

Education, Children and Young People Committee

11th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 1 December

Covid-19 pandemic: Impact on children and young people

Introduction

The Committee is scrutinising the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and young people. The Committee will be taking oral evidence at Committee meetings in November and December before undertaking further engagement in early 2022.

The Committee, at this meeting, will take evidence on the overall impact of the pandemic on children and young people.

Committee meeting

The Committee will take evidence from—

- Jennifer King, Education Manager, Children & Families Service, Dundee City Council and Chair of ASN/CYP Services, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES);
- Laura Caven, Chief Officer, Children and Young People Team, COSLA;
- Mike Corbett, National Official (Scotland), NASUWT; and
- Joan Tranent, Chief Social Worker, Midlothian Council and Deputy Chair of Children and Families Standing Committee, Social Work Scotland.

Supporting Information

Written submissions have been provided by Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), COSLA, NASUWT and Social Work Scotland. These are provided at [Annexe A](#) to this paper.

A SPICe briefing to support this evidence session is at [Annexe B](#).

Gemma Cheek
Assistant Clerk
Education, Children and Young People Committee
25 November 2021

Annexe A

**Education, Children and Young People Committee
10th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 1 December
Impact of Covid 19 on Children and Young People
submission pack.**

This paper provides the submissions from some of the witness organisations for the meeting on 1 December 2021.

- [Association of Directors of Education in Scotland \(ADES\)](#)
- [COSLA](#)
- [NASUWT](#)
- [Social Work Scotland](#)

ADES

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE: ADES SUBMISSION

The impact of the pandemic upon children and young people with additional support needs, care-experienced young people and those from a background of socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds.

INTRODUCTION

Improvement in how we engage with and support children and young people who have additional support needs (ASN), are from a background of socio-economic disadvantage, and those who are care-experienced has been a long-standing key priority for ADES within our duties to support implementation of UNCRC, GIRFEC, The Promise and Additional Support for Learning Act, and recent ASL Action Plan from the Morgan review.

For many children and young people, socioeconomic inequity and its impact on learning and wellbeing during school closures will have exacerbated the poverty related attainment gap (Audit, Scotland, 2020; Engzell, Frey & Verhagen, 2020; Scottish Government, 2021; EEF, 2020a).

From the local and national data gathered since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic period, it has been apparent that we need to maintain a focus of improvement activity on the children and young people for whom the impact of disruption in their learning was likely to be greatest. [Recalibrating Equity and Social Justice in Scottish Education: Bouncing forward after COVID-19 lockdowns | Research | National Improvement Hub](#)

To effectively target support for children and young people most affected by poverty and COVID-19 educational establishments, local authorities and national agencies need to continue to use data and research as part of an evidence base. Addressing the impact of interrupted learning now will minimise further disruption (OECD, 2020).

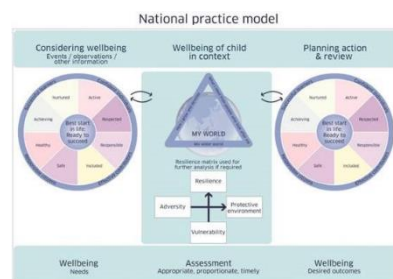
ADES therefore continues to work closely with partners across the system including Parents (through ASLIG with NPFS); Social Work and Health Professionals; Education Scotland; and the Third Sector in order to respond to and support recovery of all children and young people, and in particular those most disadvantaged. Identifying and monitoring Wellbeing must be seen and assessed in relation to risk and protective factors within the context of the GIRFEC National Practice Model

alongside the factors giving rise to ASN: the learning environment; family circumstances; disability or health needs; and social and emotional factors.

This framework was used by many local authorities to determine children and young people's access to Hubs and schools/nurseries.

Our local and regional evidence for this report is based on collective self-evaluation at this stage due to no collated national reporting of overall outcomes at the time of submission. The methodology for gathering evidence for this submission has come from:

- focus groups of ADES members;
- thematic analysis of a sample of local authority recovery reports to local committees



- a range of evidence provided to the National Collective Leadership Group (of which ADES is a member)
- consultation with SEALCC (children and young people with EAL)
- consultation with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
- case studies of practice (including one with the Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative - CYPIC)
- Education Scotland's national overview of practice in relation to remote learning
- We have also taken account of the Equity Audit's findings in the continued response to address the needs of children and young people who have been adversely affected by the pandemic. [Equity Audit | Scottish Attainment Challenge 2020-21: Equity in education | Resources for practitioners | Scotland Learns | National Improvement Hub](#)

The key areas which local authorities are addressing through the period of recovery follow.

1. Health and Wellbeing

1.1 Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing will have been affected in many different ways as a result of the pandemic and it continues to be a key priority for all services in local authority partnerships. Needs which have been identified include:

- Anxiety about returning to school for some children, young people and their parents
- Distressed behaviour related to disruption in relationships and routines
- Loss and bereavement
- Concerns about speech and language development for targeted pre-school children

Therefore, having a range of approaches which are proactive as well as responsive, from universal through to specialist services are central to school/nursery and education service plans. [Mental health and wellbeing: whole school approach: framework - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

1.2 The Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme Board workstreams have also created the opportunity to address the inter-related priorities which will respond to a number of the Morgan Review recommendations including the Neuro-Developmental Service Specification [Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme Board - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

1.3 Supports and services to address mental health and wellbeing must operate under the principles that people who know children and young people best are fully supported in their work; and in doing so counselling and other therapeutic interventions can be provided within a continuum of a resilience-based approach which promotes least intrusive, most effective solutions.

Health and Wellbeing, including mental health, is a responsibility for all practitioners and many authorities have a Standard of Health and Wellbeing 'Responsibility of All' across all schools



The Dundee Standard
HWB.pdf

1.4 All educational settings in Scotland have a link Educational Psychologist who they can consult with to seek support and advice. Educational Psychology Services aim to improve emotional health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people in a range of ways including:

- Support to educational settings so that they can be prepared in the event of a sudden bereavement or critical incident
- Staff training on trauma, attachment, and nurture
- Support educational settings to design and evaluate projects to help improve the emotional health and wellbeing of their pupils.

1.5 The Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework and associated funding specifically addresses establishing or developing community supports and services that target issues of mental and emotional distress and wellbeing rather than mental illness and other needs that may be more appropriately met through CAMHS. It supports an approach based on prevention and early intervention. The framework is intended to be used to help partnerships to design and build services and supports that are in line with GIRFEC, national priorities and principles, relevant to local developments and are based on local needs assessment, responsive to the needs of local communities. To date there are a wide range of commissioned services, many of which are from the Third Sector, which reflect local community demographics, and small-scale sampling indicates that children and families who have engaged with supports and services have benefitted from them. Some examples include:

- 'TogetherAll' provision of online counselling to support the age range 16-24 (or 26 for care experienced young people) to target mental and emotional distress and wellbeing through open access, drop in and digital means.
- Support for Young Carers; and for those who are LGBT+
- Parental support groups addressing a range of mental health and wellbeing concerns
- Interventions for children and families with additional support needs including those with Autism and wider social and communication needs
- Organisations which support families affected by developmental trauma including domestic abuse and substance mis-use
- Healthier Minds Hub coordinating interventions for children and young people with ASN who require support for their mental wellbeing and resilience.

1.6 Feedback from authorities implementation of **Counselling in Schools** services for children age 10 years+ indicates that the predominant presenting issues discussed within counselling have been: anxiety/stress; interpersonal relationships; family issues; and self-esteem. These are the issues that counsellors would expect to be prevalent amongst children and young people at the ages and stages of those engaging regardless of pandemic impact. The most significant pandemic related issues identified were: increased anxiety; worry about school work/exams; sense of removal of support networks; and loneliness. A range of individual outcomes have been formulated in counselling through children and young people working with counsellors to identify what may help such as: being more aware of feelings / behaviour; being able to cope better; being more positive; and being better able to solve problems.

1.7 While many children with ASN have adapted well on return to school (for those who attended throughout lockdown as well as those who did not) ADES members report an increase in distressed behaviour of some children in early primary and early secondary. Taking a trauma-informed approach based on **Nurture** principles is an evidence-based response to children's needs which requires resilience of staff. Debriefing has been shown to support staff following incidents.

1.8 Liaison with the **RC Speech and Language Therapy Services** and data provided to the National Collective Leadership Group indicates some concerns about the development of

some children's early speech, language and communication needs. A few authorities are delivering interventions which aim to build the capacity staff to directly support gaps in children's vocabulary and communication skills. Longer term, implementation of a systematic and collaborative approach which takes account of the RCSLT Communication cycle must be seriously considered. [communication-capacity.pdf \(rcslt.org\)](https://www.rcslt.org/communication-capacity.pdf)

1.9 Tracking and monitoring of children and young people's mental health and wellbeing will provide a longer-term picture of their resilience through a range of measures some of which are more established than others, e.g. individual monitoring through Team Around The Child frameworks have been in place for some years, while implementation of the national framework for the **Health and Wellbeing Census** and forthcoming Transforming Outcomes Framework in 2022. In addition, use of the Glasgow Wellbeing Toolkit is being used in a number of authorities which can provide a further source of evidence of the extent to which children and young people's mental health and wellbeing is affected and becoming more resilient over time.

2. Attendance and engagement

2.1 School attendance and engagement of learners is crucial for children's educational attainment particularly for children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those who need support to access learning. During the Covid-19 school closures, socioeconomic inequalities in engagement with home learning were exacerbated, which will likely lead to an increase in disparities in educational achievement.

2.2 ADES have worked in collaboration with the Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) to identify 'what works' in improving attendance and engagement. Collaboration across 6 authorities with 14 teams demonstrated improved outcomes for the children they were working with whether on-line, in school or both. The programme improved the engagement, time-keeping and attendance for all children identified. Specific changes noted included daily video calls, self-evaluation through personalised contact, mentors support for senior pupils, home visits, and 1:1 person support. The programme impacted on an average of 40 staff and over 400 children.



QI-Awards-2021-Application-Form-Innovation

Collectively, these 14 teams have demonstrated that a systematic approach across diverse demographical areas, and with the support of their strategic leaders, creates new learning for everyone in the system. We will need to track the longer-term impact of the achievements made in this academic year to know how they can be sustained.

2.3 Some local authorities have noted that as a result of the attendance and engagement of children and young people with additional support needs being prioritised during 2020-21, including those who are care experienced, there has been an improvement in their overall attendance level.

2.4 Care Experienced Children and Young People: The Scottish Attainment Care-Experienced Children and Young Person's Fund has helped address specific outcomes affecting our care-experienced young people. Local authorities have focused on improving engagement, attainment and outcomes, through a range of interventions including:

- Employability Mentors working with Throughcare and Aftercare Teams

- Funding directed towards Champions' Boards to support the 'voice' of care-experienced children and young people
- Targeting and improving attendance for young people in S1 and S2 through relationships between home-school workers and parents
- A wide range of summer holiday programmes which involved CLD, Active Schools and Third Sector organisations

2.5 Other factors reported to still be affecting some children and young people's wellbeing include:

- Parents not yet being able to fully access school buildings and therefore meet in-person to discuss their child's progress. Many schools and nurseries continue to use other ways in which to connect and maintain a relationship with parents from outdoor meetings through to virtual meetings and phone-calls but have noted the difference which in-person contact can make.
- Staff and children/young people's absence due to covid or self-isolating causes some disruption/change to routines and delivery of targeted programmes.
- The impact in particular on those children and young people with social and emotional needs who were in transition from nursery to P1/P2 and from primary to S1/S2. These cohorts of children missed out on a full transition programme and in some cases are still taking time to adapt to learning and socialising with others.
- Young people's mental health requiring continued flexible learning arrangements and in some cases an increase in home education requests

3. Learning and Teaching

3.1 It is anticipated that unfortunately, CfE attainment levels (ACEL) nationally are likely to have dropped as a result of the unforeseen pressures of the pandemic, lockdown and remote learning causing unprecedented disruption to our education system in Scotland. This is likely to apply to all sectors though the details may look different in each local authority area.

3.2 In recognition of the financial and other resource implications of maintaining critical provision for children and families at this time, guidance on Attainment Scotland Funding, including PEF, was relaxed in order that local authorities and Headteachers could support the education, support and care for children and young people during the response to the coronavirus pandemic. In financial terms, local authorities received a range of Scottish Government grants to support areas of expenditure as a result of COVID-19. ADES members make strategic decisions in where best to direct funding to and enable/empower schools to do their best for all our children and young people. Decisions made by schools, however, were to remain consistent with the principle of equity in education.

3.3 It should be noted that head teachers, school staff and staff in local authorities responded extremely well in very challenging conditions. The following are just a few examples of the types of responses and activities undertaken across the country:

- Schools using a range of targeted literacy and numeracy interventions to support children's learning. In literacy specific programmes such as Hornet, Toe-by-toe, Word Aware, Talk Boost, POLAAR and Synthetic Phonics and in numeracy Power of One and Power of Two, Maths Circles and Numicon were implemented.

- A range of evidence-based interventions such as Wave Three, High Five and Precision Teaching are becoming well embedded in practice and schools have upskilled support staff to take forward planned interventions with the support of the Educational Psychology Team through regular on-line training opportunities.
- A number of schools have focused on the universal provision for all children within the classroom and ensuring that any barriers to learning have been reduced. This includes purchasing specific equipment and considering the learning environment and sensory needs of children and young people. They have invested in universal approaches including developing sensory rooms, outdoor learning resources, digital tools, literacy and numeracy curricular materials and play-based learning resources
- the step change in digital access has been retained with schools using Teams to keep in touch with pupils during covid related absences. Teams is also much more used for homework and supporting pupils with assignments for example.
- Where additional staff had been allocated to a school, these teachers and Pupil Support Assistants mainly carried out targeted work with small groups or individual pupils.
- This work addressed the emotional wellbeing of pupils, eg to support re-engagement with school for those who were most anxious about doing so
- Another focus for the work of these staff was reinforcing and revisiting key learning in literacy and numeracy with identified pupils. Work was carried out with targeted groups and with whole classes.
- Additional staff either worked directly with identified groups or released permanent school staff to provide this targeted support.
- Additional staff also provided support in ensuring that schools were able to comply with all COVID-19 health and safety measures

Without such a response, it is very likely that the progress and life and learning experiences of our children and young people would have been significantly poorer.

4. Support for teachers and the wider workforce.

4.1 To support staff there are a range of professional learning opportunities and resources available including resources hosted by Education Scotland Positive mental wellbeing - resources to support children and young people | Learning resources | National Improvement Hub (education.gov.scot). NHS and Scottish Government also host the Mental health and wellbeing: whole school approach: framework - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/strengthening-support-for-school-staff/>

4.2 Sustained staff professional learning and development requires a clear Knowledge and Skills Framework similar to the NES which assists local authorities in determining the staffing profile required to meet the diverse range of needs in education settings [nationaltraumatrainningframework.pdf \(transformingpsychologicaltrauma.scot\)](#) Other forms of support to education staff include coaching and mentoring for Head Teachers and senior leaders.

4.3 The recommendations from the ASL/Morgan Review related to Pupil Support Assistants should also be given priority at national and local authority levels in order to ensure that the professional development and deployment of PSAs leads to the intended impact and improvement on children and young people's experiences and achievement. In doing so, research on the extent to which implementation factors, such as those identified by the EEF, are in place would help sustain the anticipated recommendations of the Classroom Support Staff working group.

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/maximising-the-impact-of-teaching-assistants/>

5. Support to parents and families.

5.1 In addition to the impact referred to in section 1 for parents and families, other areas of support and challenge which have been gathered are of significance. During and beyond the pandemic/lockdown periods, schools and nurseries have connected with children and families through both in-person and virtual contact, with a high level of attendance of vulnerable children and young people at schools and nurseries throughout this time, e.g. example from a



Hidden%20Harm%20Feedback%20second

secondary school here

This has served as a protective factor for many children and families in relation to mental health and wellbeing. However, the themes emerging from the first 6 months of counselling services indicate that children and young people who are less resilient have felt more lonely and anxious, and require greater support for their wellbeing as outlined in section 1.

5.2 Children and Families with English as an Additional Language

Analysis of responses from the Scottish EAL (English as an Additional Language) Coordinating Council indicates that there are concerns about the impact on the disruption to their attendance and learning:

- Remote teaching/learning was harder to access on digital devices for learning where there was no internet at home or not enough English to understand how to access Teams
- This was particularly the case for new arrivals, beginners and early stage learners, especially asylum seekers and refugees
- This had led to a substantial language learning loss in addition to learning loss which will have widened the achievement gap
- Many families are now taking long-awaited trips to see relatives at a time when their children are preparing for prelims/exams

A wider coordinated response across partners in local authorities will be required to address the impact for these children and families.

5.3 It has been important to look ahead and focus on those young people and their families who will be transitioning post school in August 2022. Examples of work include:

- Online workshops for parents with colleges presenting possible curriculum options and progression pathways
- Working with groups of parents to support them with some of the challenges they have been facing including some work with BAME parents with children who have additional support needs
- Collaborative work with Arc Scotland to evaluate outcomes for transition planning for young people who have additional support needs and those who are care experienced
- HSCPs worked in partnership with Leisure and Culture services to provide Enrichment Programmes between March and October 2021. Activities included sports and other physical activities, movie nights, music, drama and a family fun day. The programme also allowed more formal opportunities for social workers and other professionals to check in with care experienced children and young people.

6. Digital infrastructure and connectivity.

6.1 Firstly, it is important to say that ADES believes firmly in the primacy of the physical school in terms of the opportunities it provides for the social and emotional development of children and young people (a view also shared in the report by the ICEA published in December 2020). This cannot be replaced entirely by technology or through virtual means. However, we have now increased our ability to offer learners' access to high quality digital learning and resources in order to enhance learners' experiences and support the equity and excellence agenda. One positive development arising from the pandemic has been the rapid acceleration of the adoption of new digital learning platforms and online learning approaches. This required a considerable degree of mastery learning on the part of teachers and learners. Technology is not a replacement for in-person learning but more progress can and should be made in this area.

6.2 Local authorities retained oversight and quality assurance of remote learning from August 2020 [national-overview-of-practice-in-remote-learning-7-local-authority-approaches-to-assuring-the-quality-of-remote-learning.pdf \(education.gov.scot\)](#) Following the closure of school buildings in January 2021, staff across establishments and stages undertook a variety of activities [National overview of practice in remote learning 4 \(education.gov.scot\)](#)

- A variety of digital platforms were used by schools and practitioners to communicate and engage children and young people.
- Across Early Years Centres and some Primary schools, Seesaw was used to share tasks and videos.
- Microsoft Teams within GLOW was also used extensively across primary and secondary schools.
- Primary teachers had live sessions with their classes.
- Some secondary schools followed timetabled classes and provided young people with live and recorded content, supported by other resources.
- The family learning team adapted delivery of Peep sessions both remotely and face to face.
- Staff from Sensory Support Services provided colleagues across mainstream settings with resources to make sure that those children and young people with sight and hearing loss were able to access their learning online
- Remote learning for children with additional support needs who did not attend school or nursery during lockdown periods was, as far as possible, matched to their needs as evidenced in the examples gathered in Education Scotland's thematic review:

[National overview of practice in remote learning 10 \(education.gov.scot\)](#) for complex needs

Conclusion

There are some limitations to the methodology used in gathering and analysing the evidence from ADES members. It has not been possible within the scope of this report to undertake large surveys or analysis of every local authority's data or recovery plans. The findings are based on sampling from a range of demographic areas.

However, our analysis indicates that the impact of the pandemic upon children and young people with additional support needs, care-experienced young people and those from a background of socio-economic disadvantage has caused some disruption to learning and affected their wellbeing. For some this will be short term and the impact mitigated by the

interventions and support outlined in this report. For others it will be longer term due to inequalities which were present in children's lives before the pandemic.

Therefore, the main focus must be to continue to build on attendance and engagement so that children and young people are in school; rebuilding and strengthening our relationships with them and their families; and addressing their wellbeing alongside learning.

ADES has for some years advocated for a more inclusive assessment and outcome measurement framework which reflects the diversity of achievements which children and young people with inequalities and complex needs make but which are invisible within the current NIF. Changes which would address this include:

- Increasing the pace of implementation of the Morgan Review recommendations in relation to outcome measurement by including a far wider and more inclusive range of outcome measures in the NIF. The current consultation on Education Reform provides an opportunity for this to happen.
- Insight and the CfE Benchmarking tool being inclusive of special schools and therefore reflecting their attainment and achievement. It should be noted that virtual comparators would have to be treated with some caution due to the diverse and sometimes 'spikey' profile of children with complex needs
- With 33% of children and young people recorded as having additional support needs, schools and nurseries will need to continue to become more inclusive and accessible with regard to the physical/sensory environment; communication (see above); and the curriculum
- Expanding the use of digital technology for children and young people with complex needs to ensure that they have even greater accessibility and appropriate independence in their skills for learning, life and work. Expanding the role of Education Assisted Technology specialists such as CALL Scotland across RICs would enable this to happen

In order to build on the good work already taking place, local partnerships will require sufficient, sustainable, resources to ensure that they can meet the increased diversity and complexity of children and young people's needs. At the national level it is critical that the needs of children and young people facing inequalities including those with additional support needs is central to the reform of curriculum, assessment and qualifications and include explicit reference to their individual voices.

In order to know what the impact has and will continue to be more specific research questions need to be asked using an enquiry-based approach which seeks to understand what makes a difference or improves children and young people's wellbeing and learning when they have experienced interrupted learning and disconnection from relationships. It should ask 'what', 'how' and 'which' questions drawing from multiple data sources which have relationships between them (Robson, 2000).

Over the remainder of this school session ADES members, and all 32 authorities will engage in collaborative improvement activities to enquire of themselves and each other what is making a difference and what needs to change or improve for children and young people.

COSLA

Introduction

1. COSLA is the voice of Local Government in Scotland, we are a Councillor-led, cross-party organisation who champions councils' vital work to secure the resources and powers they need to deliver effectively. We work on councils' behalf to focus on the challenges and opportunities they face, and to engage positively with Governments and stakeholders on policy, funding and legislation. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the impact of the pandemic on children and young people with the Committee.
2. The past 20 months have been very challenging for many children and young people, particularly those with additional support needs, who are care-experienced or from a socio-economic disadvantaged background. Protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of children and young people, against the challenging and changeable nature of the pandemic, has been the priority for Local Government.
3. Whilst the pandemic, and associated mitigations, are still with us, we need to continue with the important work to implement the Morgan Review, the revised National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland and the Promise alongside the Scottish Government's proposed reform across education and children's services and supporting the development and delivery of the Scottish Government's next Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.
4. From the start of the pandemic local authorities have had to balance the need to protect public health, including legal duties to follow public health advice provided by the Scottish Government, with the need to maintain support for our communities, particularly the most vulnerable. This led to some face-to-face services being closed to mitigate spread of the virus.
5. Following the initial closure of schools in March 2020, a great deal of work was undertaken to continue to provide school-based support for the children and young people of key workers and vulnerable children. Teachers and pupils adapted to remote learning despite some issues with different levels of access to digital devices and access to broadband, with significant efforts to distribute kit. Access to free school meals was also a focus locally.
6. With the second closure of schools in January 2021, schools were more prepared for remote learning, more pupils had digital devices and schools had further developed teaching strategies for remote learning. Once again access to school support was provided for the children and young people of key workers and vulnerable children.
7. Throughout the pandemic some parents, carers and young people have had to self-isolate or shield. Local authority staff and staff within commissioned services have also had to shield due to underlying health conditions or self-isolate due to close contact and/or positive tests. This led to additional demands being placed on the remaining workforce who have worked hard and continue to work hard to maintain delivery of essential support and services.
8. COSLA recognises that the pandemic has had a more significant impact on particular groups of children and young people, and those who care for them. Many agencies and organisations, including importantly the third sector, (both national and local organisations) have provided support to children, young people, family members and carers, often in new digitally connected ways.

9. Throughout the pandemic COSLA has worked collaboratively with partners locally and nationally, including co-chairing the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group with the Scottish Government. We have also been active members of the COVID-19 Children and Families Collective Leadership Group, and many other groups focused on facilitating the best possible support for children and young people during this difficult period.
10. Local Government is continuing to meet the challenges brought by the pandemic, while also playing a key role in recovery from the impacts of the pandemic. Councils are the anchors in our communities and maintain a focus on those who are potentially more vulnerable as a result of the pandemic, including children, young people and families with additional support needs, care-experienced young people and those from a background of socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds. Local Government, and the communities we serve, continue to show innovative and creative thinking in responding to the pandemic and the impacts of public health restrictions. The Committee are encouraged to consider [COSLA's "Live Well Locally" campaign](#) as it will be vital that Local Government is properly funded in order to support communities to thrive as we recover.
11. We are pleased that the Committee are scrutinising the impact of the pandemic on children and young people with additional support needs, care-experienced young people and those from a background of socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds. We would encourage the committee to explore ways to hear directly from children, young people and families on their experience of the pandemic. We look forward to the Committee report following this scrutiny work and will be keen to apply any lessons learned.
12. The appendix is intended to provide the Committee with an overview of efforts to support children, young people and their families, and in particular those with additional support needs, care-experienced young people and those from a background of socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds, over the past 20 months.

Appendix

Education and Childcare Hubs

13. Following the closure of schools in March 2020, councils moved quickly to establish hubs to support the children of key workers, and those identified as vulnerable. It is worth reflecting that Local Government faced a great deal of pressure from stakeholders, particularly key workers, to provide as many spaces as possible through childcare hubs. There was a continued challenge to meet the public health advice and guidance to limit interactions as far as possible.
14. COSLA worked with Scottish Government and professional advisors within Local Government to agree a shared definition of “vulnerable”. This definition noted that crucially, vulnerability is not an exclusive concept, but should take account of a number of factors that mean that a child and family may need additional support. It stated that the judgement of the children’s sector professionals – critically those working most closely with the family – would be paramount in assessing vulnerability. Children who were considered to be vulnerable prior to the pandemic should have been known by services and are likely to have had a child’s plan. Where a child requires support from more than one agency, this is likely to suggest greater vulnerability. Though this was not an exclusive list, the definition noted that this may include a range of children and young people:
- at risk of significant harm, with a child protection plan
 - looked after at home, or away from home
 - ‘on the edge of care’, where families would benefit from additional support
 - with additional support needs, where there are one or more factors which require significant or co-ordinated support
 - affected by disability
 - where they and/or their parents are experiencing poor physical or mental health
 - experiencing adversities, including problem alcohol or drug use amongst family members, domestic abuse or bereavement
 - requiring support at times of key transitions.
15. Further, the definition stated that children and families may also be experiencing adversity because of the impact of poverty and disadvantage, and many may face this because of the necessary measures to respond to the pandemic. This included families with loss of income, experiencing social isolation, or who were otherwise struggling because of the lockdown. It noted that local authorities and health boards, working with partners including Police Scotland and third sector organisations, will either know or be able to identify the children and families within their areas who are potentially at risk and therefore may need additional support. As the need for additional support can be identified prior to birth, this also included help for those who were pregnant.
16. The Coronavirus (COVID-19): strategic framework for reopening schools, early learning and childcare provision stated:
- “Mindful of the impact of lockdown on many of our most vulnerable children, local authorities will work with partners to increase the numbers of children attending critical childcare provision including hubs.”

17. Hub provision looked different across Scotland, this reflected the difference experience of the pandemic and it impacts across the country, including the impact on staffing, the availability of volunteers, the location and transport links to hubs and the needs of the range of children and young people attending the hubs.
18. It is important to recognise that local authorities and schools worked creatively to support children and young people both in hubs and remotely, through phone calls, dropping off learning materials or distanced visits. In other areas there was the establishment of helplines for children and young people, or the use of mobile libraries to distribute books and materials to children and young people. The Improvement Service published [a collection of case studies which detailed some of the approaches undertaken](#), which the committee may wish to consider. These showcased the work of Local Government, but perhaps more importantly, facilitated the sharing, spreading and building on good practice.

Additional Resources

19. Local authorities have welcomed additional funding to aid them in providing support throughout the pandemic. Due to the nature of the pandemic, funding has been provided through a number of “pots”. This funding has been ringfenced for very specific funding for purposes such as:
- To support the implementation of public health mitigations within schools – including transport, cleaning, CO2 monitors etc
 - The delivery of free school meals during closures and school holidays
 - Investment in devices and connectivity solutions to tackle digital exclusions
 - Additional teaching and classroom support staff
20. All funding provided during the pandemic was initially provided on a one-off basis. Subsequently the funding for additional teachers and classroom support staff has been made permanent.
21. These pots of money have often come with significant reporting requirements, with local authorities providing information to the Scottish Government on the use of this funding. These existing report arrangements are suitable for national-level oversight, though any further analysis of spend may become overly burdensome, particularly as schools and local authorities continue to face significant pressures due to COVID-19.

Digital

22. The closure of schools in March 2020 required extraordinary efforts by local authorities, school staff, learners, and families to move to remote learning in a very short space of time.
23. The move towards greater use of digital devices in schools had been pioneered by a number of local authorities across Scotland prior to the pandemic, with some having already deployed a range of devices and support depending on local and individual needs, and digital learning strategies.
24. While local authorities entered the first period of remote learning from different starting points, in terms of digital devices, programmes and approaches, all councils worked quickly to provide devices to as many children as possible who were at risk of digital

exclusion. Estimates from May 2020 highlighted that 50,000 devices had been issued to children across Scotland by councils, with a further 20,000 devices loaned out from schools when they had closed.

25. COSLA and Scottish Government worked closely over summer 2020 to agree an approach to distribute £25m of devices and connectivity solutions to children and young people. Funding was made available to local authorities to allow devices to be bought, in line with local digital learning strategies, and to ensure they could be added to the council's IT estate, in order to ensure the availability of ongoing support including security and protective software.
26. Despite global supply issues, councils made very good progress in ensuring additional devices were distributed to children and families. As a result of this funding there have been over 72,000 additional devices provided to children and young people identified by their schools as being at risk of digital exclusion, additionally over 14,000 connectivity solutions have been provided. The additional devices meant the experience of the second period of remote learning, from January 2021, was improved for many children and young people. However, we note that our remote, island and rural communities continue to face challenges with broadband and connectivity issues, which can be a barrier.
27. We would also note that schools and education staff showed their creativity and innovation in adapting both to remote learning, when there was not the time or opportunity for digital learning, and to support children and young people without devices.
28. COSLA has agreed to work with the Scottish Government on their commitment to provide a device for every school-aged child, we look forward to using further investment to ensure all children and young people can benefit from digital education.

Poverty and Inequality

29. Following the closure of schools, local authorities took a range of steps to ensure that children and young people eligible for free school meals would continue to receive either food packages, vouchers or a cash payment.
30. In many cases the need to put in place alternative methods at speed drove the options that local authorities adopted, with food parcels and/or vouchers able to be distributed at pace. Following engagement with children, young people, families and the third sector, the vast majority of local authorities had moved to cash payments for free school meal alternatives by January 2021.
31. Local authorities were also provided with flexible funding to address financial insecurity during 2020-21. This supported a range of measures depending on local need which will have frequently been targeted at families with low incomes.
32. COSLA worked with Scottish Government in order that councils could also deliver cash payments in winter 2020 and spring 2021 to children and young people eligible for free school meals, in recognition of the additional costs of the pandemic. Subsequently it has been agreed with Scottish Government to provide 'bridging payments' over the next year until the Scottish Child Payment is fully online.

33. Local authorities have also been administering the £500 Self Isolation Support Grants, the eligibility of which has been extended a number of times to enable parents in low income households to self-isolate without financial penalty, including when they are unable to work due to having to remain at home with a child that needs to self-isolate.
34. COSLA is working with Scottish Government to support the development of the next version of the national Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan. Lessons from the COVID response, and work with partners across organisations have identified the following key points to be considered in tackling poverty:
- The need for continued flexibility to support families and meet their needs by reducing bureaucracy and barriers to working in partnership
 - The need to ensure that support and funding in place during the pandemic is not withdrawn without alternative support in place
 - The importance of local flexibility to ensure person centred approaches aligned to GIRFEC
 - Ensuring the improvements to partnership working and collaboration continues to grow
 - A continued focus on those at most risk of experiencing poverty and its impacts
 - Holistic approaches to support
35. Local Government is working with partners in relation to the best use locally of the Winter Support Fund for 21/22 to support low-income households.

Looked after and care-experienced children and young people

36. Local Government is committed to Keeping Scotland's Promise that children will grow up loved, safe and respected. Local authority Promise leads have been established and they meet regularly to ensure policy development and progress is cohesive and collaborative. COSLA also works closely with partners including Scottish Government, Scotland Excel, The Promise Scotland, the Improvement Service, professional associations and third sector partners to further support a collaborative approach.
37. To understand and mitigate impacts of the pandemic on children and families, the Covid-19 Collective Leadership Group was established. It is jointly chaired by Scottish and Local Government. The Collective Leadership has a wide, cross-sector membership whose key focus is mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on children and families, particularly on care leavers, early years and under-fives and those who may be in need of respite care, amongst others. The work of this group is underpinned by the work and principles of GIRFEC, The Promise, UNCRC Incorporation and is supported by the Children's Services Planning Partnerships Strategic Leads Network.
38. The Collective Leadership Group receives and reviews a dataset bringing together intelligence from the 32 Chief Officer Groups and national agencies and delivery partners including the third sector, Police Scotland the Health Service. The dataset includes key data on what is happening across children's services partnerships to support children and young people on the child protection register, those looked after and on the edge of care. The Collective Leadership Group also receives a data set on adult public protection issues including homelessness and domestic abuse. At the height of the pandemic, this dataset was received and reviewed weekly.

39. The active and purposeful use of such data and evidence at a local level allowed councils and their child protection partners to proactively consider the needs of children and young people who may be vulnerable to abuse, harm and exploitation. As measures to mitigate the transmission of the virus meant that children and young people had less access to external routes for support and help, this proactive approach was critical in considering ways of providing effective support to families.
40. There were increases in child protection referrals and Inter-agency Referral Discussions during the pandemic resulting in councils and partners undertaking increased assessments of risk and need, with increased focus on plans in place for children. As part of the dataset, children's contact with a professional was carefully monitored and this included all children with a multi-agency plan in place, all children with a child protection plan, and all young people eligible for aftercare support.

Children and young people with additional support needs

41. From the outset, schools and local authorities recognised that the disruption caused by school closures and the wider public health protection measures taken in response to the pandemic were likely to more significantly impact on children and young people who have additional support needs. Given the wide range of additional support needs individual learners have, the expertise and judgement of the school staff and children's sector professionals working mostly closely with them was key in understanding how to provide that support with schools and other face to face services closed. The education and children's services workforce demonstrated creativity, sensitivity, and a real understanding of and commitment to GIRFEC in their endeavours to provide support and learning opportunities.
42. In March 2021 [Education Scotland published a report](#) focused on approaches taken by local authorities and schools to provide learning for children and young people with complex learning needs during the period of remote learning. As well as highlighting examples of practice illustrating what worked well in schools, it noted that local authority support, professional learning and ongoing reflection resulted in improved approaches to meeting the needs of learners with complex needs. It also noted that schools have taken positive steps to increase engagement with and support for parents of children and young people with complex learning needs. There was recognition that local authorities and schools can learn from the experiences of remote learning to identify what has worked successfully that could be continued post-pandemic to support learners with complex needs.
43. It is worth noting that anecdotally, local authorities have shared that for some children, including those with Autism and Learning Disabilities, remote learning is reported as being preferable to face to face learning and some have found it easier to engage in their learning. However, officers have also heard that for some, the lack of routine and the differentiation about what home is and what school is has led to disengagement. Home learning has placed additional demands on parents and carers. The Scottish Commission for Learning Disability (SCLD) and Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PAMIS) are participating in research on the impact of the pandemic on people of all ages with Learning Disabilities which will be published shortly.
44. [The Morgan Review](#) called for a culture change so that the achievements of children and young people with additional support needs are recognised and valued, and a

report was recently [published on progress taking forward the recommendations](#). The Additional Support for Learning Implementation Group (ASLIG), plan to carry out further engagement with children and young people who have additional support needs to consider the impact the pandemic has had on them.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

45. Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing was consistently identified as at risk of being negatively impacted by school closures and the wider impacts of the pandemic and public health measures. Children and young people reported concerns about the impact of the virus on family members, finances, relationships with friends, impact on learning, qualifications and future opportunities. For some learners, the arrangements for return to school create understandable anxiety. Local Government continues to work with partners to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing and over the past 20 months, particularly focused on responding to the negative impacts of the pandemic. A range of approaches and provisions were and continue to be in place and are dependent on local needs, including but not limited to art-based therapies targeting those not engaged in school and/or finding it hard to leave home, a hybrid online/offline youth work based approach, and digital services.
46. Local authorities, working with community planning partners, continued to develop and enhance mental health and wellbeing supports and services which are community based. Through the joint COSLA and Scottish Government Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board, a framework for new and enhance community- based services for 5–24-year-olds and their families and carers was developed, focused on distress and supporting positive mental health and wellbeing. Examples of these approaches include closer partnership working with CAMHS, art and music-based therapies in primary school and additional support for young carers.
47. Schools have sought to maintain a relational approach to supporting children and young people, despite closures, using digital and phone-based support. Local Government and Scottish Government have worked together to provide those working in schools with the advice, information and support that they need in order to signpost and link into sources of advice and support for children, young people and their families, aligned to the Getting it Right for Every Child approach. Ongoing focus has been placed on delivery of counselling support through schools, and a whole-school approach to wellbeing, and professional learning for school staff to enhance their ability and confidence in supporting children and young people.
48. Across councils, a wide range of strategies and approaches were used, such as telephone helplines, seasons for growth (bereavement programme) educational psychology support, bespoke support packages and resources, virtual and telephone counselling, advice lines, regular contacts and relationship maintenance, family support, links to CAMHS, youth work to draw in pupils who would not regularly attend school due to anxiety, and utilisation of guidance and support staff. Approaches to resilience, nurture and trauma-informed approaches, Scottish Mental Health First Aid, LIAM and ASSIST are also frequently and frequently used.
49. Local authorities have prioritised support for children and young people who are considered most vulnerable and put arrangements to ensure contact is maintained.

Workforce

50. Throughout the pandemic COSLA has worked closely with Scottish Government, Education Scotland, Trade Unions and individual local authorities to ensure a range of supports have been available to the education workforce to enable them to look after both the own health and wellbeing, that of those the work with and of the children and young people that they teach and support. The work nationally has complemented the suite of supports that have been made available locally by councils and work continues to ensure that the national offer connects meaningfully with this.
51. Part of the national offer includes one to one coaching for key sectors of the education workforce over the session 2020/21 with professional coaches to identified groups of the education workforce to support their wellbeing as they manage the COVID-19 crisis in their context (schools, CLD, ELC) and support the children and young people in their care.
52. In addition, The Scottish Association of Minority Ethnic Educators (SAMEE) has supported educators from minority ethnic backgrounds through coaching and mentoring by providing additional support for coaching and mentoring, support and guidance to ensure that all offers are inclusive and accessible to BAME educators (e.g. ensuring that Coaching and Mentoring Matters is culturally-responsive), and reverse-mentoring opportunities for whereby BAME educators mentor white Scottish school leaders to help create inclusive workplaces that promote the health and wellbeing of educators from minority ethnic backgrounds.
53. Staff wellbeing communities of practice have been developed to ensure the workforce feel supported in managing their own mental health and wellbeing and have the capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of learners. This followed on from the successful development of spaces for wellbeing across different sectors of the education workforce over the session 2020/21. These were evaluated positively, for example, key impact themes were highlighted around empowerment, trust and permission, focussing on their own mental health and wellbeing, connections across the education system and innovation and experimentation. They also aid in providing a common language and shared understanding of the mental health and wellbeing needs of children and young people, as well as supporting the workforce to recognise the impact trauma can have on their own, and learners, actions and behaviours.
54. The Stepping Stones programme was set up in partnership with Education Scotland and General Teaching Council for Scotland to support teachers in the first four years of their teaching career post-probation. Currently the programme comprises online workshops, reflection into action sessions and a coaching programme which provides 1:1 support to all participants. This continued to be a focus during the pandemic response to meet the development needs of this group.
55. Further, there have been a series of events and webinars that align with existing work of national mental health and schools working group to support the workforce to support learners.
56. COSLA continues to work with Trade Unions and partners to develop campaigns such as “Don’t stay on mute” to ensure staff are aware of the supports that are available both nationally and locally.

Recovery

57. With the disruption of the past 20 months, the health and wellbeing of children and young people is our priority in education recovery. In line with the Scottish Government's guidance on ['Curriculum for Excellence in the Recovery Phase'](#), local authorities and schools have continued their clear focus on the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young people.
58. COSLA have agreed to work with the Scottish Government to oversee the delivery of the [COVID Recovery Strategy: For a Fairer Future](#), to ensure a shared vision across local and national government as we move through the pandemic. The Wellbeing of Children and Young People is one of the strategy's three key outcomes. We will continue to work to further strengthen support for children, young people and their family support.
59. This year's Get into Summer programme has been an important investment in the recovery of children and young people. Local authorities delivered a £15m programme of opportunities, tailored to the needs of their communities, to allow children and young people opportunities to socialise and reconnect with peers the summer. Local programmes were designed with and for children and young people from low-income households, those who are care experienced or with disability or additional support need. A full evaluation is currently being finalised but feedback we have heard to date has been very positive.
60. The Children and Young People Public Health Group will shortly be publishing an evidence paper entitled 'Ensuring our Children's Future – Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people' which aims to capture the wide range of evidence, intelligence and learning identified as a result of the pandemic and efforts to mitigate its impact. It is anticipated that this will be published by Public Health Scotland by the end of the year and may aid the Committee in their scrutiny.
61. There are many other pieces of research for the Committee to consider, in particular the joint Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland and Young Scot "[Lockdown Lowdown](#)" provide snapshots of children and young people's experiences during different phases of the pandemic. This has been an invaluable resource for COSLA and local authorities in considering priorities in emerging from COVID-19, acknowledging the importance of ensuring children and young people's voices are heard.

NASUWT

The NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Parliament Education, Children and Young People Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committee in its scrutiny of the impact of the pandemic upon children and young people. The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

1. The effects on society of the COVID-19 pandemic have been deep and wide-reaching, causing long-lasting issues that will undoubtedly be felt for many years.
2. It is undeniable that the impact of the global crisis in disrupting children's education has been significant. Educational progress and achievements have been inhibited, alongside damage to the social and cultural development of children and young people, and their emotional and mental wellbeing.
3. The NASUWT recognises the urgent need for a long-term, sustainable and properly funded education recovery strategy. A comprehensive strategy that brings together the work of schools and other bodies is essential.

EDUCATION RECOVERY STRATEGY

4. Although the educational implications of the pandemic have been significant, it is clear that other important dimensions of children's lives have been affected. For this reason, the NASUWT rejects recovery strategies premised on a narrow vision of 'catch-up', in which the aim is little more than to fill in the gaps left by disrupted schooling. The Union also rejects an approach that asserts that the innate resilience of children means that any adverse impacts can largely be addressed simply by returning them to full-time education with limited or no additional support.
5. Recovery should be understood as a long-term process given the pandemic's far-reaching impacts. It should also be viewed as an opportunity to tackle deep-rooted structural issues affecting children and young people in all aspects of their lives that have been exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. Other education systems, including those in the Netherlands and the United States, have developed bold and ambitious plans that reflect this reality. To be sustainable, recovery will also need to be manageable for those in the workforce with day-to-day responsibilities for children and young people. It will need to take into account the pressures they faced before the pandemic, the increased pressures they encountered during it, and the challenges they will need to take on as it recedes.
6. For these reasons, the NASUWT advocates a holistic view of recovery, based on supporting children in all aspects of their lives, including, but not limited to, those relating to formal schooling. Schools will have a critical role in securing recovery, but they cannot be expected to contribute in isolation or without working in effective partnerships with other services for children and young people that are resourced adequately and supported appropriately.
7. It is also clear that the impact of the pandemic has not been experienced uniformly. While it is likely to be the case that every child has been adversely affected by the crisis, some will have been impacted on more profoundly than others, particularly those who were more vulnerable or more disadvantaged before the pandemic.

8. There are huge disparities in educational outcomes that young people face from particular backgrounds, and this is an increasing problem that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Racism, racial injustice, economic disadvantage and other discriminatory factors have impacted on the education outcomes and life chances of young people well before the pandemic as a result of systemic inequalities. This situation has worsened for young black pupils, as well as those from Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) and poorer backgrounds, further compounding the socioeconomic disadvantages they face. Any education recovery plan and supportive budget must address these existing disparities and ensure that, going forwards, policies and practices focus on demonstrable positive outcomes for all pupils and communities.
9. The Scottish Government must recognise and seek to address the demonstrable disparities in experience and outcomes that particular groups of pupils have faced during the pandemic, including those that relate to race, socioeconomic status and geographical location. It must give practical effect to provisions set out in equalities legislation, particularly the Public Sector Equality Duty, and the specific duties and responsibilities these establish in respect of those with protected characteristics.
10. Recovery will also need to reflect the aims and objectives of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including those set out in Article 12 of the Convention on ensuring that appropriate weight is given to children's views in matters that affect them, especially since the introduction of the Convention into domestic law. Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC provide the right to education, and more generally to the rights of children to have their wellbeing promoted in all respects, as the preamble to the Charter confirms. In a context where the UNCRC is incorporated into domestic legislation, these become legal requirements on the Scottish Government.
11. Given the significant scale of the recovery challenge and the need for it to be impactful, it will be essential that it is subjected to an ongoing system-level evaluation, such that it makes a difference for children and supports the workforce.

WORKFORCE

12. Schools and the staff that work in them will be at the heart of any effective recovery strategy. Any strategy will require an effective focus on the workforce to ensure that it is as well placed as possible to support children's learning and development. The aspirations of the Government to achieve excellence and equity across school systems cannot be achieved without adequate funding. There are significant challenges to the recruitment and retention of teachers, including the pay levels of experienced teachers and excessive workload suffered by the profession.

PAY

13. The last three-year teachers' pay award came to an end on 31 March 2021. The NASUWT is continuing to work within the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) to seek to agree a pay award for teachers.
14. Since the 2018-21 teachers' pay award was implemented in Scotland, the Westminster Government and the Welsh Government have taken action to make pay in England and Wales more competitive. The Scottish Government must take this into account when implementing the 2021 teachers' pay award. The comparably poor pay of Scottish teachers, when compared internationally, is

demonstrated by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) research.

15. NASUWT research indicates that 71% of teachers in Scotland do not believe that teaching is currently competitive with other professions. Moreover, only 31% of teachers feel that they are paid at a level commensurate with their skills and experience as a teacher.
16. The NASUWT believes that a substantial pay uplift for teachers in 2021 is both fair and justified, as detailed in the Union's pay submission.¹

TEACHER SUPPLY

17. Addressing the education-related aspects of recovery requires an adequate supply of suitably qualified teachers. Before the pandemic, the education systems in some parts of the country faced the most severe teacher recruitment and retention crisis since the Second World War. While there are indications that the impact of the pandemic on the broader graduate labour market has resulted in some improvements in key recruitment and retention indicators, it is recognised that any 'COVID-bounce' in teacher supply is likely to be extremely short-lived.
18. Other causes of the teacher supply crisis are well established. They include: the cumulative impacts of a decade of pay restraint and suppression; poor pupil behaviour; limitations on pay and career profession prospects; low regard for staff wellbeing; uncollegiate and unsupportive working environments that do not respect teachers' professionalism; and limited access to professional development and training. Without action at national and school levels in all these respects, there is a clear risk that recruitment and retention into the profession will continue to deteriorate and jeopardise the education system's capacity to meet future challenges.

WORKLOAD

19. Going into the pandemic, survey evidence collected by the NASUWT confirmed that workload was the biggest concern that teachers and school leaders had about the quality of their working lives. During the pandemic, it has become clear that many of the well-established drivers of unnecessary workload remain in place in too many schools. These poor practices have exacerbated the additional pressures created by the pandemic, such as managing arrangements for awarding qualifications and delivering remote learning.
20. As a minimum expectation, action will need to be taken to ensure that these causes of excessive workload, particularly those related to marking, planning and assessment, are tackled: more effective action will need to be taken to implement the reports of the Curriculum for Excellence Working Group on Tackling Bureaucracy.
21. Approaches that leave individual schools free to continue with workload-intensive practices have not worked, as the fundamental causes of excessive workload remain unaddressed in too many cases. A meaningful recovery strategy will require the Government to intervene in schools where poor practice persists and ensure

¹ <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/static/uploaded/cd6c47a0-77cc-48b6-8961758cbc2f0a46.pdf>

that the demands they make of schools do not result in excessive and unnecessary burdens for staff.

22. A key component of this element of the strategy will be to ensure that teachers' and school leaders' statutory and contractual entitlements are respected.
23. Given the extraordinary pressures that the school workforce has encountered during the pandemic, recovery strategies will not be effective or sustainable if they create additional burdens for the workforce or negatively impact on their wellbeing. It should be noted that the joint OECD/Education International (EI) report on education recovery identifies supporting staff wellbeing and mental health as core components of any effective education recovery strategy.

CLASS SIZES

24. Studies indicate that limiting class size can have a powerful impact on pupils' educational experiences. The Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project in Tennessee and the Class Size and Pupil-Adult Ratio (CSPAR) study in the UK supported the view that class size had positive implications for pupils' learning. This impact was particularly evident for younger pupils, those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with relatively lower levels of prior attainment. Other studies have pointed to the benefits for the development of pupils' non-cognitive skills (such as persistence and engagement) of smaller class sizes.
25. Evidence suggests that smaller class sizes can not only have positive benefits for all pupils but have also been associated with particularly positive outcomes for black pupils and those for whom English is an additional language.
26. Literature reviews of teachers' reported experience confirm that reductions in class size can positively impact on teacher workload and stress levels. Evidence from other jurisdictions further suggests that reductions in class size can help address concerns relating to teacher recruitment and retention.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

27. Supporting children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) requires urgent renewed investment in tailored service and education settings to ensure that there is equality of opportunity and choice for all.
28. Investment in, and collaboration between, wider children's services is key. The crisis has highlighted and deepened pre-pandemic concerns about the fragmented nature of children and young people's services in some parts, particularly in the areas of special and additional needs. The Government must support action in this area through significant investment in these services, particularly in-school and out-school services focused on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged. The real-terms cuts in spending in the children's services sector experienced over the past decade must be reversed, with additional resources made available to meet recovery-related priorities.

POVERTY

29. Before the pandemic, levels of child poverty in the UK had reached entirely unacceptable levels. Evidence confirms that in 2019/20, 4.3 million children were living in poverty in the UK, with children of lone-parent or large families and black children among those most at risk of living in the most economically disadvantaged

households. Across this period, three quarters of children in poverty lived in homes where at least one adult was in employment.

30. Given that economic disadvantage is the characteristic that has the most significant impact on pupils' learning, development, wellbeing and life chances, it is profoundly concerning that the pandemic has compounded the financial pressures on many households. A study of families on low incomes undertaken by the Child Poverty Action Group in November 2020 found that nearly nine in ten families had experienced a significant deterioration in their living standards compared to before the pandemic. The same study found that almost six in ten families were experiencing difficulties covering the cost of three or more essentials, including food, utilities, rent, travel or child-related costs. These concerns are compounded by evidence that the economic prospects for many economically disadvantaged households are likely to deteriorate in the absence of meaningful action to address these risks.
31. An approach based on the continuation of a previous policy in this area will serve only to hinder rather than support the development of a recovery programme that addresses the needs of the most vulnerable children in society. In the short term, the Government must reconsider its decision to reverse the £20 per week uplift to universal credit and tax credits, enhance other child-related benefits and remove current arbitrary benefits caps. The ability of all children to access universal free school meals would also have a positive impact on addressing the food insecurity that many households with children continue to face.
32. Teachers report that many local authorities are unable to deliver their statutory duty to ensure equity irrespective of socioeconomic disadvantage. There is no question that many pupils can, for example, only pursue senior courses of study because their families can afford to pay for textbooks and resources.
33. Poverty and disadvantage can have a profound impact on pupils' educational achievement and, moving forward, the Scottish Government must adopt an intersectional approach to addressing socioeconomic disadvantage. In the UK today, children from black communities continue to be affected disproportionately by material disadvantage. The most recent official data shows that black and minority ethnic children are twice as likely to grow up in poverty as their white peers. The Union has campaigned consistently for more effective action to ensure that no child grows up in circumstances where they are deprived of the economic, social and cultural resources they need to thrive and make the most of their potential. The right to grow up free from poverty and socioeconomic insecurity is one of the most important children's rights, and the disproportionate impact of poverty on black children must not be ignored.

PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

34. The Committee will be aware of the well-established evidence that black and minority ethnic children, young people and adults are disproportionately more likely to be affected by COVID-19 infections and deaths. It is, therefore, critical that the Government's recovery strategy ensures that every school acknowledges the specific risks that black staff, pupils and communities have faced. The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty places significant legal responsibilities on all public bodies, including the Government, when carrying out their functions. Legislation requires such bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate

discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

35. While the statutory Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) was introduced to ensure that schools and colleges play their part in advancing racial equality and tackling discrimination faced by staff and learners, independent NASUWT research shows that the majority of schools are unaware of their duties and obligations under the PSED. Without rigorous inspection and enforcement, the PSED will remain largely a tick-box exercise among many public sector employers, who only pay lip service to the legislation and whose commitment to equalities remains tokenistic at best.
36. A significant move to support black workers and pupils would be to ensure mandatory ongoing equalities training for all schools and in all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) institutions.
37. The Scottish Government must also show its commitment to equality and diversity through the education budget and by giving teachers and prospective teachers with protected characteristics the priority they deserve. It is vital that the teaching profession is inclusive and representative at all levels. The profile of the workforce in our schools sends an important message to children and young people about the kind of society we live in and who we value most. A key challenge for public education is to address the serious under-representation of black teachers at all levels. Our public education system should demonstrate that it values the contribution of all teachers, not simply regardless of age, gender, ethnic background, disability, religion and sexual orientation, but also by valuing the contribution that such professional diversity can make to children's learning and lives.
38. The Scottish Government publication, *Coronavirus (COVID-19): framework for decision-making*, states:

'We must take these lessons into how we recover from this crisis. The austerity-driven response to the 2008 financial crash did not work and worsened the inequality that was part of its cause; we must not repeat those mistakes. Inequality is also worsening the outcomes for those people impacted by the coronavirus. Our younger people deserve a fairer and more secure economic future.'
39. It is critical that the Scottish Government does more than just espouse equality and that it actively seeks to address the societal inequalities, discrimination and prejudice faced by black and minority ethnic communities, building a future founded upon the trade union principles of equality and fairness.
40. A diverse teaching profession is vital to securing high educational standards for all children and young people. The Scottish Government must play its part to support increased employment and skills opportunities and deliver supportive and inclusive workplaces for people from black communities in Scotland.

RECOVERY STRATEGY TO DATE

41. On 5 October 2021, the Scottish Government published *Coronavirus (COVID-19) education recovery: key actions and next steps*. Given the central role of teachers to securing education recovery, the strategy is disappointingly light on tangible actions to improve teachers' pay and working conditions, without which any pledge to recruit additional teachers and support staff will not be realised.

42. The education recovery strategy largely restates existing plans and policies. While there are some potentially helpful additional programmes and ideas, these seem at best to be bolt-ons to a pre-pandemic policy framework.
43. The NASUWT has consistently argued that a recovery strategy with no financial investment associated with it shows limited ambition and without which remains deeply unsatisfactory. Equally, any effective recovery strategy needed to be based on a clear assessment of the full implications of the pandemic and how these should be addressed. Without an effective assessment of the scale of the challenge, there is no way of knowing whether the amount of resource available is likely to be sufficient.
44. Recovery needs to be understood as a long-term process, given the pandemic's far-reaching effects, and the NASUWT considers that the Scottish Government's strategy to date fails to set out a holistic post-pandemic vision which would support children in all aspects of their lives, not just within formal education.

Social Work Scotland

Education, Children and Young People Committee: Overall Impact of COVID-19 on Children and Young people

Briefing to Support Oral Evidence Session – 1st December 2021

Introduction and Context

Social Work Scotland is the national professional leadership body for the social work and social care professions in Scotland. We are led by our members, and work to influence policy and legislation and to support the development of the social work and social care workforce. Alongside organisational support Social Work Scotland run a number of national projects around design and implementation of policy and legislation.

Social work is defined as ‘a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.’ (Global definition of social work, International Federation of Social Workers, 2014)

As an organisation, we welcome the opportunity to engage with the work of the Education, Children and Young People Committee in relation to the impact of COVID-19 on our children. Along with many other professions, social work has lived through the most difficult period in the history of the profession. Our support and protection for the most vulnerable in society, and drive to enable and empower children and families has been restricted and challenged. We seek to reflect in this briefing emerging themes, information and areas relating to care experienced and other disadvantaged groups with whom the social work profession is most engaged. We caveat this by noting that we remain in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as such, research on the impact on children and specifically those with whom we work, is as yet minimal – it remains too early to know the medium or long-term impact on children’s health wellbeing and development. Full understanding and appreciation of what this period has meant for children and young people and their families is likely only to become clear over time.

What we do know is that this has been a lengthy and traumatic period of national and worldwide insecurity. Learning from knowledge of trauma in young people and the impact of disruption in the lives of children, for example where alternative permanent care is necessary, or child protection measures have been taken, suggests that insecurity and uncertainty can influence on a lifelong basis. The Scottish GIRFEC framework provides a time-tested model within which to manage and monitor children’s wellbeing and resilience, and the impact of trauma as we move out of the crisis phase of the pandemic.

The pandemic has brought with it additional stressors for many families. These range from concerns about health and additional experiences of loss to pressures resulting from caring responsibilities, competing demands and loss of support networks and social outlets. For many children and families with whom social work engage, these stressors exacerbate existing challenges, whether that be social isolation, poor socio-economic support structures or disrupted relationships. Some children entered the pandemic period having already experienced adversity. Examples are children living with domestic violence where the safety and protection of school and other social outlets was lost; children with complex needs whose support networks reduced or ceased; children in poverty where the pandemic further reduced their access to basic provision and income; care leavers whose limited networks were removed thus increasing social isolation. This underlines that a likely impact of the pandemic for some children is an increase in adverse factors and that while many services have resumed, to mitigate the effects of the pandemic will require proactive investment across many facets of society and an ongoing attention to wellbeing over time.

All areas of society including the social work and care workforces have been affected, and therefore many of the above challenges and stressors above are also true for elements of staff and care settings which support children. With only critical services able to be provided, ability to respond to need, progress children's plans and manage the basic issues such as family contact for care-experienced children were severely limited. There have been specific pressures and challenges for informal and formal carers and establishments, many of which remain in the current period. Any crisis requires resilience to face and manage the situation in a manner that allows an individual or group to exit that crisis without significant damage. As we move forward, resource, capacity, and care for the workforce to facilitate healing and mitigate current and future issues is critical.

The information in this briefing is gathered from research, national data, practice information, Chief Social Work Officer reports, and material and data from local areas, groups and our members.

Research Evidence

While a comprehensive research basis will only develop over time, there are some early pieces of research which highlight the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups in society, and also reflect the information coming from practitioners members. We highlight a few below.

CELCIS. The impact of COVID-19 on children and families in Scotland: Understanding needs and services through local social work data July 2021

This report considers data provided over the period of the pandemic to assist understanding of the impact of the pandemic on Scotland's most vulnerable children and young people. The work notes:

Child Protection

- An increase in demand such as child protection referrals and IRD's but this is not translated in to an increase in child protection registration and related activity. Referrals were received from police, rather than the previous main referrer of education
- Overall number of children becoming looked after children reduced
- The number of referrals to the Children's Reporter fell significantly across 2020, especially in the first six months of the pandemic when compared with the prior year. There was a small proportional increase in referrals due to a lack of parental care and a small proportional decrease in referrals due to close connection with a person who has carried out domestic abuse. Referrals from social work increased (15%), while referrals from education decreased (5%)

Mental health

- A reduction in children's wellbeing and mental health, seen in relation to sleep patterns, eating, concentration in younger children and an increase in anxiety and worry in older young people

Care experienced young people

- A reduction in the support available and increase in mental health issues
- A February 2021 Who Cares? Scotland membership survey found that 77% of care experienced respondents reported that they had received less support from professionals (including teachers/lecturers, social workers, doctors) during the pandemic. They described feelings of worry, anxiety, vulnerability, depression and being tired, and over 50% considered their mental health to be worse than before the pandemic.
- An increase in deaths amongst care leavers from 12 in 2019 and 15 in 2020.
- Specific groups identified as in need were young people and families with disabilities who experienced isolation, increased family poverty and inequality, challenges maintaining connection and support for Eastern European communities and more fractured and fragmented transition for care leavers.

Hidden Harm

A significant concern for practitioners in social work is the lack of visibility of children during the pandemic. The report notes this, and that, while critical

services continued, and the most vulnerable children were prioritised, the reduction in contact with children ie a lack of visibility, meant issues could not always be picked up. This included impact on children's development as well as areas such as domestic abuse, isolation of new parents, or family stress. For some groups such as young carers, those subject to sexual exploitation and those impacted by bereavement, the hidden nature of their role was exacerbated

The report notes specific areas where challenges arose, including children in need, those in kinship care and families where isolation, housing and financial issues, and lack of supports impacted.

CELCIS conclude with by summarising likely results for children and noting that demand will almost certainly increase and be characterised by an upturn in demand and referrals for children's services as restrictions ease, schools return, face-to-face visits by professionals increase, interactions between households increase and neglect and family poverty becomes more visible. They highlight that

- Concerns are likely be similar to those impacting on children and young people during the pandemic - mental health (including self-harm and eating disorders), parental mental health, domestic abuse, and problematic parental alcohol and substance use.
- Demand for services is likely to endure for many months, even years, to come.

This underlines the need to monitor closely unknown or unmet needs tier of children and young people whose needs could increase and escalate, including unborn children, and the importance of services being alert to changes in family situations and swiftly sharing information with partners. They highlight that '*Care experienced young people may be particularly disadvantaged as many will be less able to draw on family support for housing, money and employment and training opportunities*'.

CELCIS encourage attention being given to new families whose needs may endure and escalate over time noting in particular the small upturn in child protection activity for unborn children. Local areas who took part in the research considered that development of services over the pandemic period means they are in a better position to respond to future increases in demand. In particular, more regular analysis of the data to identify and respond to emerging trends and patterns; increased collaboration between multi-agency partners, and the funding and introduction of additional specialist roles to respond to increasing areas of concerns. Some local areas noted that current budgetary pressures will impacts on ability to provide preventative supports for the children and families as will recruitment and retention challenges particularly in more rural areas.

Institute for Research in Social Services Social (IRISS) social work leadership through COVID-19 December 2020. Iriss-Social-work-leadership-covid19

IRISS published their research on social work leadership through the pandemic in December 2020, as the country entered the second wave of the pandemic. The work outlines the statutory leadership role of the Chief Social Work Officer within social work noting the complexities and cross cutting nature of social work service delivery, which spans areas such as public protection, corporate parenting and many national initiatives.

The report focuses on leadership and the role of social work and is therefore not specifically considering the impact of the pandemic on children. However, it contains useful context and insight into emerging challenges, approaches, and cross cutting issues, many of which have influenced the position of children and their families, and moves on to highlight potential impacts beginning to emerge. These include:

- Rising occurrences of domestic abuse, and its impact on children, young people, adults and families and the human and financial costs of this which demands a coordinated strategic and partnership response.
- A possible rise in demand for social work services as there is a resumption of wider services (e.g. courts and children’s hearings) and as a result of poverty, stress and increased vulnerability
- The wider impact of adult mental health issues and growth in referrals.
- The cumulative impact of carer and family stress - this can be a result of limited or reduced availability of services, or from an increase in family and carers stepping in to care for loved ones
- The widening social and health inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic and the cumulative reduced capacity to cope with adversity
- Financial cost of responding to the pandemic and impact on decisions about budgets for vulnerable people’s services.
- Implementation of The Promise and learning from the Independent Review of Adult Social Care Review - will not be achievable without further investment in preventive services to release the costs of crisis services

The report concludes by noting that the pandemic has escalated already known challenges with ‘those who are most vulnerable being the ones most disproportionately impacted.’

Young People Led Survey.

A group of care experienced young people undertook a piece of work on the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers in their area. This will be published on 17th December. The young people agreed that their findings could be included in this briefing in advance of the launch date to assist the work of the Committee. Findings include:

- 55% felt that the pandemic had a negative effect on their mental health and wellbeing. This linked to professional help not being available and being left on their own to manage issues, financial pressures and isolation from lack of face-to-face interaction.
- Many detailed mental health issues such as not sleeping
- 29% reported being diagnosed at some point with a mental health issues, and almost 50% had used a mental health service. However, less than 50% found this useful
- Barriers to accessing mental health services were mainly practical, with waiting times being highlighted and the short time then given to an appointment resulting in the contact not always feeling worthwhile. This was alongside feeling that not all professionals understood, that other people's problems were seen as more important, and that the transition from child to adult mental health services was not smooth
- There is not enough support available

On the positive side, a large proportion (over 70% of respondents) indicated that someone had spoken to them about their mental health, and many rated specific services positively. Factors that rated a service positively included the environment in which support or treatment is received, and a friendly and understanding approach of staff/workers. This approach by staff created a positive environment where young people feel comfortable sharing their experiences, whilst also assured that they would receive professional and expert help.

Recommendations for improvement include:

- ensuring that support is readily accessible, empathetic, and consistent
- better training for staff s which could involve getting young people involved in designing training
- Constantly reminding young people that support is available

Poverty

While research on poverty is not specifically related to the impact of the pandemic on children in need, the increasing context of poverty tends to be seen more in vulnerable groups. (Reference Scottish Government Every Child Every Chance: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-2022) As such, we reference analysis in this area to highlight this context, which affects health, development and need in children, and highlight below one example from Glasgow which provides stark statistics. Reference is also directed to Public Health Scotland work undertaken with Inverclyde Council and published in September 2021 around a data and systems approach to prioritising poverty which includes lived examples

- Since the start of the pandemic the number of children in Glasgow living in relative poverty has risen from 25,485 to 27,995, a 10% increase

- The depth of that poverty has increased as well. On average families with children in relative poverty are now £115 per week below the poverty line or £8 per week worse off than before the pandemic.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a drastic increase in the number of families with children that are receiving Universal Credit in Glasgow, rising from 10,154 to 15,140 or almost a 50% increase. 92% of children that are living in households receiving both Universal Credit and Council Tax Reduction are living in relative poverty
- An additional 1,650 children from lone parent households are identified as living in poverty
- The effectiveness of the Scottish Child Payment during the pandemic has decreased due to families moving deeper into poverty however. The increase in the payment to £20 week and the further roll out in late 2022 will impact positively.

Key Reflections

Social Work Scotland information confirms much of the detail outlined above. We would highlight specific supporting detail from Members and local areas:

Increased demand:

There is a significant increase in demand for services being seen across the country. This is reflected in child protection referrals, level and complexity of need and expectations of both other professionals and families. Figures provided by one local authority show an almost 50% increase in cases compared to 2020. As Scotland has opened up and particularly as schools re-opened and more children's health services returned to face-to-face contact the effects of the pandemic have been highlighted.

Related to this, many looked after children were 'stuck' during the pandemic, with plans for moves to permanent placements unable to be progressed, due to either restrictions on movement, court and Children's Hearing closures/restrictions and ability to undertake family finding in a global pandemic environment. This has created ongoing delays as courts struggle to prioritise civil cases, and social works struggle with demand for updated assessments whilst also dealing with new situations.

There are particular pressures and service demands for families of children with disabilities which are referenced below.

Alternative Family Based Care:

While the emergency legislation assisted some aspects of fostering and kinship situations, the pressures on family based alternative care have been highlighted by many member's, local authorities and third sector partners. This includes all the pressures of lockdown on with limited supports, managing complex contact arrangements which often included risk to themselves and their families, and a lack

of short break/respite provision. Carers were also often dealing with issues such as a need to shield due to their own, a family member or cared for child's health, providing a teaching environment for a range of children and needs, and managing a wide range of behaviours.

Number of available placements in some areas fell over the pandemic due to factors such as self-isolation and shielding, and accessing placements was complex. Carers were often asked to take children in emergencies without knowledge of their COVID-19 status.

Despite the above restrictions, many carers noted that for some children removal of the pressures of managing school resulted in a reducing in stress and anxiety and an increase in engagement with learning via remote routes. For those children, time in the security of a closed and nurturing environment was a positive factor. For other young people this was not the case and some placements disrupted due to the risks resulting from young people ignoring the COVID-19 rules.

The increase in number of children being accommodated reported by some areas coincides with what may be a national crisis in relation to foster car recruitment at a time when this service is most needed to meet the challenges of the post-COVID-19 period and to meet the commitments of the Promise. Fostering Network have maintained regular contact with their member and provide on their website details of the pressures experienced by foster carers, how they are dealing with these and the recruitment position. Both local authority and third sector providers are detailing a lack of response to recruitment and loss of existing cares due to factors such as age and the impact of the pandemic.

There were particular pressure for kinship situations, and while foster carer noted that support from link workers was regular and helpful, few kinship cares have the benefit of a dedicated supervising worker, being supported instead by the looked after child's worker. As those staff were largely engaged in the crisis response to the pandemic, kinship carers have reported feeling isolated and not as well supported. Kinship carers also reported feeling least comfortable or able to engage with remote support groups.

Residential Care:

Residential services managed well during the pandemic, with many reducing capacity to better care for existing young people in placement. Digital technology and support for contact was provided, and processes put in place where individuals tested positive. The challenges faced by adult care homes have not been reported for children where the approach was to consider the children's house in a similar way to any other family home.

Digital Technology:

The use of digital technology which has resulted from the pandemic has been largely positive. Additional funding to ensure that vulnerable children and families had access to suitable devices was utilised and made a difference. Understanding of the

need to provide data along with devices was a point of learning. There are examples of seven day a week programmes of touching base, exercise and groups taking place to support care leavers and Champions Board young people as well as creative use of technology to ensure that young people in care could keep in touch with family and friends.

Alongside this, as the pandemic progressed technology was utilised to take child protection and child care reviews onto Teams or related platforms. This enabled multi-agency reviews to continue and ensure proper planning. It is however not without challenges and in particular how to ensure that families and young people are able to engage and are supported to do so. This is crucial where difficult material is being considered, and a family may be accessing a meeting from their own home. Many local authorities mitigated any impact by ensuring that families took part alongside social workers or a key professional, with time for de-brief and discussing after the meeting

For young people they reported feeling comfortable with remote meetings, and some appreciated the opportunity to join for a period then leave and a lessening of the pressure of sitting in a large room with many people.

While not taking the place of face-to-face meetings this aspect of change is likely to be integrated in to recovery and beyond, allowing flexibility, and better use of time and engagement.

Poverty

For those already living in poverty, which includes many families in need, care leavers and families with disabilities, the pandemic has increased the pressure of living in poverty. Alongside other area where this impact, poverty can affect children's health and development welling and achievement. Despite significant funding to close the attainment gap, it is likely that the pandemic has mitigated any progress, and in fact increased that gap.

Care Experienced Young People

Members have highlighted specific impact on care experience young people. This include isolation from family and friends and the consequences of this, delayed progression of plans which has particularly affected children returning home or moving to permanent alternative placements, and challenges in completing assessments of families when access was restricted

Several areas have reported an increase in mental health and emotional wellbeing issues. For care leavers living on their own this was particularly noted and includes an increase in self harm and suicide, and suicide ideation.

Young People with Disabilities:

The pandemic has had a very particular impact on young people with a disability and their families, underlining the often-un-acknowledged pressures these families manage in their normal day to day lives.

Many essential support services such as short breaks were closed when the first lock down occurred, and the restrictions in relation to health meant that even once able to open, the services were restricted. Alongside this, some families were shielding and opted for the safety of their children, not to accept home support. This placed the full burden of day-to-day care for some extremely complex children on their families without the normal breaks provided by services or school. While manageable for a short period, the unexpected lengthy period of the pandemic-before vaccination and an opening of service, - meant that many families were and remain exhausted. While school hubs were available, attendance was not an option for many children, and means to engage remotely were more limited.

The crisis in social care is also influencing the position of children with a disability. Only a small number of home care providers are registered to provide care to children with complex needs, and thus the lack of current staffing in this sector is increasing pressure on families already in crisis. The failure to include children's social care provisions and PA's in the recent salary increase for adult providers may further reduce availability.

One local authority has provided details which shows an increase this year of 67% in residential placements, all children with a disability with lack of community supports being a significant contributory factor. Many local authorities developed creative ways of providing what support where they could and utilised summer funding to improve social experience, but the effects on this group of young people and their families is likely to continue, and to be as impacted by carer supports and exhaustion as by resources and support directly for children.

Mental Health

Regardless of the area of social work or children's services, threaded through every piece of research and feedback is that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased negatively mental health and wellbeing of children and young people and that those already vulnerable groups are again most affected. To coordinated and cohesive attention must be paid to this area which impacts on every other aspect of children's lives. Children cannot engage, attain, grow and develop in a positive manner and build their resilience when dealing with an environment which negatively impact on their wellbeing

Workforce:

Members have provided information on a range of workforce issues. This highlights that social work children and families staff have operated under immense pressure over the period of the pandemic with reduced staff, critical services only operating, and with the added pressure of new legislation and

Conclusion

Evidence for the impact of the covid 19 pandemic is continually increasing. Social Work Scotland is conscious that the information informing this briefing is largely gathered from local data, member details and practice examples. As recovery progresses that evidence base will be enhanced with threads and priorities emerging. Children, however, are not able to wait, and existing material has already provided indications of where the priorities for action lie.

- The impact on children is likely to long term and continually emerging and demand for services has and will continue to increase
- The pandemic has increased vulnerability factors for children and families already experiencing adversity and trauma
- Mental health impact permeates all the feedback and research and is a core area for action.
- There has been a particular impact on children with disabilities, care experienced young people and the resources that support those groups.
- Wider societal factors such as poverty are critical factors
- Workforce issues need to be addressed to enable appropriate response to need

In conclusion, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to develop and is significant for children and particularly those who had existing adversities in their lives before the pandemic. Mitigating the impact on children will require more than a resumption of services but active recovery and support to build a new structures and supports that will enable children's recovery and wellbeing, encourage creative approaches and utilise learning from the pandemic. Working together, paying attention to early intervention and staff wellbeing, and listening to the voice of young people and families are essential

References:

CELCIS report.

https://www.celcis.org/application/files/8516/2763/5115/The_impact_of_COVID19_IRRIS_9_on_children_and_families_in_Scotland.pdf

IRISS report

Centre for Civic Innovation report on child poverty in Glasgow, Child Poverty: Understanding the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Child poverty and impact of Covid:

<https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/publications/early-child-development/early-child-development-scotland-201920/>

<https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/publications/prioritise-child-poverty-a-data-and-systems-approach>

Youth Link The Covid Crisis: the Impact on Youth Work and Young People

<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/4511/survey-report-final.pdf>

The logo for SPICe is a purple rounded rectangle with a gradient. The text 'SPICe' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font.

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Education, Children and Young People Committee

1 December 2021

Covid 19: Response and recovery

Introduction

This paper is to support the Committee in its third meeting exploring the response to and recovery from the pandemic.

This week the Committee will hear from representative of local government – COSLA and ADES – Social Work Scotland and the NASUWT. ADES and COSLA are both members of the Covid 19 Education Recovery Group.

Submissions have been received from all attendees and are included in members' papers.

The Committee's two previous meetings have focused on the impact of the pandemic and next steps through the lenses of additional support for learning and deprivation.

Links to the papers and the official reports are listed below.

- ASL 17 November 2021
 - [Submissions and papers](#)
 - [Official Report](#)
- Deprivation 24 November 2021
 - [Submissions and papers](#)
 - Official Report ([will be available early w/c 29 November](#))

This paper is in three parts. The first part explores the response to the pandemic and particularly how the structures the Scottish Government put in place to take

forward policy. The second part looks at specific impacts and responses and the third part explores the theme of recovery.

Response to the pandemic

In October, the Committee took evidence from the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission on a range of topics. The AGS and his colleagues spoke to their report [Improving outcomes for young people through school education](#) which was published in March 2021. This report observed—

“The Covid-19 pandemic has affected children and young people in many ways, including their learning, wellbeing and economic circumstances. Pupils living in the most challenging circumstances have been most affected by school closures.

“Those involved in planning, delivering and supporting school education were working well together prior to the pandemic. This strong foundation helped them to collaborate to deliver a rapid response to Covid-19 in exceptionally challenging circumstances. The pandemic has reinforced the importance of school education and other sectors working together to tackle issues which affect young people’s life chances and outcomes, such as child poverty and health and wellbeing.”

The Committee discussed the progress since the Christie Commission report in 2011 with the AGS. He noted that there had been barriers to some of the ambitions of the Christie Report. The AGS’ blog, [Christie's Clarion Call Can't Wait Another Decade](#), identified a number of barriers to implementing the recommendations of the Christie Commission. These included: a focus on shorter term indicators rather than longer term outcomes; a lack of empowerment of public sector leaders to work collaboratively and deliver change; and a culture which works against risk taking. However, he said that the pandemic had seen some of these barriers overcome. He told the Committee

“The pandemic has changed that. There has been increased collaboration. The delivery of essential services to the people in the greatest need has disrespected some of the boundaries that had been barriers in the previous period. Public sector, private sector and third sector organisations have all worked collaboratively, set aside roles, responsibilities and, where appropriate, accountability arrangements and got services out to where they were most needed during the pandemic.” (OR [3 November 2021, col 4](#))

Covid 19 Education Recovery Group

The Scottish Government established the [Covid 19 Education Recovery Group \(CERG\) in April 2020](#). The purpose of CERG is—

- bring together decision makers and key influencers to ensure that the delivery of childcare, early learning and education maintains a strong focus on excellence and equity for all, within the necessary constraints of the COVID-19 response

- provide leadership and advice to ministers and local government leaders in developing the strategic approach to the response and recovery of the ELC and education system
- work across organisational and structural boundaries to support the response and recovery efforts
- consider and provide advice on any proposed changes in Scottish education strategy, taking into account any long-term effects of the COVID-19 response
- be a forum for frank and open discussion about what is working and what and where more improvement is required

The CERG membership includes a range of stakeholders, including the Scottish Government, local government, national agencies, the NPFS, a number of trade unions, and the SYP.

At the outset, CERG established a number of workstreams which included—

- Learning
- Curriculum and Assessment
- Supporting Learners from Disadvantaged Backgrounds
- Pastoral Care
- Workforce support
- ELC

CERG is jointly chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and Stephen McCabe, COSLA's Children and Young People spokesperson. The Scottish Government has regularly published minutes of CERG. How CERG worked in practice, for example who decided upon the agenda and the balance between policy development and policy delivery, has not been explored in public.

CERG was involved in the development of advice to schools and ELC settings in re-opening/staying open. During 2020 and early 2021, the Scottish Government issued a number of Education Continuity Directions under the Coronavirus Act 2020. These provided legal bases for, among other things, schools being closed.

Coronavirus (COVID 19): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues

The [Advisory Sub-Group](#) provides advice to support and inform the development of operational guidance for providers of learning, childcare and children's services. The groups were set up to provide "more granular scientific advice on education and children's issues to support the iterative development of guidance". The group's membership includes experts in public health, education and children's services.

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Children and Families Collective Leadership Group

[This group was set up in May 2020](#). Its remit was to “review data, intelligence, research and policy to identify and respond to immediate concerns for children, young people and families with vulnerabilities during the pandemic”. It has now turned its attention to longer term recovery from the pandemic.

This group is co-chaired by officials from SOLACE and the Scottish Government. COSLA and Social Work Scotland are members of this group.

Members may wish to explore with the panel—

1. **How did the Covid 19 Education Recovery Group’s work compare to pre-existing policy groups, such as the Scottish Education Council? For example, was it more collaborative?**
2. **How much influence did and does CERG have on key policy decisions?**
3. **How did the work of the group on children’s services dovetail with the work of CERG?**
4. **How were the views of those not represented on these groups heard and reflected in decision-making?**
5. **Has the pandemic improved cross-sector and cross-border working? Can the panel identify examples?**

Impacts, interventions and funding

The Scottish Government has made available significant additional resource to local authorities to support the school system in the past two years. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) education recovery: key actions and next steps document published in October 2021 stated—

“Work to support children and young people has been a top priority since the very start of the pandemic, and over £450m of additional funding has already been committed during 2020/21 and 2021/22 as part of education recovery. £240m of that total has already been provided for the recruitment of extra staff to ensure resilience and to provide additional support for learning and teaching. In addition, a further £145.5m is being added permanently to the local government settlement from April 2022. This will allow local authorities to offer sustained employment of additional teachers and support staff.”

COSLA’s submission stated that local authorities welcomed the additional funding. It also noted—

“These pots of money have often come with significant reporting requirements, with local authorities providing information to the Scottish Government on the use of this funding. These existing report arrangements

are suitable for national-level oversight, though any further analysis of spend may become overly burdensome, particularly as schools and local authorities continue to face significant pressures due to COVID-19.”

Additional staff

The Scottish Government announced a number of tranches of funds for additional teachers and support staff through 2020 and 2021. In announcing the [continuation of this funding in August](#), the Cabinet Secretary stated—

“Our priority for COVID education recovery is to ensure the highest quality of learning and teaching. Our schools have shouldered significant disruption as they tackle the unparalleled challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic.

“This is why it is imperative that we do everything we can to support councils to recruit permanent teachers and support staff. This funding will provide local authorities with the certainty they need in order to plan their future permanent workforce requirements.”

COSLA said in the same news release—

“[COSLA looks] forward to continuing to work with Government to address broader recruitment and retention needs that councils are facing so that we can continue to deliver the highest all-round quality of education to all.”

The NASUWT’s submission stated—

“Schools and the staff that work in them will be at the heart of any effective recovery strategy. Any strategy will require an effective focus on the workforce to ensure that it is as well placed as possible to support children's learning and development. The aspirations of the Government to achieve excellence and equity across school systems cannot be achieved without adequate funding. There are significant challenges to the recruitment and retention of teachers, including the pay levels of experienced teachers and excessive workload suffered by the profession.”

Digital connectivity

Ensuring that all young people could access online teaching resources has been a priority. This was important for learners during periods when schools were closed to most pupils and also for those periods when individual pupils were and are unable to attend school due to the virus.

The Scottish Government had provided £25m to local authorities to support this. This led to around 70,000 devices and 14,000 connectivity packages were distributed to learners across Scotland.

The Children’s Commissioner, Bruce Adamson told the Committee on [17 November](#)—

“Many of the children I spoke to were feeling happy, particularly later in lockdown, that devices were working well. However, there were real limitations for disabled children and children who cannot use the same technology as others; there are gaps in specialist technology that suits the needs of some children.” (Col 13)

Witnesses on 17 November also discussed the need to ensure that pupils and families have the skills to use laptops and other devices effectively. Stephen McGhee from the Scottish Children’s Services Coalition said—

“[There should have been] a community approach in which families are involved in digital literacy in their own right. The stumbling block is often that parents or grandparents are asked to set up computers that are given to children.” (Col 15)

It is Government policy to ensure that every school-aged pupil in Scotland has a device and an internet connection by the end of this parliamentary session.

Food

The Scottish Government provided £51 million for free school meal alternatives during the period of remote learning and school holidays. This was aimed at pupils who were statutorily eligible for free school meals. Local authorities took a variety of approaches to supporting families to feed their children. Some local authorities provided vouchers, some cash, and in some cases, food was provided.

John Dickie from CPAG Scotland told the Committee on 24 November that families preferred cash, which allowed the families to retain the dignity of being able to make choices in how to spend the money.

Hubs

During the closures of schools, local authorities made provision for children of key workers and vulnerable children to attend schools or hubs. Guidance was provided to local authorities but there was local discretion in determining vulnerable children in this context.

Bruce Adamson, the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland, told the Committee on [17 November](#) that while the Hubs were generally effective for those who attended, this was not necessarily the case for those who have complex additional support needs. He said—

“Our concern is that, although many families who have children with additional support needs were told that places were available, the specialist support and the relationships that had existed before Covid were not in place. Access to the individualised support that many children, particularly those with complex needs, require was not particularly good in those hubs.” (Col 3)

Stephen McGhee also complemented the hubs as “a vital resource for young people who needed that type of service”, but also said that there was a lack of clarity on who could access them.

COSLA's submission noted that local authorities "faced a great deal of pressure from stakeholders, particularly key workers, to provide as many spaces as possible through childcare hubs". The submission stated—

"Hub provision looked different across Scotland, this reflected the difference experience of the pandemic and it impacts across the country, including the impact on staffing, the availability of volunteers, the location and transport links to hubs and the needs of the range of children and young people attending the hubs."

Mitigations in Schools

Detailed guidance was produced in advance of schools returning in August 2020. This guidance has constantly been updated as the situation has changed. Local authorities, as employers and managers of schools, had duties under health and safety legislation to keep their staff and pupils safe. It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail all of the mitigations in place.

The Scottish Government noted in the Recovery Plan that it has provided "£90m to fund the implementation of those mitigations, including enhanced hygiene measures, ventilation solutions, and necessary changes to logistics such as transportation". In addition, in August this year, the Scottish Government provided £10m to support ventilation through access to CO² monitors.

Supporting wellbeing

Mental wellbeing of staff, learners and their families during the pandemic and beyond has been a focus of work. The Scottish Government has provided—

- £3 million supporting targeted youth work services to support children's wellbeing and to engage with children who most need our support
- £20 million over summer 2021 to improve physical and mental health, address issues of social isolation and lack of access to normal activities
- £1.5 million for workforce support

ADES' submission stated—

"Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing will have been affected in many different ways as a result of the pandemic and it continues to be a key priority for all services in local authority partnerships. Needs which have been identified include:

- Anxiety about returning to school for some children, young people and their parents
- Distressed behaviour related to disruption in relationships and routines
- Loss and bereavement
- Concerns about speech and language development for targeted pre-school children"

COSLA's submission highlighted the work undertaken to support the workforce. This included specific support for BAME educators.

Additional Support Needs

A report by the Scottish Government published in July 2021 on the [experiences of vulnerable children, young people](#), and parents found—

“Children and young people who had had tailored additional support for their learning prior to the pandemic, such as those with Additional Support Needs (ASN) or those with limited English, found it very difficult to take part in home learning when this support was removed, and felt that they were falling further behind their peers as a result. These groups called for increased 1-to-1 support from teachers, or face to face contact. Some children and young people with ASN were also particularly affected by the change in their daily routines.

“Another issue relevant to several groups was the suitability of online service provision, including some remote technology and social media. Some children and young people with ASN were unable to use video calls or social media due to their health conditions, or found it very difficult to engage with. Some participants with domestic abuse experiences within their home also struggled to find private places to make use of remote support services, and some were unable to access support that had previously been provided face to face outside the home.”

Submissions from the participants of the evidence session on 17 November provided information on the impacts on different groups of young people. Children in Scotland's submission reported that—

“Parents and carers contacting Enquire have also reported the longer-term impact or concern about:

- Long term reduction in support/ or the level of support for their child
- Delays in identifying needs
- Failure to plan for support (and transitions planning not taking place for school changes or leaving school).
- How behind with their learning children were on the return to school.”

COSLA's submission stated—

“Given the wide range of additional support needs individual learners have, the expertise and judgement of the school staff and children's sector professionals working mostly closely with them was key in understanding how to provide that support with schools and other face to face services closed. The education and children's services workforce demonstrated creativity, sensitivity, and a real understanding of and commitment to GIRFEC in their endeavours to provide support and learning opportunities.”

The Committee heard that the pandemic paused diagnosis and assessment activity. Not only the every-day wellbeing assessments made in schools and classrooms, but also through specialist services. Ramon Hutchingson from Arch told the Committee on [17 November](#)—

“We are reliably informed by health colleagues that, at the moment, they are not looking at any referrals that were made after 2019. Therefore, there is a significant two-year gap, and, for many families that we talk to, the gap is significantly longer than that.” (Col 45)

The NASUWT’s submission called for greater investment in wider children’s services and more collaboration across services to meet children and young people’s needs. Mr Hutchingson also noted that local authority services were paused or stretched. He said—

“The other part of that is pre, mid and post-diagnostic support services, which are down to local authorities and care services to provide. That has been another issue. Another major gap that arose during lockdown is in the provision of respite services, and that continues to be the case.” (Col 45)

Wider children’s services

Linda O’Neill from CELCIS told the Committee on 17 November that social work teams had prioritised “face-to-face visits for children who were on home supervision orders and that those who were in residential and foster care continued to receive support from the teams and staff around them”. However, she also noted that the regular contacts in school would normally be an additional protective measure and this was missing. (Col 9) Ms O’Neill also noted that practitioners had adapted, she said—

“From practitioners and leaders across the system, we have heard that the removal of processes that can be viewed, at times, particularly in the context of local authorities, as overly bureaucratic, was particularly helpful. It allowed workers and practitioners to respond in a much more attuned and relational way to children and families.” (Col 6)

Social Work Scotland’s submission highlighted research that showed an increase of social work referrals and at the same time a reduction of children in care. It also highlighted a reported increase in domestic abuse. Its submission stated—

“The pandemic has brought with it additional stressors for many families. These range from concerns about health and additional experiences of loss to pressures resulting from caring responsibilities, competing demands and loss of support networks and social outlets. For many children and families with whom social work engage, these stressors exacerbate existing challenges, whether that be social isolation, poor socio-economic support structures or disrupted relationships. Some children entered the pandemic period having already experienced adversity. Examples are children living with domestic violence where the safety and protection of school and other social outlets was lost; children with complex needs whose support networks reduced or ceased; children in poverty where the pandemic further reduced their access

to basic provision and income; care leavers whose limited networks were removed thus increasing social isolation. This underlines that a likely impact of the pandemic for some children is an increase in adverse factors and that while many services have resumed, to mitigate the effects of the pandemic will require proactive investment across many facets of society and an ongoing attention to wellbeing over time.”

Social Work Scotland’s submission set out its understanding of how various services have fared over the past 20 months. It reported that family-based care had to navigate additional complexity of supporting children during the pandemic. This included a reduced number of placements available due to public health measures and, in the longer term, shortages in foster carers. SWS’ submission reported that residential care system had broadly responded well by reducing the capacity in residences to better support young people and embracing digital working.

Support and accountability

To support schools and teachers with remote learning, Education Scotland along with partners developed a “[National elearning Offer](#)” which included eSgoil as well as other resources and professional development. This remains available this year and includes—

- Live, interactive lessons through e-Sgoil;
- Expansion of the online and remote learning options available to schools in both the Broad General Education and Senior Phase;
- Study support webinars and resources; and
- Recorded content for learners to use as directed by their teacher.

During the second school closures in January, Education Scotland undertook weekly reviews of practice. These were intended to support the sharing of best practice. A [summary covering the first five of these stated](#)—

“Local authorities and schools are better prepared and more equipped to deliver remote learning. They have learned from the experiences of the previous lockdown and have responded quickly to ensure learners can access remote learning. Local authorities and schools have taken active steps to improve children’s and young people’s access to resources by using additional funding, including Pupil Equity Funding to purchase digital resources and tools for learners.”

The summary also noted that, compared to the Spring 2020 school closures, communication with families had improved. There was a strong focus on pastoral support and monitoring wellbeing and learners also felt that the experience of learning in the second lockdown was better than the first.

Members may wish to explore with the panel—

- 6. Whether the overall package of additional funding has been sufficient for local authorities to meet the needs of pupils, families and their staff in the past 20 months? Are there long-term cost pressures as a result of the pandemic?**
- 7. How have local authorities ensured that additional staffing has been deployed where it is most needed? Are there examples of cross service or cross authority working to achieve outcomes?**
- 8. What were the challenges of delivering digital devices and connections? What are the expectations of the length of the replacement cycle for these devices and ongoing costs?**
- 9. How were staff and schools supported to improve teaching and learning utilising these digital devices? How is the impact of using digital approaches being measured?**
- 10. How did local authorities ensure that the approaches they took to supporting families to feed pupils reflect local circumstances and the needs of those families?**
- 11. How did the hubs support the education of the children who attended?**
- 12. How have local authorities monitored the wellbeing of their employees, pupils and their families over the course of the past 20 months? How are they currently supporting those individuals?**
- 13. What are the key challenges for children's social work departments?**
- 14. Whether the panel has comments on how successfully the Regional Improvement Collaboratives and Education Scotland have supported classroom or remote learning since August 2020?**
- 15. Whether individual interventions through the pandemic are being evaluated? What lessons might be learned for any future interruptions in education?**

Recovery

The Scottish Government is responsible for the overall education system and the strategic approach. Local authorities and schools are key to the delivery of school education and the specifics of the actions to support education recovery will be left to local decision-makers.

The [Scottish Government's Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) education recovery: key actions and next steps](#) document notes the significant likely impacts on children and young people. As noted above, the plan identified the extra investment and work of the Scottish Government to specifically address the pandemic. It also noted that recovery from the pandemic should be consistent with existing policy frameworks

(e.g. GIRFEC), noted the contribution to a number of individual policy initiatives (e.g. expanding universal free school meals), and is considered in developing wider changes to policy (e.g. the response to the OECD report).

This complexity can make it difficult to tease out the strands of policy which are aimed at, say, supporting more equal outcomes as a result of experiencing deprivation or supporting outcomes following the experience of the pandemic. The NASUWT's submission advocated a "holistic view of recovery, based on supporting children in all aspects of their lives, including, but not limited to, those relating to formal schooling".

The interlinked nature of various policy strands was illustrated in the [Cabinet Secretary's statement on 23 November](#) on the Scottish Government's refreshed approach to the Scottish Attainment Challenge. This statement referenced the "disproportionate impact that Covid-19 has had on the most disadvantaged in our society", the Government's response to the OECD review, and policies to remove costs associated with the school day.

The Committee has explored how the pandemic has impacted on progress to take forward key policies, such as improving Additional Support for Learning through the response to the Morgan Review and the Promise. COSLA's submission stated—

["The Morgan Review"](#) called for a culture change so that the achievements of children and young people with additional support needs are recognised and valued, and a report was recently [published on progress taking forward the recommendations](#). The Additional Support for Learning Implementation Group (ASLIG), plan to carry out further engagement with children and young people who have additional support needs to consider the impact the pandemic has had on them."

The Committee has explored some of the difficulties in quantifying the impacts of the pandemic. Social Work Scotland's submission said, "research on the impact on children and specifically those with whom we work, is as yet minimal – it remains too early to know the medium or long-term impact on children's health wellbeing and development." In a similar vein, Bruce Adamson said on 17 November—

"One problem is that we do not know what the impacts will be. It is difficult to research something when we cannot map out the effects. We know what has happened—we have really good evidence on that—but it is hard to measure its impact, particularly on mental health, long-term physical health and educational attainment, because we do not have the frameworks in place."
(Col 16)

The Cabinet Secretary also noted that the Achievement of CfE Levels is expected to be published in December (due on the 14th) and that this will provide evidence of the depth and distribution of the impacts on literacy and numeracy. ADES' submission stated that it expects attainment levels to have dropped.

The extent to which existing policies (or approaches to reform) are fit-for-purpose in the post-pandemic landscape has been a theme of the Committee's discussions. Social Work Scotland's submission stated, "the Scottish GIRFEC framework

provides a time-tested model within which to manage and monitor children's wellbeing and resilience, and the impact of trauma as we move out of the crisis phase of the pandemic." However, SWS's submission concluded by saying—

"Mitigating the impact on children will require more than a resumption of services but active recovery and support to build anew structures and supports that will enable children's recovery and wellbeing, encourage creative approaches and utilise learning from the pandemic. Working together, paying attention to early intervention and staff wellbeing, and listening to the voice of young people and families are essential."

The Scottish Government's recovery plan stated—

"Schools, teachers and early years practitioners will know best how to help individual children, including identifying those who need extra support with specific subjects or with their health and wellbeing, and what type of support is needed. That is why we will continue to maintain empowerment as a central tenet of our response."

To support localised action, Education Scotland has produced guidance. [Recalibrating Equity and Social Justice in Scottish Education: Bouncing forward after COVID-19 lockdowns](#) identified "six broad principles which can be used to help schools and local authorities consider their use of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding and supports to recalibrate equity and help learners to bounce forward after COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures." These principles included prioritising re-engagement with learning, identifying learners most impacted by poverty & COVID-19 (including learners with ASN), and providing high quality universal and targeted support.

The rapid review of evidence by the UCL Social Research Institute on [Mitigating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on primary and lower secondary children during school closures](#) argued that school level action "requires schools to have access to contextually relevant diagnostic tools they can use to assess the range of harms in need of redress in their local context." It also cautioned that targeted interventions supporting learning in normal circumstances may not necessarily apply to the circumstances after the pandemic.

ADES' submission provides the Committee with a number of examples of types of responses and activities undertaken across the country to support recovery. Laurie Black from the EIS told the Committee on 17 November—

"It should be acknowledged that local authorities are rising to the challenge and implementing specialist roles for Covid recovery, which they are using to address the specific needs of their geographical areas. That is taking place above and beyond what was happening prior to Covid. Those things are happening, but within the budget and resources that local authorities have."
(Col 29)

The Committee has explored the importance of taking into account Children's and Young People's voices in plans for recovery. The Scottish Government's recovery plan highlights the new Children and Young People's Education Council which is

intended to provide comment on national policy. The recovery plan stated the goal of making it “the norm for children and young people to be involved in decision-making across Scotland, so that they are at the heart of decisions that affect them at local and national levels”.

Audit Scotland’s [Improving outcomes for young people through school education](#) report stated—

“It is now more important than ever that schools, councils and the Scottish Government are clear about:

- the priorities for education recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and how to improve outcomes beyond what was being achieved before
- what that means in terms of the anticipated outcomes for children and young people
- how these outcomes will be measured, reported and acted on.”

Re-engaging learners and their families

The Committee heard from witnesses on 24 November that retaining focus on children’s wellbeing is important to ensure re-engagement with learning. Also, the witnesses argued for a greater emphasis on family-based interventions and strengthening relationships between home and the school.

The Scottish Government’s recovery plan stated—

“The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people's health and wellbeing, including mental health, has been foremost in our consideration when developing our response to the pandemic, and will continue to be a priority as we move into the renewal phase.”

The Committee has heard that families and young people experienced periods of lockdown differently. Similarly, Bruce Adamson argued that pupils’ re-engagement with learning should be individualised and that this could be particularly helpful for neurodiverse children and young people. ([Col 20](#))

Laurie Black from the EIS told the Committee on 17 November of examples of children returning, or starting, school and being socially and emotionally unprepared. ([Col 27](#))

Panel members on 17 November also argued that the pandemic has reinforced the need to include a range of professionals to support a variety of needs. Sally Cavers from Children in Scotland stated—

“All the empowered schools guidance and the work that has been done to ensure that partnerships are as effective as they can be are really critical now. We have to look at the community around the school and the expertise in the youth work sector in working with and supporting children with additional

support needs and care-experienced young people. We have to make sure that they are part of the recovery plan and really embedded in it so that some of the issues to do with sustainability for the sector are addressed swiftly.”
(Col 29)

ADES’ submission noted that “school attendance and engagement of learners is crucial for children’s educational attainment particularly for children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those who need support to access learning.” ADES also highlighted work it had undertaken with the Children and Young People’s Improvement Collaborative to identify effective approaches to improve attendance and engagement. COSLA’s submission stated—

“A range of approaches and provisions were and continue to be in place and are dependent on local needs, including but not limited to art-based therapies targeting those not engaged in school and/or finding it hard to leave home, a hybrid online/offline youth work based approach, and digital services. ... Schools have sought to maintain a relational approach to supporting children and young people, despite closures, using digital and phone-based support.”

Resilience

The Scottish Government [regularly publishes data](#) on absences in schools.

The data for 16 November shows that the pupil attendance in local authority schools was 89.3%; absence due to Covid 8.5%; and absence for another reason, 2.2%. Of the 15,652 absences due to Covid, 10,670 were absent due to self-isolating, 4,346 were sick due to Covid, 580 were off as parents chose to keep their children off school contrary to guidance, 56 were off because their school was closed.

On the same day around 1,400 teachers and 900 other school staff were off due to Covid. Roughly half of these absences were due to being sick and half due to self-isolation.

Members may wish to explore with the panel:

- 16. To what degree are new approaches needed to tackle the impacts of the pandemic?**
- 17. A number of submissions and contributors to the Committee’s work have suggested that more research is needed to understand the impact of the pandemic. What are the key questions any such pieces of research should seek to address?**
- 18. How are families and children and young people being meaningfully included in decisions on how local authorities, their schools and children’s services approach recovery?**
- 19. To what degree should responsibility for leading recovery be at a national, local or school level? How should outcomes and progress be measured at these different levels?**

- 20. Schools and local authorities are likely to take different approaches to planning, implementing and evaluating interventions to support recovery. What is the role of the Scottish Government, local government and national agencies to support this and ensure improved outcomes for young people and their families?**
- 21. Have the expectations of pupils' progress changed through the pandemic?**
- 22. How are schools and local authorities supporting continuity of learning in the cases of:**
- **Individual pupils self-isolating;**
 - **Teaching staff being absent; and**
 - **Schools closing?**
- 23. What are the contingencies should a further lockdown be necessary? How will the needs of pupils with ASN or whose families experience deprivation be met?**

Ned Sharratt, Senior Researcher (Education, Culture), SPICe Research

24 November 2021

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ANNEXE

For ease of reference the suggested questions in this paper are reproduced here

Members may wish to explore with the panel—

- 1. How did the Covid 19 Education Recovery Group's work compare to pre-existing policy groups, such as the Scottish Education Council? For example, was it more collaborative?**
- 2. How much influence did and does CERG have on key policy decisions?**
- 3. How did the work of the group on children's services dovetail with the work of CERG?**
- 4. How were the views of those not represented on these groups heard and reflected in decision-making?**
- 5. Has the pandemic improved cross-sector and cross-border working? Can the panel identify examples?**
- 6. Whether the overall package of additional funding has been sufficient for local authorities to meet the needs of pupils, families and their staff in the past 20 months? Are there long-term cost pressures as a result of the pandemic?**
- 7. How have local authorities ensured that additional staffing has been deployed where it is most needed? Are there examples of cross service or cross authority working to achieve outcomes?**
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