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# NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

4 June 2024

## Cabinet (Education)

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**Title:** Educational Achievement of Care Experienced Learners in North Ayrshire in 2023

**Purpose:** To update Cabinet on: (i) Curriculum for Excellence Broad General Education (BGE) attainment levels of care experienced learners in 2022; (ii) Senior Phase attainment of care experienced school leavers in 2023; (iii) post-school participation of care experienced learners

**Recommendation:** That Cabinet:

- a) Notes the content of the report, including the progress being made by care experienced learners, specifically in literacy and numeracy.
- b) Notes the achievements of care experienced school leavers in SQA examinations in 2023.
- c) Notes the progress in closing the attainment gap between all learners and care experienced learners.
- d) Notes the positive progress in post-school participation of care experienced school leavers

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## 1. Executive Summary

1.1 North Ayrshire Council has high expectations for all learners and is committed to improving educational outcomes for all children and young people. Two of the current five strategic priorities for the Education Directorate are directly linked to raising attainment:

- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people

1.2 The Scottish Government has released new leavers' data for session 2022/23 through the benchmarking tool for the senior phase: 'Insight'. Insight provides schools with a school level statistical summary of attainment. It anonymises data for individual learners or groups of learners which prevents them from being identified.

There is a sustained improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy, with North-Ayrshire's Care Experienced learners performing better than both national and South West collaborative care experienced learners (Appendix 3).

Our Care Experienced learners are among our most disadvantaged learners, whilst there remains a gap between them and our non-care experienced learners, we can see a narrowing of the gap in Primary school. (Appendix 2).

- 1.3 There continues to be a positive trend in average total tariff score over the last 6 years. The proportion of care experienced learners entering a positive destination has been above the national figure for the last 6 years.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Care experienced young people are categorised for the purposes of our management information system SEEMIS as: Looked After at Home, Looked After Away from Home and Previously Looked After. The total number of Care experienced young people in North Ayrshire at the annual census date in September each year is shown in the charts in Appendix 1. In 2023 there were 814 care experienced young people enrolled in North Ayrshire schools, with 57 leavers in 2023.

### **2.2 National Benchmarking Measures**

One of the functions of Insight is to provide an analysis of four national benchmarking measures showing the performance of pupils at the point of exit from school. This provides a consistent benchmark and emphasises that attainment and achievement in S4 to S6 are cumulative. These measures are connected and should be looked at together when considering the performance of a school or local authority and the next steps to be taken in seeking further improvements.

- 2.3 The four National Benchmarking Measures are:

- **Improving attainment in literacy and numeracy**

Our aim is for all our school leavers to be highly literate and numerate, increasing their life chances greatly.

Curriculum for Excellence stresses the responsibility of all teachers for developing literacy and numeracy skills. This reflects the importance placed on these crucial skills which unlock learning in all other areas of the curriculum and are vital for success in learning, life and work in the modern world and workplace.

- **Improving attainment for all**

The overall aim for this measure, along with tackling disadvantage, is to have our pupils attain as highly as possible 'across the board'.

Attainment is an individual's passport to personal, social, cultural and economic opportunities. Raising attainment means improving life chances. This does not mean just focusing on exam results, but instead looking at attainment in its widest sense. It is this rich attainment which enables all of our children and young people to make good progress and develop the skills, ambition, and know-how they need to improve life chances.

- **Tackling disadvantage by improving the attainment of lower attainers relative to higher attainers**

The overall aim for this measure, together with improving attainment for all, is to have our pupils attain as highly as possible 'across the board'.

This measure is aimed at reducing the gap in attainment associated with the incidence of higher and lower deprivation and has the same aspirations for our learners as improving attainment for all.

- **Increasing post-school participation**

Considering the destinations of our leavers is a vital part of ensuring that Curriculum for Excellence is a success in our schools. The measure focuses on initial destinations and is linked with Skills Development Scotland's information.

## 2.4 This report focuses on the following key measures:

1. Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy across the Broad General Education for care experienced learners for 2023.
2. Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy and overall attainment in all qualifications at Senior Phase level for care experienced school leavers in 2023.
3. Average Total Tariff Score of school leavers.
4. Post-school participation of care experienced school leavers for 2022.

## 2.5 **Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy in Broad General Education for care experienced learners** (These highlights are supported by charts in Appendix 2)

The charts at Appendix 2 indicate that the attainment of care experienced learners at BGE stages P1, P4 and P7. At all stages, achievement of Literacy and Numeracy levels have increased for care experienced learners from 2021 figures. The gap between the attainment of all learners and care experienced learners remains, however it is closing, most significantly in levels of literacy.

## 2.6 **Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy and overall attainment in all qualifications at Senior Phase level for care experienced school leavers** (These highlights are supported by charts in Appendices 3-5)

2.6.1 It should be noted that the cohort size for care experienced school leavers varies from year to year and is generally around 50 young people. Therefore, care must be taken when analysing variations in performance for this group. For example, one care experienced learner attaining/not attaining a specific qualification may account for more than 2 percentage points of a difference in the overall attainment measures for care experienced learners (whereas in the general population, one pupil would make less than 0.07 percentage points of a difference in the same attainment measure).

2.6.2 Performance in Literacy and Numeracy at SCQF levels 4 and 5 is consistently lower for care experienced leavers than for the overall school leaver cohort in North Ayrshire. However, North Ayrshire care experienced school leavers consistently perform better than their counterparts nationally and in the SWEIC authorities (see Appendix 3).

- 2.6.3 For Level 4 Literacy (79%) and Numeracy (82.5%) in 2023, care experienced leavers in North Ayrshire are above both the regional and the national performance. Attainment in Level 4 numeracy is at its highest level since 2014. For Level 5 Literacy (50.9%) and Numeracy (36.8%) in 2023, again North Ayrshire care experienced leavers are above both the regional and national performance.
- 2.6.4 In 2023, 87% of North Ayrshire's care experienced leavers attained at least 1 qualification at SCQF Level 4 or better, this is slightly lower than 2022. For Level 5, 61% of care experienced leavers achieved at least 1 qualification again slightly lower than the previous year. The proportion of care experienced school leavers achieving at least 1 Level 6 award was 32%. Whilst some of these results seem disappointing it may be explained by the small cohort, and leavers attainment still remains well above the national measure.
- 2.6.5 The average total tariff score achieved continues to be above the National performance. At 411, the average total tariff score for North Ayrshire's care experienced school leavers is the third best performance to date (excluding the two previous alternative certification model years). Both locally and nationally there remains a gap between the attainment of care experienced learners and those who are not care-experienced. In North Ayrshire, the gap continues to close, with this year being the smallest gap in the last 8 years. This is encouraging news but there remains significant work to be done to raise attainment for all and to continue to close the gap.

## 2.7 **Post-school participation of care experienced school leavers** (These highlights are supported by charts in Appendix 6)

The overall percentage of North Ayrshire care experienced school leavers entering a positive destination continues to be above the national performance. In 2023, the number of care experienced school leavers in a positive destination is 94%, with the gap between care experienced leavers and all leavers being at 2.6%. The percentage of leavers in positive destinations continues in an upward trend since 2015.

## 2.8 **Proposed Improvement Actions**

The Education service continues to prioritise on improving outcomes for all learners including our most disadvantaged. Attainment of Care Experienced learners is specifically referenced within the education service plan. Quality Improvement visits will include a focus on the attainment and achievement of this group of learners to ensure consistency of delivery of interventions with a positive impact. During this coming session all staff will be provided with the opportunity to improve their knowledge of the role of education in keeping The Promise. Mindful that education alone cannot improve outcomes for care experienced children and young people, we will continue to collaborate with both local and external partners to provide care experienced children and young people with positive learning experiences.

### **3. Proposals**

3.1 It is proposed that Cabinet:

- a) Notes the content of the report, including the progress being made by learners, specifically in literacy and numeracy; and
- b) Notes the achievements of school leavers in SQA examinations in 2023.
- c) Notes the progress in closing the attainment gap between all learners and care experienced learners.
- d) Notes the positive progress in post-school participation of care experienced school leavers.

### **4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty**

#### **Financial**

4.1 None.

#### **Human Resources**

4.2 None.

#### **Legal**

4.3 None.

#### **Equality/Socio-economic**

4.4 Tackling inequality is a key aspect of this report. The Council is committed to a continued focussed approach to improve outcomes for care experienced leavers.

#### **Climate Change and Carbon**

4.5 None.

#### **Key Priorities**

4.6 NAC Council Plan 2023-28: Wellbeing: To transition to a wellbeing economy, delivering prosperity, wellbeing and resilience for local people:

- Improving educational attainment and achievement and closing the attainment gap
- Developing the Young Workforce and ensuring positive destinations for school leavers

This work relates to the following priorities in the Education Service Plan 2023-26:

- Improvement in attainment and achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.

## **Community Wealth Building**

4.7 The Council will continue to consider the pillars of community wealth building in any future developments in this area.

### **5. Consultation**

5.1 None specifically related to this report.

Andrew McClelland  
Head of Service (Education)

For further information please contact **Eilidh James, Quality Improvement Officer**, on **01294 324443**.

### **Background Papers**

None.