

## ITEM No ...2.....

**REPORT TO:** CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE – 27 OCTOBER 2025

**REPORT ON:** ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

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

**REPORT NO:** 314-2025

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report 'Achievement of children and young people with Additional Support Needs', provides information on the profile of additional support needs (ASN) in Dundee and an overview of some of the achievements of children and young people with complex ASN.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the content of the report.

### **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### **4.0 BACKGROUND**

4.1 Dundee City Council has a statutory responsibility to assess and make provision for children's additional support needs (ASN) under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. In addition, it has duties under the Equalities Act 2010 regarding children and young people with protected characteristics, including disabilities.

4.2 A child or young person has additional support needs for the purposes of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 where, for whatever reason, the child or young person is, or is likely to be, unable without the provision of additional support to benefit from school education provided or to be provided for the child or young person. Additional support falls into three overlapping, broad headings: approaches to learning and teaching, support from personnel and provision of resources.

4.3 A child or young person has additional support needs if the child or young person is looked after by a local authority (within the meaning of section 17(6) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (c.36).

4.4 Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 requires that the local authority "must make adequate and efficient provision for such additional support as is required by each child or young person with additional support needs, for whose school education the authority is responsible." There is no requirement in the 2004 Act that a diagnosis must be made before support is provided.

4.5 The presumption to provide education in a mainstream setting has been in legislation since 2003 reflecting a move towards a children's rights-based approach. Section 15 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 provides that a preschool and school aged child should be educated in a mainstream school unless one of three circumstances set out in section 15 apply. The three exceptions are that it would not be suited to the ability or aptitude of the child; would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for the children with whom the child would be educated or would result in unreasonable public expenditure being incurred which would not ordinarily be incurred.

- 4.6 In 2010, the way in which ASN information was collected by the Scottish Government changed and for the first-time information on reasons for support and nature of support was collected separately for each type of additional support need. Since 2012, six extra categories of reasons for support (communication support needs, young carer, bereavement, substance misuse, family issues and risk of exclusion) have been introduced.
- 4.7 It is important to recognise that children and young people with additional support needs are not a homogenous group. They may have a range of needs – some educational, some not - some needs may be short term; others may be long lasting. Whilst some children and young people do not require additional support beyond that which a classroom teacher can provide, others need additional services or specialist provision. The Children and Families Service provide a range of additional services and provision to meet the needs of our children and young people, with an overview included in Appendix 1.

## 5.0 PROFILE OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS (ASN) IN DUNDEE

- 5.1 The number of children and young people in Dundee identified with additional support needs (ASN) has steadily increased since 2010 and there continues to be year on year increases, both in terms of the numbers as well as the complexity of needs. This is mirrored nationally.

### Early learning and childcare settings

- 5.2 The [Additional early learning and childcare statistics 2024](#)<sup>1</sup> (published December 2024, Scottish Government) contains information about the number of children registered with early learning and childcare (ELC) settings whose home language is not English, are assessed/ declared disabled, and have additional support needs (ASN). The statistics for Dundee, and Scotland, are detailed in Table 1.

*Table 1 Percentage of registrations (and number of children) with ASN in ELC in Dundee*

	Dundee	Scotland
Percentage of all registrations whose home language is not English, Gaelic, Scots, or Sign Language (note: estimate to nearest ten in publication)	13% (340)	11%
Percentage of all registrations assessed/declared disabled	3% (80)	2%
Percentage of all registrations with additional support needs	20% (520)	19%

- 5.3 According to these statistics, 12% of all children registered in Dundee's ELC settings are recorded as having language, speech, and communication issues, compared to 8% nationally. 4% of children are recorded as having learning difficulties, compared to 2% nationally. 7% of children are also recorded as having social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, compared to 6% nationally.

### Primary and Secondary schools

- 5.4 According to the [pupil census supplementary statistics](#)<sup>2</sup> (published March 2025, Scottish Government), 33.4% (3,311) of primary school children in Dundee in 2024 were reported to have at least one ASN. This was an increase of 3 percentage points (pp) from 2023, when 30.4% of children were recorded as having ASN. The Scotland average increased from 30.4% in 2023 to 34.6% in 2024. The highest seven reasons for additional support are detailed in Table 2, as well as the number of looked after children.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-for-schools-in-scotland-2024/documents/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/>

- 5.5 48.7% (4,110) of young people in Dundee secondary schools in 2024 were reported to have at least one ASN. This was an increase of 4 pp from 2023, when 44.7% of young people were recorded as having ASN. The Scotland average increased from 42.9% in 2023 to 46.1% in 2024. The highest seven reasons for additional support are detailed in Table 2, as well as the number of looked after young people.

*Table 2 Number children and young people with Additional Support Needs 2023 and 2024, by Reason for Support (NB cannot be summed, as a pupil may have more than one reason for support). 12 most common Reasons for Support 2024.*

	Primary Schools			Secondary Schools		
		2023	2024		2023	2024
1	Social, emotional and behavioural difficulty	925	966	Social, emotional and behavioural difficulty	1,252	1,359
2	English as an additional language	727	884	Family Issues	686	780
3	Family Issues	384	404	English as an additional language	541	665
4	Communication Support Needs	324	373	Mental health problem	486	606
5	Language or speech disorder	357	359	Other moderate learning difficulty	471	575
6	Other moderate learning difficulty	299	318	Interrupted learning	271	514
7	Autistic spectrum disorder	265	270	Young Carer	339	506
8	Physical health problem	202	198	Autistic spectrum disorder	409	434
9	Young Carer	178	190	Physical health problem	252	357
10	Learning disability	125	138	Dyslexia	242	311
11	Looked after	105	118	Other specific learning difficulty (e.g. numeric)	257	250
12	Interrupted learning	81	111	Looked after	175	219

- 5.6 In total, there are 1,716 children and young people assessed and/ or declared as having a disability in schools in Dundee. 1,388 of these children and young people have been assessed as having a disability.
- 5.7 There are 2,464 children and young people in Dundee schools for whom English, Gaelic, Scots, Doric nor Sign Language is their home language. These children and young people have 75 different home languages between them. Dundee has the fifth highest amount of different home languages of all 32 local authorities.

- 5.8 Children and young people receive support in a range of ways, and from various professionals and partners, to meet their needs. An overview of the nature of this support is detailed in Table 3.

*Table 3 Nature of support of children and young people with Additional Support Needs in 2024*

Nature of support	Primary	Secondary
Education: Additional Specialist teaching support	732	1,268
Education: Additional Specialist non-teaching support	1,120	1,575
Social Work services	201	283
Health services	724	962
Voluntary	129	254
Classroom Teacher	2,193	2,683
Other	265	546

Note: children and young people with more than one additional need will appear multiple times

### Special schools

- 5.9 Dundee has two 'special schools: Kingspark School and Rockwell Learning Centre. In 2024, there were 268 children and young people (89 female; 179 male) in Dundee's specialised schools with ASN. 196 of these children and young people were assessed or declared as having a disability. 166 children and young people receive additional support for learning disabilities and 129 for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

*Table 4 Nature of support of children and young people with Additional Support Needs in 2024: Special*

Nature of support	Special
Education: Additional Specialist teaching support	228
Education: Additional Specialist non-teaching support	249
Social Work services	24
Health services	75
Voluntary	11
Classroom Teacher	7
Other	10

## **6.0 ACHIEVEMENTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IDENTIFIED AS HAVING ASN**

- 6.1 The following measures are based on all pupils in Dundee mainstream schools with at least one additional support need (ASN) recorded on SEEMiS (the management information system).
- 6.2 Table 5 shows that, in 2025, 75.3% of senior phase pupils (S6 based on S4) with ASN attained literacy and numeracy at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 4 or better. This is 1.1 pp better than the previous year.
- 6.3 In 2025, 48.3% of senior phase pupils (S6 based on S4) with ASN attained literacy and numeracy at SCQF Level 5+. This is 1.8 pp higher than the previous year.

*Table 5 Percentage of pupils (S6 based on S4) with ASN attaining literacy and numeracy.*

Session	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
At SCQF 4+	74.3%	76.3%	75.5%	74.2%	75.3%
At SCQF 5+	50.3%	48.7%	48.6%	46.5%	48.3%

- 6.4 As Table 6 shows, in 2024/25, the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of senior phase pupils (S6 based on S4) with ASN improved their average total tariff points compared to 2023/24. The highest attaining 20% of pupils with ASN saw a drop in average total tariff points.

*Table 6 Average Total Tariff Points for pupils (S6 based on S4) with ASN*

Session	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Lowest 20%	38	41	29	36	39
Middle 60%	484	495	471	468	478
Highest 20%	1,578	1,751	1,632	1,600	1,571

- 6.5 Special sector schools are not included in the Insight benchmarking tool. Their results are available to the Children and Families Service in the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) results available on SEEMiS in August and updated in December.
- 6.6 In 2025 two young people in S6 in Kingspark achieved one National 2 award each, one young person achieved two National 2 awards, and one young person achieved two National 2 and one National 3 awards. These awards were in English and Communication, Performance Arts, Physical Education and Practical Cookery.
- 6.7 37 pupils at Rockwell Learning Centre were entered for SQA awards at National 3+ in 2025, 21 in S4, 13 in S5 and 3 in S6. Table 7 shows the number of pupils gaining one or more awards at Level National 3 or better in 2025. These figures are not cumulative i.e. they do not include awards gained in previous diets.

*Table 7 The number of pupils in Rockwell gaining 1 or more awards at Level National 3 or better in 2025 (not cumulative).*

		Award Level		
		National 3+	National 4+	National 5+
Number of awards	1+	37	31	14
	2+	32	21	
	3+	15	12	
	4+	10	6	
	5+	7	4	
	6+	5	2	
	7+	3	1	

- 6.8 Not all the achievements of children and young people should, or can, be measured in statistics; the same can be said about the support and experiences provided by our staff and partners to meet the needs of our children and young people. Case studies have been included in Appendices 2 to 6 to give an insight into the additional support available (staff, services and provision) and the impact of this support in meeting the needs of children and young people with a range of additional support needs.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

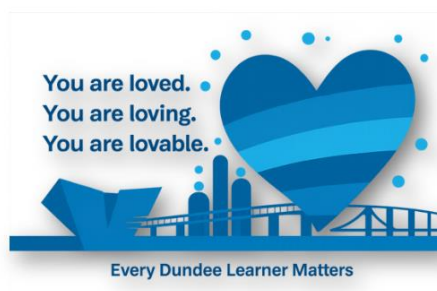
- 7.1 The Children and Families Service continue to strive to improve outcomes for children and young people who have additional support needs.
- 7.2 The number of children and young people in Dundee identified with additional support needs has steadily increased since 2010, as it has done nationally, and there continues to be year on year increases. The complexity and range of additional support needs is also increasing. The Children and Families Service completed an ASN review which has now informed a new, long-term Inclusion Strategy to ensure that the local authority can meet the changing and increasing needs

of Dundee's children and young people. The working vision for this strategy can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Inclusion Strategy (draft) vision statement

## Vision

Every Dundee learner is educated within an inclusive, equitable, and nurturing environment where they thrive, learn, and achieve their full potential, regardless of background, identity, or additional support need, within their local catchment school.



7.3 The key aims of our Inclusion Strategy can be summarised as follows:

### 7.3.1 **Promote Inclusive Practice**

Embed 'The Dundee Standard of Inclusive Practice' across all educational settings, ensuring every learner feels safe, valued, and supported.

### 7.3.2 **Strengthen Wellbeing and Belonging**

Prioritise the emotional, social, and mental wellbeing of children, young people, and staff through proactive, trauma-informed approaches.

### 7.3.3 **Ensure Equity of Access and Outcomes**

Address barriers to learning and participation through timely, needs-led support. Use inclusive, responsive pedagogy to meet diverse learner needs and promote positive outcomes for all.

### 7.3.4 **Build Capacity and Leadership**

Develop confident, skilled practitioners and leaders at all levels, who deliver high quality learning and teaching and who champion inclusion and wellbeing.

### 7.3.5 **Enhance Data-Informed Decision Making**

Use robust, moderated data to inform planning, interventions, and quality assurance in a timely manner.

7.3.6 Article IX of The Minute of Meeting of the Children, Families and Communities Committee of April 2024, (Report No 113-2024 refers) 'A Step Change on Positive Destinations for Young Dundonians' sets out an ambitious improvement plan to inspire young people to pursue education, develop their employability skills, and realise their full potential. This improvement plan identifies six key themes to improve the participations rates of all Dundee's young people. Each theme has a "young person's expectation" to focus the direction of the changes needed and subsequent

actions. Whilst the themes are interconnected, there is a specific theme of “Additional Support Needs” with a young person’s expectation and associated improvement actions.

## **8.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 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.

## **9.0 CONSULTATIONS**

9.1 The Council Leadership Team have been consulted in the preparation of this report and are in agreement with its content.

## **10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

10.1 None.

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**APPENDIX 1****Range of additional support (services and provisions) available in the Children and Families Service**

<b>Provisions</b>	<b>Type of Support offered</b>
Accessibility and Inclusion Service (AIS)	An outreach team who supports children and young people with a range of ASN including care experienced young people, travelling community, hospital education and home education.
Anxiety in Motion (AIM)	A community-based provision, now situated in Rockwell, that supports education for young people in secondary who have medically registered Anxiety, where they experience school avoidance due to anxiety.
Dudhope Young People's Unit School (YPU)	A hospital-based education provision for CAMHS inpatients aged 12–18, with all referrals received through the NHS. Young people come from any of ten local authorities across the North of Scotland.
English as an Additional Language (EAL)	Team of teachers and bilingual assistants that support children within mainstream education to build strategies to support English language.
Longhaugh Support Group (LSG)	Supports joint placement for primary aged pupils between their placement school and LSG. Supports pupils experience high levels of social, emotional and behavioural needs.
Deaf Education team	The education team supports children and young people across different secondary and primary schools, who have hearing impairments or are registered Deaf.
Visual Impairment (VI) team	The VI education team supports children and young people across different secondary and primary schools, who have sight impairments or are registered blind.
Autism and Social communication team	Outreach team who supports mainstream schools and nurseries with strategies to support young people who have a diagnosis of autism or display behaviours that are neurodivergent in nature.
Rockwell	Specialist off site provision for secondary aged pupils who are experiencing complex social, emotional and behavioural needs.
Kingspark school	Specialist school who supports educational outcomes for children and young people from Primary 1 – to Secondary S6, who have complex medical and other additional support needs.



**APPENDIX 2****Dundee CAMHS YPU School - Case Study****Focus: Educational Resilience in a CAMHS Inpatient School**

Pupil A was first admitted to the Dundee CAMHS Young People's Unit (YPU) at the age of 13, during her second year of secondary school (S2). She was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa and was also experiencing high levels of emotional distress, homesickness, social anxiety, and self-harming behaviours. The hospital admission took her far from home, family, and school. Despite these challenges, she demonstrated a deep commitment to her education, continuing to engage with YPU School throughout several lengthy admissions until the age of 18.

She was especially passionate about languages and writing, often expressing herself as comfortably in French as in English. Initially reluctant to engage with NHS staff or therapists, she developed strong, trusting relationships with her teachers, valuing the clear boundary between education and clinical treatment. YPU teachers adopted a personalised and flexible approach to her learning, collaborating with her home school teachers and NHS professionals to create an education plan that allowed her to thrive.

The Covid-19 pandemic presented additional challenges, particularly due to restrictions on movement and the cancellation of exams. However, the education team responded with creativity and determination, keeping the YPU School open and prioritising wellbeing, learning, and teaching throughout the pandemic. Despite many challenges, she achieved top grades in all her National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher qualifications, a testament to her perseverance, resilience, and the effectiveness of the tailored educational support provided.

Beyond the classroom, she became one of Dundee's Young Ambassadors for Inclusion, advocating for young people with mental health needs and highlighting the importance of education during a CAMHS admission. "Mental illness can be a barrier to success in school, but with the right support, it does not have to be," she said. During lockdown, when unable to leave the hospital for external placements, YPU teachers facilitated a virtual work experience project, enabling her to develop French language resources for younger learners as part of a local 1+2 primary languages initiative.

Now entering her final year of university, studying psychology, she remains determined to use her lived experience to support others facing similar challenges. Her recovery journey illustrates the transformative impact of sensitive, student-centred teaching within a clinical education setting. At the YPU School, staff recognise the importance of maintaining high educational expectations and provision—alongside emotional safety—for young people with complex mental health needs.

### APPENDIX 3

#### **Case Study: Overcoming Emotional Based School Avoidance – The Journey of Pupil X – AIM**

##### **Background**

Pupil X, a 13-year-old boy, presented with significant challenges related to emotional health and wellbeing, school anxiety, and physical health concerns. These difficulties emerged during the critical transition from primary to secondary school, which was severely disrupted by COVID-19 restrictions. The lack of a structured transition, combined with the breakdown of peer relationships, marked the onset of Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

He also suffered from a chronic bowel condition, which heightened his anxiety about being away from home and the need for close proximity to toilet facilities. At home, emotional struggles were compounded by trauma, having witnessed domestic abuse involving his mother. This led to comfort eating, increased isolation, and a deepened attachment to his mother, making separation and school attendance increasingly difficult.

##### **Challenges**

- Severe school avoidance and agoraphobia
- Anxiety related to health and toilet access
- Social isolation and physical health decline due to inactivity and emotional eating
- Trauma exposure and attachment concerns linked to domestic violence
- Complete disengagement from education and refusal to leave the house

##### **Initial Interventions**

Initial school-based efforts were led by the Health and Wellbeing Worker, but Pupil X was too anxious to engage. As his situation deteriorated, CAMHS became involved to address the agoraphobia. The school arranged online learning to maintain educational access.

##### **Innovative Support – Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)**

In January 2022, Pupil X was identified as an ideal candidate for the council's pilot Virtual Learning Programme (VLE). He engaged with National 3 Geography through online resources and one live lesson per week.

This marked a turning point:

- He achieved a National 3 qualification in Geography
- He regained a sense of achievement and re-engaged with learning
- Transition to AIM

In May 2022, Pupil X was referred to AIM, a community-based education setting designed for young people experiencing EBSA. He joined the Broad General Education (BGE) class in S3 and began a phased return to in-person education.

Through gradual exposure and individualised support, he:

- Built trust and confidence
- Improved attendance
- Engaged with peers in a small group setting
- Targeted Health and Wellbeing Support

Physical health remained a concern. Pupil X expressed a strong interest in becoming a wrestler, despite limited physical capacity. In response:

- The AIM Educational Resource Worker connected with the Healthy Weight Service for tailored nutrition education
- Contact was made with a local wrestling club, which provided a mentor with lived experience of overcoming social anxiety
- He received a lifetime free membership to the club
- Funding from Cash for Kids enabled the purchase of gym clothes and gear

As a result, he:

- Increased his fitness
- Gained a new social group
- Participated in wrestling events in Dundee

### **Family Support**

The AIM team extended support to the wider family:

- Assisted with reapplying for larger housing, including writing statements of support. The family successfully moved after being previously unsuccessful since 2002
- Encouraged participation in community events, including Family Fun Days and outings, helping reduce isolation and build a social network

### **Educational Progress and Outcomes**

Pupil X remained at AIM for three years:

- S4: Achieved 5 National 4 Awards and 3 Unit Awards
- S5: Began a senior phase college course in Esports (Level 6 Award) while completing:
  - 2 additional National 4 qualifications
  - National 5 English (Grade B)
  - 2 units in National 5 Mathematics

To support independence:

- Successfully applied to the Independent Living Fund to purchase a laptop and driving lessons in preparation for college life

### **Current Status (2025)**

Pupil X has now:

- Transitioned to full-time college, studying Computing
- Is attending regularly and thriving in the new environment
- Remains committed to wrestling, continuing to grow physically and socially

### **Conclusion**

Pupil X's journey is a powerful example of what can be achieved through early identification, multi-agency collaboration, trauma-informed practice, and innovative educational approaches such as the VLE and AIM. His story highlights:

- The importance of relationship-based support
- The role of flexible education models in re-engaging learners
- The long-term impact of whole-family support

This case demonstrates how tailored intervention can not only reintroduce young people to learning but also transform lives.

**APPENDIX 4****Autism & Social communication Team – Case Study****Background**

Pupil A is a young autistic child who presents with a demand avoidant profile. His early experience in education began in a mainstream nursery setting; however, this environment did not meet his needs, and he exhibited high levels of distress. His behaviours indicated significant anxiety, and he was unable to access learning in that setting.

Following these difficulties, he was placed in a specialist nursery provision. This setting was more appropriate for his needs and provided a nurturing, structured environment. The change led to noticeable improvements in his wellbeing and engagement. This period was a positive experience for both Pupil A and his family, with his needs being better understood and supported.

**Transition and Withdrawal**

Pupil A transitioned into his catchment primary school and attended for just over one term. Although he managed to be in school during this time, there were increasing signs of distress at home. His anxiety escalated to the point where he began refusing to attend school altogether. This led to a prolonged period—spanning two terms—during which he was not in education. In addition, he was not engaging in daily living activities, and leaving the house became an overwhelming challenge.

**Targeted Support**

During this period of heightened anxiety and withdrawal, the AIS Autism team began providing targeted support to the family, in consultation with the educational psychologist. Their input included:

- Supporting the family to establish daily routines (e.g., getting dressed, structured outings, bedtime routines)
- Introducing visual supports to reduce anxiety and increase predictability

Following a family relocation, Pupil A was enrolled in his new catchment school. AIS supported a phased transition into this new school environment, ensuring that the approach was child-led and flexible. Key elements included:

- Careful planning of transactional supports (e.g., identifying key adults, visual timetables, predictable routines)
- Making school predictable and desirable by incorporating his interests and motivators

**Current Status**

Pupil A has recently started attending school full time. While this is still early in the reintegration process, the signs are promising. His current setting continues to prioritise structure, predictability, and low-demand communication to reduce anxiety. AIS remains involved in providing ongoing support and ensuring the provision remains responsive to his evolving needs.

**APPENDIX 5****Case Study: Supporting a Refugee Pupil – English as an Additional Language (EAL)****Background**

Pupil R is currently a Primary 7 pupil attending a school in Dundee. He arrived in Scotland as a refugee with his family, and his first language is Arabic. Prior to arrival, he had received limited formal schooling. Upon starting school, he struggled to follow classroom routines, frequently appeared restless, and occasionally left the classroom or the building without permission. His behaviour was initially interpreted as challenging, and concerns were raised regarding the need for a more structured environment. Following a multi-agency meeting, a decision was made to allocate him an enhanced support place in an area with additional staffing.

**Initial Concerns**

- Communication barriers: Pupil R had very limited English on arrival, making it difficult for him to understand instructions or express his needs.
- Behavioural presentation: He was observed shouting out, wandering during lessons, attempting to leave the building, and showing signs of frustration.
- Emotional impact: As a refugee, he had experienced upheaval and uncertainty, which may have contributed to his behaviour.

**Intervention by EAL Staff**

The EAL team became directly involved and identified that Pupil R's difficulties were closely linked to his stage of English language acquisition rather than any inherent behavioural difficulty.

**Key strategies included:**

- Language support through focused small-group sessions to develop basic social and curriculum English
- Use of visual scaffolds such as picture timetables, flashcards, and dual-language resources to support comprehension
- Implementation of a buddy system to model classroom routines and provide language role models
- Staff training to help teachers and support staff differentiate tasks, reduce language load, and offer alternative ways for Pupil R to demonstrate understanding
- A wellbeing focus through regular check-ins to ensure he felt safe, valued, and included

**Progress**

Over the course of two terms, Pupil R's confidence grew significantly. He began using simple English to communicate with peers and staff, and his understanding of classroom instructions improved. As his language needs were better met, his frustration decreased, and he was able to engage more consistently in learning activities. Teachers noted that behaviours previously perceived as disruptive were actually attempts to participate without the necessary language.

**Outcome**

With the support of EAL staff, the classroom teacher, and support assistants, Pupil R made strong progress in acquiring English and adapting to school routines. His enhanced support place was no longer required, and he successfully reintegrated into his mainstream class on a full-time basis. By the end of Primary 6, he was working at expected levels in several curriculum areas and actively participating in group tasks and class discussions.

**Key Learning Points**

- Behavioural concerns in newly arrived bilingual pupils may often stem from language barriers and unfamiliarity with school expectations rather than underlying difficulties
- Early involvement of EAL specialists can prevent unnecessary referrals for behaviour or learning support
- Visual scaffolds, structured language development, and staff training are highly effective in supporting refugee pupils' inclusion

- A focus on wellbeing and belonging is central to enabling pupils to thrive academically and socially

## APPENDIX 6

### Case Study: Supporting children's communication and emotional regulation through SCERTS – Woodlea Children's Centre and Dundee Educational Psychology Service (DEPS)

#### Background

Woodlea Children's Centre is a large, free-standing nursery catering to children aged 2 to 5 years. Situated within the St John's/Harris cluster, the centre has long held a strong reputation in Dundee for supporting children with additional support needs (ASN). At the time of the project, the nursery had a roll of 119 children, with 68% residing within SIMD 1 and 2.

SCERTS is an assessment, planning, and intervention framework that draws on evidence from psychology, child development, speech and language therapy, and neuroscience. It provides a comprehensive structure for developing Social Communication (SC) and Emotional Regulation (ER) through attuned interaction, known as Transactional Supports (TS). The framework also supports the effective integration of other approaches, ensuring they are developmentally appropriate.

This project was led by the Nursery Teacher and the Link Educational Psychologist, with full support from the Head Teacher and the wider management team. Careful consideration was given to sustainability and future roll-out.

#### Rationale

- Dundee City Council ASN data indicates that the primary barriers to learning in the early years are language and communication, social interaction, and emotional regulation.
- This trend was evident in the target nursery, where profiling and referrals to the Dundee Educational Psychology Service (DEPS) highlighted a growing number of children whose main challenges were social communication and emotional regulation.
- Observations of the targeted children revealed that, although ABLe planning is well embedded within the nursery, there is no consistent approach to setting targets for these children. Furthermore, analysis of the plans and discussions with staff suggested that the emphasis of the plans is more on the support provided than on promoting children's developmental progress.
- Practitioners currently report difficulties in demonstrating measurable progress for these children.
- Visual supports are used to aid understanding; however, staff report that their use is often based on trial and error and lacks consistency. The team aimed to explore how visuals could be used more effectively to support communication.
- Educational Psychology (EP) reports for the Early Years panel that utilised the SCERTS framework were considered helpful.
- There is a strong research base supporting the importance of coaching in embedding new learning.

#### Description

- The Head Teacher and the link Educational Psychologist completed a three-day NAIT training programme focused on the SCERTS framework.
- The Nursery Teacher participated in training sessions delivered by the link Educational Psychologist to the wider Dundee Educational Psychology Service (DEPS) team.

- All nursery staff received an introduction to SCERTS through two sessions, each delivered twice to ensure full staff attendance. Medbridge videos were used to support discussion and highlight key messages. Staff engaged with the SCERTS initial assessment to identify a child's developmental stage and trialled the SCERTS observation tool. This process revealed a tendency to focus on developmental "gaps" rather than strengths, prompting further reflection on the nursery environment—for example, considering how to make group time more predictable.
- Six information and coaching sessions were delivered to staff supporting five target children. These sessions focused on the SCERTS process, use of assessment tools, and drafting individual SCERTS plans.
- Target staff shared their learning with the wider team during the February In-Service Day.
- Evaluation and planning for the next session were undertaken to inform future practice.

### **What happened during implementation?**

#### **Whole Staff Inputs**

Training inputs delivered to all nursery staff were positively received. Key learning points included:

- A deeper understanding of how to support children who experience the world from an "objective-focused perspective." This led to reflection on previous practices, with some staff expressing discomfort upon considering past approaches such as physically moving children between areas of the nursery.
- A shift in thinking around observation practices. Several staff recognised a tendency to focus on developmental gaps rather than identifying and building on children's strengths and current developmental stages.

#### **Targeted Staff Inputs**

- While initial plans aimed to explore the three areas of the SCERTS framework—Social Communication (SC), Emotional Regulation (ER), and Transactional Support (TS)—staff found it challenging to separate these domains. Sessions were therefore more effectively structured around the SCERTS assessment and planning process.
- Time allocated for professional dialogue and coaching proved essential. Additional sessions were added to address queries and support the embedding of learning. Flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of the group were key to the success of this approach.
- The sessions highlighted the depth of staff knowledge about the children they support.
- Although some staff initially expressed insecurities about sharing their learning, all were able to do so with growing confidence. Their contributions were well received by the wider team. A preparatory session was added to support staff in presenting their learning.

#### **Planned Outcomes**

##### **For All Staff:**

All nursery staff are expected to develop a clear understanding of the following:

- The importance of children perceiving interactions with adults as enjoyable.
- Children's motivation to seek interaction both to meet their needs and for pleasure.
- The three stages of social communication—social, language, and conversational—and how to assess each stage.
- The value of a predictable environment and what this looks like in practice.
- How to use verbal supports that meet children at their current developmental level, including objects of reference, photographs, and symbols.
- The importance of extending communication beyond simple naming.

- Their role in supporting the five targeted children to develop social communication and emotional regulation.

#### **For Targeted Key Staff:**

For staff working directly with the five targeted children, the use of the SCERTS framework is expected to positively impact:

- Confidence in assessing Social Communication (SC) and Emotional Regulation (ER) for the targeted children.
- Confidence in setting measurable targets for SC and ER.
- Consistent use of attuned transactional supports across the nursery setting.
- Observable progress in SC and ER for the five targeted children.
- Confidence in sharing their learning about the SCERTS model and contributing to planning for the next cycle of implementation.

#### **For Dundee Educational Psychology Service (DEPS):**

Evaluation of this test of change will inform future service delivery and development.

#### **Impact**

NAIT assessments indicated improved ratings in Social Communication and Emotional Regulation for all five targeted children, with the most significant impact observed in social communication. These findings were triangulated through staff observations and feedback from parents during Team Around the Child (TATC) meetings. The consistent use of transactional supports by staff was also reflected in the assessment ratings.

#### **Impact**

NAIT assessments indicated improved ratings in SC and ER for all of the 5 target children with the biggest impact in social communication. This was triangulated through observations and feedback from parents at TATC meetings. The consistent use of transactional supports by staff was also demonstrated in the assessment ratings.

Feedback from the staff through questionnaires and focus group was also positive, with the majority of the wider staff:

- rating their confidence in key messages and use of the “bubble plan” as 4/5 on a 5-point rating scale
- reporting more confidence in the assessment process (a rating of 3 and above)
- indicating an interest in being part of the target group moving forward.

All members of the target group reported that they had enjoyed participating in the project. They expressed increased confidence in using the SCERTS framework and noted that their involvement had positively influenced their practice. Their evaluative comments highlighted several key themes:

- Staff engaged in significant reflection on their individual practice, particularly in relation to specific situations where they supported individual children.
- The project helped staff to focus more clearly on target strategies.
- It provided permission and space to take time for meaningful reflection on these targets.
- Staff were encouraged to question the rationale behind targets and to consider the ways in which they implement them.
- Reflections extended to broader practice, such as differentiating group activities, which led to positive outcomes—for example, children actively seeking interaction. This approach helped to break down barriers by building on children’s strengths and reducing uncertainty, making practice more predictable and positioning the practitioner as a key resource.



- The experience reinforced the importance of knowing the children well.
- Staff reported growing confidence in sharing their learning with the wider team.
- Many felt empowered and reassured in their thinking and practice, and valued the opportunity to seek advice from colleagues.
- Observations showed that children had made progress through focused targets, particularly in social communication—such as indicating needs, showing awareness of keyworkers and peers, and using language to bridge communication levels. Children also demonstrated increased interest and enjoyment in engaging with others.
- Staff recognised the importance of ensuring predictability when physically supporting a child, including explaining what will happen next to promote safety.
- There was thoughtful reflection on the language used by adults when supporting individual learners.

### **Staff Feedback and Reflections**

Feedback gathered from staff through questionnaires and focus groups was overwhelmingly positive.

The majority of the wider staff:

- Rated their confidence in understanding key messages and using the “bubble plan” as 4 out of 5 on a five-point scale.
- Reported increased confidence in the assessment process, with most ratings at 3 or above.
- Indicated interest in joining the target group in future cycles of the project.

All members of the target group also reported that they had enjoyed participating in the project. They expressed increased confidence in applying the SCERTS framework and noted that their involvement had positively influenced their professional practice. Their evaluative comments highlighted several key themes:

- Staff engaged in deep reflection on their individual practice, particularly in relation to specific situations involving support for individual children.
- The project helped staff to focus more clearly on implementing targeted strategies.
- It provided time and permission for meaningful reflection on developmental targets.
- Staff were encouraged to question the rationale behind targets and to consider the methods used to implement them.
- Reflections extended to broader aspects of practice, such as differentiating group activities, which led to positive outcomes—for example, children actively seeking interaction. This approach helped to break down barriers by building on children’s strengths and reducing uncertainty, making practice more predictable and positioning the practitioner as a key resource.
- The experience reinforced the importance of knowing each child well.
- Staff reported growing confidence in sharing their learning with the wider team.
- Many felt empowered and reassured in their thinking and practice, and valued the opportunity to seek advice and support from colleagues.
- Observations indicated that children had made progress through focused targets, particularly in social communication—such as indicating needs, showing awareness of keyworkers and peers, and using language to bridge communication levels. Children also demonstrated increased interest and enjoyment in engaging with others.
- Staff recognised the importance of ensuring predictability when physically supporting a child, including explaining what will happen next to promote safety.
- There was thoughtful reflection on the language used by adults when supporting individual learners.

**Next Steps****In Woodlea Nursery:**

- **Group 1**, comprising the initial cohort of staff supporting children who remain in nursery, will continue to meet regularly. This group will adopt a coaching approach to support ongoing assessment, planning, and review.
- **Group 2**, made up of key workers for newly identified children and supported by members of the original group, will follow the revised programme of Career-Long Professional Learning (CLPL), as outlined in the “Do” session.
- Alternate whole-staff “Supporting Learners” meetings will include a SCERTS focus to promote shared responsibility in implementing individual plans.

**Areas for Consideration:**

- Strategies to better facilitate the use of SCERTS plans as dynamic, working documents informed by regular observation and evaluation.
- Opportunities for further involvement of parents in the planning and review process.
- Approaches to effectively support transition planning for children moving on from nursery.

**For Dundee Educational Psychology Service (DEPS):**

- The SCERTS approach will be rolled out to a target nursery in each cluster, as agreed with Education Officers and Speech and Language Therapy colleagues, as part of the DEPS Service Improvement Plan (SIP).
- Moving forward, SCERTS projects in target nurseries, including Woodlea, will be evaluated and recorded using a shared Assess–Plan–Do–Review (APDR) template. These evaluations will be collated to inform the overall DEPS SIP evaluation.
- Ongoing dialogue with Additional and Inclusive Support (AIS) colleagues will continue to ensure that receiving primary schools are equipped to support children on their SCERTS journey.

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>AIS</b>	<b>Accessibility &amp; Inclusion Service</b>
<b>BSL</b>	<b>British Sign Language</b>
<b>CAMHS</b>	<b>Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services</b>
<b>DEPS</b>	<b>Dundee Educational Psychology Service</b>
<b>ESOL</b>	<b>English for Speakers of other languages</b>
<b>EAL</b>	<b>English as an additional language</b>
<b>LSG</b>	<b>Longhaugh Support Group</b>
<b>PACE</b>	<b>Pupil Access to College and Employability</b>
<b>RISE</b>	<b>Raising Interpersonal Skills for Employment</b>
<b>SEBN</b>	<b>Social, Emotional and Behavioural needs</b>
<b>SCERTS</b>	<b>Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support</b>

**GLOSSARY**

<b>Insight</b>	<p>Insight is an online tool for benchmarking the senior phase. It is a professional tool available to secondary schools and local authorities to allow them to look at specific cohorts of learners and identify areas of success and where improvements can be made.</p> <p>Although Insight provides data on the attainment of a wide range of Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) awards from a range of providers, not all SCQF achievement awards are included.</p>
<b>SEEMIS</b>	A management information system, that is used by all authorities within Scotland. It is a secure site that holds all attainment, attendance and personal data of our young people.
<b>Special Schools</b>	These are specialist provisions to support the educational outcomes for pupils and young people.
<b>SQA</b>	Scottish Qualification Authority, an awarding body for National qualifications.
<b>Strategic Equity Fund</b>	Is provided by the Scottish Government to invest in approaches to achieving the mission of the Scottish attainment challenge; to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.
<b>Tarriff Points</b>	<p>The Tariff Scale is a key feature of the Insight online benchmarking tool. It allows a score to be calculated that summarises a wide range of achievement and awards from a range of providers. The tariff score is based on elements from the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), in particular SCQF Credit Points and levels, as well as elements related to a qualification's composition. The tariff scale allows comparisons to be made between cohorts, schools, local authorities, and their virtual comparators.</p> <p>The tariff points accrued by schools, local authorities and cohorts should not be viewed as the only way of measuring performance and should be considered in the context of the other outcome measures included in the tool, for example, breadth and depth, improving post-school participation and raising attainment in literacy and numeracy as well as other data sources.</p>