, but actually, as it emerges, you might change, because the data might inform what you're doing. (secondary)

So, we can have different types of conversations and try and explore a little bit more. Some of the things that we're finding is our children who are not coming to school, it's because they're worried about their parents, and it's because they're worried about their parents' health. You know, it's initiated lots of different conversations in terms of about how to support children to come to school, they feel less worried and what parents can then do to protect their child from hearing adult conversations. (primary)

1.9 Using evidence. During the interviews a mixed view emerged regarding the extent to which statistical data are used as a starting point for determining areas for further examination within Dundee. For example, this conversation took place during one of the interviews:

We got all the attendance data, we got it recently.

Interviewer: But do they look at it nationally?

Someone in the Scottish Government must.

Yeah, somebody must, but it's not something they actually do, and publish about much. And that's something that they probably should. Because we're trying to get a really hard message over to parents to say: it's your responsibility to make sure your children are at school.

1.10 Embedding the approach. A positive feature is the way almost all schools and establishments are working to embed the *Every Dundee Learner Matters* into their usual ways of working:

It's actually moved on from us thinking, what are we going to do with the EDLM thing, and here's some of the young people that we could do some work on, some research, and see how we do here, and then bring it into the body of the kirk. And I think what's happened, very subtly, it has become part of our core business, you know. That everybody kind of identifies with it – not everybody, that's a bit of an exaggeration there – but you know, a lot of people now have had a hand, a small hand in it. But they now think, that's part of what we do. (primary)

I think taking this long, measured approach has definitely embedded this practice. And the feedback that we're getting from staff, I think even at the end of cycle one, I remember the staff saying – the staff that were involved in the first cycle – it's not only changed their practice towards the children in the key group, because it wouldn't, it's changed their practice across the whole setting when they're working with all children in the setting. (primary)

It was part of our improvement priority anyway. But instead of just going gung-ho and right, we're all going to use this approach now, there was a much more measured approach to it. (secondary)

But what I found even more successful was the way that the staff worked together on a real collaborative action research piece. So, what we did this year was we kept that group running to try and get it embedded, 'cause it was only going into year two, but we started two other groups across the school… (primary)

Commenting on developments in two of the schools, an education officer commented.

I think, these projects have been particularly successful, because they're not projects anymore, they are embedded in the school culture, and the way that the school works now.

However, it was also reported that in some schools, implementation has faded:

Because we've had staffing changes, it's kind of fallen apart, I suppose. Or it kind of finished the project that was, earlier and it's not been a longer-term thing... It did have an impact on some children's attendance and the writing had an impact.

9.10   2. Between school developments

2.1 The SIPS. In our first progress report we explained that there was still some uncertainly regarding the roles of the school improvement partnerships (SIPs), including their relationship to the work of the clusters. It is encouraging to find that this has now largely disappeared, as those in schools, particularly senior staff, have seen the benefits of collaborating with schools with which they are less connected. In particular, there is considerable evidence that this has led to the sharing of strategies and expertise between schools regarding ways of reaching heard to reach learners.

For example, a primary head commented:

I think the highlights are the SIP network meetings…. there's a confidence in each other that we are there as part of that support mechanism for school improvement. Sharing some of the practice that's happened incidentally, you know, just from giving feedback to staff and talking about what we're doing in our own schools. And these informal links of coming together, can we come and see this in your school? So, teachers have now made informal links across the schools as well.

Similarly, a senior member of staff in another primary school explained:

There's been a definite shift in terms of how we work together. So, we had informal networks, as in: how do you do this, you know? I've just had this question through, this is my thinking, how would you answer that? So, we had these informal networks. But in terms of actually talking about school improvement, how we work together is completely different now.

Another primary head added:

And I would even say it's moving in a different way again, going into the next year. What we did last year is what probably a lot of SIPs need to do: first of all, they need to get to know each other's schools. So, you know, we did do short-term model reviews in all of the schools. Two schools who were close to getting HMIE,

they did two days in their schools, and they only did, sort of, one day in the other schools.

Other comments included:

We have no objection to carrying on with the SIP in the format that it's in, if that is the decision that's made. (secondary)

I think there's value in it. I think where ours has fallen down is just probably ourselves getting caught up with our own settings. (primary)

However, a few schools are still not active in their SIP. For example, an education officer commented:

…they haven't been attending meetings as much, they've been getting all the information and reminders. And there was a bit of a hiccup, in that there was a change of headteacher. I've constantly sent out reminders, and reminders about today, but I'm not as confident as to where they are.

2.2 Networking. The social network analysis we have carried out points to considerable variation regarding the extent to which senior staff have connections to colleagues in other schools. For example, there is a continuum of social cohesion across the SIPs, schools in some SIPs are very strongly connected, while for others this remains a work in progress. See for example:
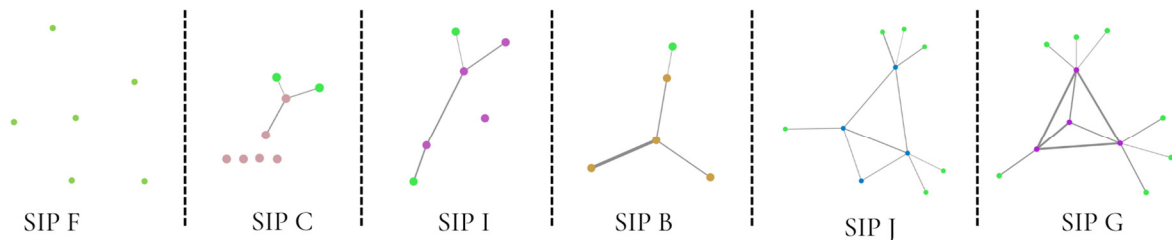
We know from earlier research that relatively successful schools are active networkers, looking to gather ideas that can add value to their efforts to ensure the progress of all their pupils. At the same time, there is evidence that schools that are relatively isolated are much more vulnerable as they struggle alone to address the challenges they face.

Comments on this included:

…sometimes you always work with the same people, whether that's your cluster, or somebody you normally sit beside in a Head Teachers' Development day or whatever. So, it's good, absolutely it's good to be working with other people. (primary)

I think that what has been successful around the SIPs is that widening the intelligence. So, you do become very insular in your cluster. And you do, and that's

not, there's a lot of good work goes in the clusters, but I think to actually see it across city, I think that probably the tentacles are longer and wider. (early years)

Some of the clusters are quite small. I've only got three other primaries in my cluster. (primary)

Over the next year we will continue to monitor progress regarding this issue and share this evidence with senior colleagues within the schools and local authority.

2.3 Peer Inquiry. This approach is intended to promote professional learning and strengthen the partnerships between schools. It involves the creation of groups of colleagues that work on solving real problems through repeated cycles of inquiry and reflection. In this way, the peer inquiry process encourages the sharing of expertise, whilst also offering challenges to existing thinking and practices.

We have suggested that the peer inquiry process should focus directly on the implications for management and leadership practices in schools as they use the *Every Dundee Learner Matters* strategy. At the same time, it is likely to lead to discussion of wider strategic issues.

So far, the extent of the implementation of peer inquiry has generally been disappointing. Given the pressures that schools have faced over recent times this is unsurprising. However, where it has been used, there is encouraging evidence of its impact. This confirms experiences elsewhere that suggests that, where peer inquiry is used effectively, it will have an impact on thinking and practices within partner schools and, most importantly, on outcomes for pupils.

A primary school colleague commented:

Well, we've tried a few, sort of, peer visit type things. And I suppose, it is hard at the stage we're at, following pandemics, et cetera, I almost feel that we're trying to do too many things in little, short visits that we're almost trying to replicate the good practice visits we used to really enjoy doing, we got loads out of in the past.

Another primary school leader explained:

But for me, I suppose being really focused on our individual inquiries and having that, sort of, critical friend, for me, I think would be of most value. However, I was probably one of the settings that was least able to do that because of the state of our staffing during the visits – we tried it twice and it wasn't much better the second time. And just the extent to which we felt we hadn't managed to keep the momentum going in the way that we'd wished, on my own project. Do you know what I mean? But moving forward, that's where I think I would get most benefit.

Other comments on the use of peer inquiry included the following:

We had to get to know each other's schools. And because we've been in and out of each other's schools, the staff now know us as well. So, there's an element of confidence and working together…. So as I was giving staff feedback, I was giving them ideas and just challenging some of their thinking. (primary)

Because we've got to know the staff, there's already been four of the staff from (name) school who've actually asked to come and observe some learning and teaching in our school. So much more informal, you know, discussions and

professional practice and sharing of practice across each other's schools as well, because we've got to know them. (primary)

9.11   Next steps

This progress report is intended to stimulate debate amongst school leaders and local authority staff about the actions that are now needed to ensure that *Every Dundee Learner Matters* has an impact in relation to the Three Ps and the strengthening the city's capacity to support school improvement. In moving forward with this agenda, issues to consider include:

- How can each early years centre and school maximise the impact on all pupils?
- How can the school improvement partnerships be further developed as a means of supporting and challenging expectations and practices within their constituent schools?
- How can the work of local authority staff best support developments in the schools and early years?

More specifically, we recommend that:

- While *Every Dundee Learner Matters* sets out to ensure that all learners to achieve, the primary work of the SIGs should be focused on generating and engaging with evidence about those **learners who are currently missing out**. There is clear evidence from schools within Dundee – and elsewhere – that where this approach is well implemented, it can make a significant improvement to outcomes for all pupils within a school. With this in mind, we recommend that the SIGs revisit the Collaborative Action Research Framework that was presented at the start of the *Every Dundee Learner Matters* strategy (attached below).

- All schools and early years centres should use their SIPs peer inquiry to promote professional learning and **strengthen support and challenge between schools**. This approach involves headteachers and leads from each school's inquiry group spending a morning together in each of their establishments, in order that the visitors can gather evidence about how inquiry-based improvement plans are being implemented. This might include discussions with a sample of staff and students, possibly through a series of learning walks. It is suggested that the host school determine the exact focus for inquiry.

9.12   Further monitoring and support

As *Every Dundee Learner Matters* moves into a third year, our intention is to continue monitoring and supporting the implementation of its design features. At the same time, the focus must now turn to a more systematic scrutiny of the impact. This research will address the following questions:

- What is the impact on the practices of teaching and forms of leadership within schools and nurseries?

- How far is this having on impact on the presence, participation and progress of all children and young people?

The intention is that the findings of this impact analysis will be presented in a third progress report to be published later in 2024.

Final thoughts

We congratulate all our colleagues in Dundee on their continuing efforts to ensure that all children and young people in the city are well served. Building on the good practices that already exist, these efforts are a source of considerable optimism for the future. For our part, we feel privileged to have a small role in these important developments.

The Collaborative Action Research Framework

This framework is used within *Every Dundee Learner Matters* to plan, implement and monitor the impact of collaborative action research activities. It should be used flexibly, taking account of factors and circumstances within individual schools. It consists of the following six interlinked elements, each with its own set of issues for consideration:

1. Analysing our context.

- Which pupils are missing out within our school?
- What do we know about these learners?
- Which group(s) should we focus attention on?
- What are our hunches about the factors that lead to their marginalisation?

2. Collecting evidence.

- What further information do we need about these pupils?
- How can we collect, record and analyse this information?
- Who needs to be involved?
- What forms of support do we need?

3. Making sense of the evidence.

- What does the evidence suggest about the experience of this group of pupils?
- What factors appear to be associated with their lack of progress?
- Who needs to be involved in making sense of this evidence?
- What might we do to address these factors?
- What aspects of our school need to be considered?

4. Moving forward.

- What action are we proposing to improve the experience of this group of pupils?
- What aspects of our school do we need to change?
- Who needs to be involved in moving forward?
- What actions should we take to involve them?

5. Involving partners.

- Who do we need to involve from outside the school?
- How can we get them involved?
- In what ways can they add value to our efforts?

6. Monitoring progress.

- What are the outcomes we are seeking?
- What do we expect to see happening in the process of achieving these outcomes - in the short, intermediate and longer term?
- How do we monitor these actions and their impact on pupil presence, participation and progress?

N.B. Whilst these questions are presented in sequence, responses to some of them will probably develop simultaneously.

---

[i] see: https://nsee.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/EVERY DUNDEE LEARNER MATTERSProgressReportHTs16Nov2022.pdf

[ii] Chapman, C. & Ainscow, M. (Eds.) (2021) *Educational equity: Pathways to success.* London: Routledge

[iii] Schleicher, A., 2010. International comparisons of student learning outcomes. In: Hargreaves, A., Lieberman, A., Fullan, M., Hopkins, D. (Eds.), *Second Handbook of Educational Change.* Springer, London.

[iv] Fishman, B. J., Penuel, W. R., Allen, A. R., Cheng, B. H., & Sabelli, N. O. R. A. (2013). Design-based implementation research: An emerging model for transforming the relationship of research and practice. *Teachers College Record*, *115*(14), 136-156

[v] Ainscow, M., Chapman, C. and Hadfield, M. (2020) *Changing education systems: a research-based approach.* Routledge

Appendix 2   School Inquiry Group   CASE STUDY   Camperdown Primary School

School Improvement Focus:	Improving punctuality and school attendance
Which of the 'Three Ps' does your school improvement focus on? **Inquiry question**	Presence Does explicitly sharing lateness and time lost in the classroom with pupils and parents impact positively on attendance and attainment?
Context	**Which pupils are missing out?** We have several pupils who are consistently late, resulting on periods of 'lost learning,' Lateness is monitored at each Attendance Review Group meeting and recorded by Office staff daily. **What group should we focus on?** The focus will be on learners from P4-P7. We have looked at consistency of lateness and how this fits with attainment information. We also looked at where these pupils stay. For example - are they within catchment so can they be developing independent skills to arrive at school on time. This can support transition to high school for some of these pupils.
Key Activity	Targeted group of pupils to monitor their weekly attendance in terms of minutes lost due to lateness. School and Family Development Worker (SFDW) met the group each Friday morning for breakfast, where they reviewed their week and prepared a letter home detailing their time. SFDW also provided additional support for this group – focused on independence and skills to enable the child to get themselves to school. Overview of sessions Week 1 – breakfast, group overview – why we're here and expectations. Week 2 – breakfast, weekly check ins and minutes missed letters. Week 3 – breakfast, discussions/feelings around being late. Week 4 - breakfast, weekly check ins and minutes missed letters. Week 5 – breakfast, making our mornings easier session. Week 6 - breakfast, weekly check ins and minutes missed letters. Week 7 – breakfast, role play of family in the morning and discussions Week 8 - breakfast, weekly check ins and minutes missed letters. Week 9 – breakfast, importance of being at school on time. Week 10 - breakfast, minutes missed letters and evaluations.
Impact	8 of 9 pupils involved reduced the number of times at they were late over a 10-week period, with 2 pupils not late on any occasion during the SIG. Overall school attendance rates increased by 1% to 90.8%. Being present at school has supported pupil progress. More time spent in the class has impacted positively for all pupils involved in the small test of change.

Appendix 3   School Inquiry Group   CASE STUDY   Sidlaw View Primary School

School Improvement Focus:	Improving Primary 1 attainment - Closing the vocabulary gap
Which of the 'Three Ps' does your school improvement focus on? **Inquiry question**	Progress Will explicit small group teaching of vocabulary increase progress and help to close the vocabulary gap in P1?
Context	Observation, assessment and dialogue early in P1 saw teachers identify that a number of P1 pupils had a significant gap in their vocabulary levels. This cohort of learners had experienced low levels of attendance in nursery. Missed experiences included Book Bug Sessions, library visits and use of approaches such as Word Aware and Nursery Narrative. Through conversations with colleagues in our SIP, members of the pedagogy team and Educational Psychology we identified the Renfrew Language Scales Word Finding Vocabulary Test as our method to gather baseline vocabulary ages. All pupils in P1 were assessed and a target group of 7 pupils was identified to be part of a vocabulary intervention. All targeted pupils had a vocabulary gap of between 1 year and 2 + years (behind their chronological age).
Key Activity	Picture packs were created on a variety of themes including pirates, space and Spring. These included simple images of the nouns which were to be explicitly taught. Words were levelled and taught progressively to build on previous knowledge – levels were anchor words (level 1), Goldilocks words (level 2) and Step-Up words (level 3). Explicit teaching of vocabulary was carried out in 3 x 15-minute sessions per week, with each theme being taught and reinforced over a two-week period. Nouns were taught using the Word Aware teaching vocabulary process – symbol, phonology (sound), semantics (meaning) and action. Opportunities for consolidation of new vocabulary was built into sessions through bingo games, jigsaws, sharing stories, drawing and play. Before, during and after each vocabulary theme, pupils' word knowledge was assessed to show the number of new words learned. Individual word trackers were used to track at word level and run charts were created to illustrate the numerical tracking of words retained. Further assessments were carried out after 2 weeks and 4 weeks to further track if new vocabulary had been retained.

Impact	Pupils on average gained 38% new vocabulary across the intervention however for one child this was up to 48% (based on comparison of pre and post assessment words known)

There was a six-month period between pre and post completion of the Renfrew vocabulary age assessment. The six-week vocabulary intervention occurred within this six-month period. Our control group showed an average vocabulary increase of 6.5 months in this period. While we would expect a child to gain 6 months of vocabulary in this time in line with their chronological age, any additional gains could indicate value added by the intervention. When assessing our target pupils, on average we found a vocabulary age increase of 10.9 months. |

Appendix 4   School Inquiry Group   CASE STUDY   Morgan Academy

School Improvement Focus:	Improving school attendance
Which of the 'Three Ps' does your school improvement focus on?	Presence
Inquiry question	What impact can a targeted attendance support worker make to individual pupil attendance?
Context	Attendance is a major factor in academic attainment. We know from our school data that attendance is a major barrier to achievement. In 2021 (baseline / pandemic) we sat below the Dundee average (89.3 compared to 90.43). We also had a 3.2% difference when looking at Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) groups 1-5. As an inclusive school, it is vital that we address all areas that can disadvantage a young person's chance of achieving. Improving attendance is a key factor in our SIP. The evidence shows that pupils whose attendance drops in Broad General Education (BGE) are more at risk of not attaining the qualifications needed to progress to a positive destination in S4.
Key Activity	The attendance SIG team and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) completed a Fishbone analysis of our attendance strategy and identified 3 key areas: Culture, Systems, Staffing. A driver diagram helped prioritise actions. Term 1-2, systems were improved to support accurate tracking of attendance. In term 2 we appointed a Pupil Support Worker (PSW)- Attendance who started at the end of January working with our priority group (17 pupils) to track, monitor and provide a series of interventions with pupils and parents/carers. SEEMIS data and whole school data provided by the Children and Families Service supported the interventions as well as information from guidance staff on pastoral issues affecting attendance.
Impact	Overall school attendance declined in year 1 of the project in line with a decline across the secondary sector. However, this has recovered in year 2. (87.5% in 2023) Morgan has the highest rate of improvement across secondary schools in Dundee. The overall average attendance of the priority group has increased by 6% since December 2021. SIMD Quintile 1 school attendance declined in year 1 of the project but has improved in year 2. (84.7% in 2023 – an increase of 1.3%)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASN	Additional Support Needs
BGE	Broad General Education
ELC	Early Learning and Childcare
EDLM	Every Dundee Learner Matters
IIA	Integrated Impact Assessment
PSW	Pupil Support Worker
ROC	Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change
SFDW	School and Family Development Worker
SIP	School Improvement Partnership
SIG	School Inquiry Group
SAC	Scottish Attainment Challenge
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SLT	Senior Leadership Team