

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL****Report by Laura Mason, Chief Education Officer****Educational Services Committee: 19th March 2025**

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**Subject: Services for Children, Young People and Families Update Report****1. Purpose****1.1** The purpose of this report is:

- a) to inform the Educational Services Committee of progress on supports to children, young people and families.

**2. Recommendations****2.1** Members of the Educational Services Committee are asked to:

- a) Note progress on plans to continue developing and improving supports.

**3. Background****3.1** West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC) is committed to ensuring all children and young people are enabled to progress through Early Learning and School with the support they need.

When this support is more or different to what is generally provided for children and young people of the same age, then the child or young person is said to have additional needs.

**3.2** The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 lists four interrelated factors which individually or jointly impact on ability to learn:

- Learning Environment
- Family Circumstances
- Disability or Health
- Social or Emotional Factors

Additional support may be required throughout a child or young person's educational journey: others may only require additional support for a short period.

**3.3** It is recognised that children, young people and families are best supported through effective multi-agency planning and delivery of services. Educational Services work in collaboration with a range of council, Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and third sector colleagues to support our families. This work is being developed via the Whole Family Wellbeing (WFW) planning, led by Educational Services on behalf of the Community Planning Partnership.

## **4. Main Issues**

- 4.1** There are currently 11 781 school pupils in West Dunbartonshire Council. 5470 Pupils have Additional Support Needs (ASN), supported mainly in mainstream schools. Approximately 280 pupils are supported in our specialist settings as they require a more specific learning environment. We also have a small percentage of our children and young people with additional support needs supported by day or residential providers in external placements. These often involve young people separated from their peers and their community and can be expensive in comparison to supporting in-house. These costs have increased significantly over the past few years due to increased salaries and increased charges from partner providers for the range of specialist support offered. This has resulted in budget overspends and it is anticipated that there might be mitigation of these to some extent by the ASN strategy implementation.

The trajectory of ASN needs in WDC has increased over time (from 36.9% in 2013 to 46.4% in 2025) and has been supported by the investment in our ASN estate expansion. Over the past four years this has resulted in the availability of 78 additional places in specialist settings.

- 4.2** In preparation for transition to school session 2025-2026 there was a significant increase in the number of children's cases considered by the revised Inclusion Support Forum (ISF) which allocates placements to specialist settings. These figures are reflective of local and national ASN statistics and increases in needs post pandemic. 32 children who had cases heard at the forum were identified as having needs which would require additional support when transitioning to primary school. 20 of the group were identified as having the most complex needs and allocated places in our Specialist Settings. 2 children were identified as having needs which would be able to be supported in mainstream establishments within the existing ranges of support planning by team around the child processes, and a further group of 11 were identified, who would require enhanced support in mainstream establishments. For our pupils' transition into secondary school 44 children's cases were considered with 37 pupils being allocated a space within our specialist settings. 11 pupils will be offered places in the new Riverside School which is due to open in August 2025.

No child considered this year has a Coordinated Support Plan. To meet the criteria for one, the child requires significant and ongoing support from an agency other than education; to meet their educational targets and this does not currently apply to this cohort.

- 4.3** In line with National Guidance, we have a presumption to mainstream and almost all children with additional support needs have them successfully met in mainstream settings.

Our ASN Strategy identifies and addresses these issues with a focus on the four pillars of inclusive education in Scotland which are: present, participating, achieving and supported, in order that children meet their full potential. Mainstreaming is the 'central pillar' to this approach.

Our strategy is successfully upskilling staff and building on consistent approaches to meeting learner needs across all settings, ensuring our legal obligations are being met.

#### **4.4** Enhanced Local Learning Community Expansion

An enhanced Local Learning Community (LLC) model of support has been established, building on inclusive practices and our processes of moving towards a 'new normal', where the expectation will be a presumption to mainstream schooling for all children. High quality child's planning, support and professional learning is instrumental in this. In session 2024-25 additional staffing capacity and support was provided to 3 identified schools; Linnvale, Knoxland and Levenvale, supporting transition and approaches to meet learners' needs. 13 identified pupils offered places accepted and started in school. A group of Central Officers and Educational Psychologists have delivered on an action plan and associated tasks to ensure that staff were appropriately trained and supported, that school environments meet the requirements of children attending and that the team around the child worked with parents to deliver the transition and supports needed to enable a successful Primary One.

All establishments have now undertaken reviews for the children involved. Feedback has been positive, and children's progress is evident. They are benefitting from the language rich social environments of the mainstream setting. Reviews will continue to monitor pupil progress and inform next steps. This model will be expanded to include St Mary's Duntocher next year which will support 5 pupils. A further 6 pupils will be supported in the 3 existing schools.

**4.5** The Neurodevelopmental (ND) Team has worked across the 3 Enhanced Support Model Schools as part of a pilot approach to supporting parents in an environment where they were comfortable. It has also increased staff awareness of neurodivergence and reduced wait times whilst streamlining the ND assessment process. The team will continue to offer 'Cuppa and Connect' across educational establishments bringing support to parents in school settings as these were welcomed and very well attended last session. Engagement so far is very positive and approximately fifteen families attend each session.

**4.6** Education Leaders have collaborated to identify key areas of development and focus for Year 4 of the ASN Strategy. Notable progress has been as follows:

- In Year 3 of the Child Inclusive Research into Curriculum Learning Education (CIRCLE) implementation, all schools have committed a representative to work as a CIRCLE Champion to facilitate the development of the framework in all WDC mainstream schools. The 37 CIRCLE Champions continue to actively engage in collaborative planning within local learning community groups to enhance the integration of inclusive practices through planning, joint working and the sharing of good practice. This year the emphasis on parental engagement further strengthens the progression of the framework by ensuring that parents are informed, empowered, and actively involved in processes, reinforcing the school-home partnership critical for pupil success. The sustained commitment of all stakeholders is key to realising the long-term aims and impact of CIRCLE on creating fully inclusive educational environments.
- The implementation of Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, Transactional Supports (SCERTS) in five out of our seven specialist settings has ensured consistent approaches to using the SCERTS framework with parents/carers at review points for their children. Within each of the 5 specialist settings 'SCERTS Brew & Blether' sessions have been effective in supporting parental engagement and understanding of SCERTS. Feedback from all 'SCERTS Brew & Blether' sessions has been very positive with all attendees in agreement that the sessions have positively impacted on their understanding of the SCERTS framework in supporting their child. Parental feedback highlighted the positive impact SCERTS has had on their children's well-being, academic progress, social skills, and overall confidence whilst enhancing effective home schools collaboration .
- Approaches are being undertaken to support our care experienced children and young people through tracking of attendance and attainment data with targeted interventions to address gaps. Through the CSS bid process, an acting principal teacher and class teacher are providing enhanced support to 23 care experienced young people across 9 primary and 2 secondary schools. Care Connections, a partnership approach to support with Y-Sort-it, are providing additional support to 12 pupils across 9 schools and CSS, Care Connections and the Senior Phase team are working in partnership to coordinate provision and improve outcomes with a focus on improving engagement, attainment and destinations. The Keeping the Promise Award is being rolled out to Early Learning and Childcare Centres (ELCC's) and school establishments via a Train the Trainer model with the aim of all teaching staff having completed it over the next 2 years. Most ELLC leads, primary and secondary leads have engaged in the Train the Trainer sessions, 4 primary and 4 ELLC's trainers have received I Promise certificates and 1 secondary school has gained the We Promise Award at establishment level. Teaching staff will be supported in developing their knowledge of the key priorities of The Promise in education and their duty as corporate parents. It promotes the consistent use of non-stigmatising language around care and an understanding of how educators can work together to improve outcomes for care experienced young people.

**4.8** The Children's Rights Officer has continued to develop Council wide approaches to ensuring the Rights of the Child are understood and upheld. The Rights Respecting Schools Programme continues to be implemented across our service. It is anticipated all of our schools will have achieved the Bronze level of award by March 2025, with many having progressed to achieving or progressing towards Silver.

We have a fully established network of Children's Rights Ambassadors in all establishments and curriculum resources have been prepared for use which can be tailored for appropriateness.

The Rights Advisory Board is now operational. The board has met with a member from the Planning and Building Standards department of WDC and has plans to meet with the Food and Nutrition Coordinator. This is an evolving group and will be a source of views from children and young people for council services. The Board is also undertaking a raising awareness campaign for children's rights and the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC), starting with creating an information short film.

The Children's Rights Officer is continuing to support professional learning and recently trained this year's Newly Qualified Teachers. 92% of participants rated training as successful in improving their knowledge and feeling more confident in engaging with rights-based practices.

In collaboration with the Citizens Advice Bureau and Glasgow Caledonian University a programme of learning for secondary school pupils around the theme of Poverty Anti-stigma is being developed. This pilot project will be running from January 2025 until May 2025. There will be 20 young people participating and their views and classwork will directly influence the shape of the contents of the lesson pack.

In liaison with WDC Active Schools, the Children's Rights Officer will be enhancing the engagement opportunities of children in relation to Whole Family Wellbeing - Family Fun programme on offer in the WD for Family Hubs. This will involve seeking the views of children from primary schools to help design the programme and evaluate it. Modern Apprentices involved in this project will also gain experience in leading engagement opportunities in the future and the importance of respecting the right of children's views.

**4.9** Attendance at school remains a priority for all establishments. Data is monitored closely and focuses on key cohorts of pupils each month. This allows for the identification of trends and areas of need. 5 primary schools are collaborating with Education Scotland on a Quality Improvement Project. The key focus is Primary School attendance and it is anticipated this will provide valuable learning and sharing of experiences to help develop practice. Our detailed analysis demonstrates improvement in all aspects measured compared to the same period last year. It is anticipated we will engage with a local and more widespread behaviour change campaign in the coming

months, focussing on Every Child, Every Classroom, Every Future. (App. 1 Attendance Monitoring Overview Jan'25)

## **5. People Implications**

- 5.1** There are no people implications as a direct result of this report. However, it should be noted that in line with the recommendations in the ASN Review we must ensure we have a well-trained, high-quality workforce who are equipped to support the range of needs and rights of our children and young people.

## **6. Financial and Procurement Implications**

- 6.1** The projected additional funding required for the learning estate expansion has been approved and planned for in current and future budgets.

## **7. Risk Analysis**

- 7.1** If the Council is unable to ensure appropriate support to children and young people, we will not be meeting their needs under the terms of the Children and Young People Act 2014 (Equalities Act 2010).
- 7.2** If the Council is unable to ensure appropriate support for all children, young people and staff this could result in reputational damage.

## **8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

- 8.1** As noted in the previously produced Equalities Impact Assessment, the ASN strategy and subsequent supports and guidance developed will enhance the quality of the service provided to all children, young people and staff and therefore can be seen to have a positive impact in terms of the equalities.

## **9. Consultation**

- 9.1** Legal Services and the Section 95 Officer have been consulted in relation to the content of this report.

## **10. Strategic Assessment**

- 10.1** This report reflects the Council's aspiration to reduce inequalities for the people of West Dunbartonshire.

**Laura Mason**  
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**Wards Affected:** All Wards

**Appendices:** App. 1 Attendance Monitoring Overview Jan'25

