Children's Services

**Service Overview**

All Children's Services indicators fall under the remit of Education & Children's Services. An integrated service, it provides a wide range of services including schools, nurseries, early intervention and targeted support for children and families, child protection as well as cultural services, sport and leisure and community learning and development (the latter three areas have specific indicators for performance under the “Culture and Leisure Services” heading.

The main objectives of the service are:

* To improve learning
* To ensure an inclusive culture
* To support the development of sustainable Communities
* To encourage a culture of continuous improvement that ensures that our service is high quality, efficient and responsive to people's needs

The Education and Children’s Service is the largest of Aberdeenshire Council’s services, and accounts for 56.1% of the total spend of the Council’s budget— the total Council budget being £538,838,000 in 2014/15. The service is responsible for 17 secondary, 150 primary and 4 special schools – which include nursery, primary and secondary stages, as well as 83 nurseries. We also provide a range of services for children and families through family centres, residential children’s homes, family placements and one to one support.

You can find out more about all our education services by visiting the [council's website](http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-us/service-structure/education-%26-childrens-services).
You can find out more about our social work services for children by visiting the [council's website](http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/children-and-families/children).

**Highlights for 2014/15**

**School Attainment**

Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy showed an improvement compared with the previous year, with more young people achieving awards in Literacy and Numeracy at both SCQF Levels 4 and 5. The Aberdeenshire figure in 2015 now exceeds its Virtual Comparator by a notable margin at both Level 4 and Level 5. The % pupils achieving 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 5 improved by 1% in 2014/15 and the % achieving 3 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher Level) improved by 5%. However, as highlighted by LGBF Indicator CHN5, there was only a marginal improvement in the 5 attaining 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 by the end of S6, and further improvement is required here.

**Positive Destinations**

There was a notable improvement in the % of school leavers securing a positive post school destination, increasing by 1.9% to 93.7% of leavers, ranked 4th in Scotland in LGBF.

**School Attendance**

Supporting high levels of attainment and positive outcomes is the ongoing high levels of attendance of children and young people at schools in Aberdeenshire. For academic session 2014/15, this shows that attendance at schools across Aberdeenshire at 95%, the same as for 2013/14 and higher than the national figures of 94%

**Awards**

* Pupils from Alford Primary School won a £150,000 energy makeover for their school after they won the Generation Green Energy Performance final held in London in June 2014. The group of fourteen P7 pupils participated in this competition, performing their winning dance on a specially-commissioned dance floor which generated electricity by capturing the energy made by their footsteps using innovative *Pavegen* technology. Prior to the final in London, the pupils had to design their own eco-house before coming up with their dance routine and team name - ‘The Alford Primary Eco Boogie Team’. Diversity dance stars Perri and Jordan, were on hand to help judge the competition as well as performing for the competitors.
* In Autumn 2014, the council’s catering service was awarded a Bronze Food for Life Catering Mark from the Soil Association in 2014 in recognition of the fresh and healthy food it provides. The Food for Life Catering Mark offers a guarantee that fresh food is always on the menu, demonstrating that the food served meets high standards of traceability, freshness and provenance. It requires at least 75% of dishes on the menu to be prepared free from any unprocessed ingredients.
* Two primary school teachers were awarded Natural Teaching awards by the General Teaching Council for Scotland recognising their approach to outdoor learning.

**Youth Commissioners *#Bullying* Project**

The Youth Commissioners # Bullying project successful engaged learners, parents, carers, stakeholders and the wider community in developing a service wide policy on promoting positive attitudes in relation to tackling all types of bullying. This policy development was led exclusively by 24 Youth Commissioners aged 16 to 24, representing communities across Aberdeenshire. A clear emphasis was placed on engaging with all stakeholders, including those groups who may not have participated previously in policy development. The written guidance has improved the quality of support available for staff and roles and responsibilities are now fully described. The culture for considering service users’ views has improved as a result of the project.

The development of a Toolkit for Young Carers was commissioned in response to the views of children and young people with caring roles. Young carers led the development of the Toolkit and involved partners in its content, design and production. The toolkit has improved the processes in place in support Young Carers and has increased awareness of their role. All schools understand the need to comply with the guidance contained in the kit.

**Safeguarding Children and Young people**

A number of improvement activities were undertaken to keep children safe through enhancing assessment processes and through developing strategies to minimise harm and to aid recovery:

* Parental assessment materials have been reviewed and revised to standardize processes and improve consistency and quality of practice.
* Procedures underlying Child Protection decision making were updated and cascaded to teams to improve consistency and quality of practice.
* Resources and an Aberdeenshire wide rota were developed and implemented to ensure Joint Investigative Interviewing involving trained staff can take place when required.
* Child Protection guidance materials and procedural formats were reviewed and updated so that all relevant materials available to staff via Arcadia is available and up to date, ensuring standardisation of processes and improved consistency and quality of practice.

**Corporate Parenting Champions**

In December 2014, the Corporate Parenting Champions Board was launched at an event at Pittodrie stadium. The Board brings together young people and their supporters, senior officers, elected members, NHS Grampian, Police and voluntary sector as equals to discuss and make decisions on an agenda set by the young people themselves. The two elected members have a lead role as Corporate Parenting Champions which involves ensuring that the council acts upon its corporate parenting duties to enable young people to be fully supported to reach their full potential.

**Satisfaction Ratings**

Although LGBF Indicator CHN10 indicates a fall in adults expressing satisfaction with local schools from 84% to 70%, Aberdeenshire’ s own reputation tracker, which is based on a much bigger sample size, indicates an improvement in overall satisfaction ratings (in 2014/15, compared with data available for 2013/14), with on average, 93% of respondents indicating that they were either “very” or “quite” satisfied with local schools.

You can view performance for 2014/15 by [clicking here](http://www.covalentcpm.com/CovalentWebModule/CovalentWidget?c=424&id=3099)

**What are we doing to improve?**

We are committed to using a range of self evaluative information to inform and drive our plans for improvement. We closely monitor our performance using a range of performance measures and plan and implement interventions where performance is below expectations. We regularly evaluate the quality of all aspects of our work against recognised quality frameworks, and take active steps to address performance issues identified through our own, or via external evaluations. These processes underlie the strategic planning for the improvement activities identified within our Service and Business plans. As a result of our self-evaluation using this range of evidence, include the LGBF performance measures, we have identified the following set of improvement priorities which will inform our improvement activities during 2015/16 and beyond:

1. Improve learning and teaching and the quality of the curriculum in our schools, early years and other learning establishment
2. Improve our performance and raise levels of attainment and achievement
3. Provide more flexible early years and childcare services equitably across Aberdeenshire
4. Further develop effective integrated working to ensure that children and families receive the support they need, when they need it, and as far as possible, within their local communities
5. Ensure that our learning estate is maintained and developed in order to support and facilitate our strategic objectives
6. Ensure that our business processes and procedures are effective and efficient and deliver value for money
7. Fully develop leadership capacity at all levels across the service. Invest in learning and development of our staff to build capacity and improve leadership
8. Support economic development by working with communities and by ensuring that young people are ready and able to take up positive and productive post-school destinations

Although all of the above priorities represent important drivers of our improvement activity, priorities 2, 3 and 6 are particularly relevant to addressing the performance issues highlighted by the Children’s Services LGBF performance measures for 2014/15.

Further details on our planned improvement actions can be found by [clicking here](http://www.covalentcpm.com/CovalentWebModule/Dashboard?c=424&i=4538614).