

Cùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Foghlam agus Sgilean
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Jenny Gilruth MSP



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Dear Convener

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee at your session on the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Beyond that, I have included some further detail on some points touched on during the Committee session, which I trust members will find useful.

Examples of mental health interventions you are aware of being provided in schools, as a direct result of PEF.

97% of schools receive PEF, with over £130million each year empowering headteachers across Scotland to take the best approaches to improve the attainment and wellbeing of the children in their schools.

Committee members will be interested in our forthcoming report on our PEF sampling exercise, which involved over 120 schools across all 32 Local Authorities. This work has gathered first-hand evidence on the impact and use of PEF in schools, with some clear key themes emerging in relation to investment in learning and teaching, leadership, and families and communities. The PEF sampling report will be published in late Spring and the Committee will be given advance notice of publication. Two examples from recent school visits I have attended include:

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1. St Rose of Lima Primary School, in Glasgow, is using some of their PEF to fund the CLEAR programme, delivered by The Spark. The programme is delivered through a series of workshops for staff and pupils. Each workshop focuses on different skills such as communication, listening and empathy, with the goal of fostering stronger relationships and emotional understanding within the school community.
2. Cowie Primary School, in Stirling, has adopted 'high structure, high nurture' strategies and restorative practices to manage relationships and conflict. The school also focused on creating safe spaces, with staff explaining new routines, boundaries and expectations to students, and providing support resources for regulation and re-engagement. This work has been supported by in-depth professional learning for staff on nurture and child brain development.

CAMHS

The extent to which these interventions are being used to bridge the gap between a CAMHS referral and a child/young person receiving their first CAMHS appointment.

The current waiting times for CAMHS and the criteria used to decide who should receive CAMHS support.

There have been transformational improvements in CAMHS waiting lists in the last year. The waiting list is now at its lowest point since 2013 and as I highlighted in evidence, the national performance against the 18-week CAMHS standard has been met, with 90.6% of children and young people starting treatment within 18 weeks of referral. 1 in 2 children and young people referred to CAMHS now start treatment within 4 weeks, compared to 12 weeks pre-pandemic. Public Health Scotland publish these statistics on a quarterly basis and are available on their website at the following link - [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\) waiting times - Quarter ending December 2024 - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\) waiting times - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)

The Scottish Government published the [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\) Service Specification](#) in February 2020 and this outlines provisions young people and their families can expect from the NHS. The specification contains the National Referral criteria and sets out that all children and families should receive support and services that are appropriate to their needs. For many children and young people, such support is likely to be community based, and should be easily and quickly accessible.

We continue to work with NHS Boards to closely monitoring the CAMHS Specification's implementation, to improve services and support for children and young people and their families.

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Community mental health and wellbeing services for children and young people

While not all children and young people require support from specialist services, like CAMHS, and CAMHS is a health intervention, rather than an education intervention, the specification also ensures that children, young people and their families will be able to access additional support which targets emotional distress through Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Supports and Services. These community services are often more appropriate and suitable for children and young people, ensure support is provided in their local community. Community supports and services should work closely with CAMHS and relevant health and social care partners, children's services and educational establishments to ensure that there are clear and streamlined pathways to support where that is more appropriately delivered by these services.

In order to support the delivery and development of community services, we have provided local authorities with over £65 million since 2020 to fund community mental health and wellbeing supports and services for children, young people and their families. This investment will continue with the baselining of this £15 million per annum funding into the local government finance settlement from 2025-26.

These community-based supports and services are focused on prevention and early intervention, and more than 300 have been put in place across the country. Local authorities have reported that nearly 83,000 people used the supports and services between July 2023 and March 2024.

Additionally, we also continue to provide local authorities with £16 million per annum to support counselling services in secondary schools. These services are available to children in Scotland aged ten years and over.

Temporary Contracts Funded by PEF

The Committee raised a point about the balance of temporary and permanent contracts funded via PEF.

Due to the nature of how PEF can be used, it is not always possible or meaningful to assign a single source of funding to a teaching post or teacher. The reasons for this are detailed in the [Summary statistics for Schools in Scotland 2024 Background Notes](#). The number of teaching posts estimated as funded by PEF in 2024 was 531 FTE.

All that being said, the number of teachers in a PEF funded post employed on a temporary basis with the authority in 2024 was estimated by local authorities to be 33%. We set out PEF allocations over four years to provide certainty and to encourage schools and local authorities to take multi-year decisions and provide permanent contracts where they are able to do so.

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Care Experienced Children and Young People – Young Carers

The Committee raised the issue of care experienced young people and young carers not being identified in schools.

Under the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004, education authorities have duties to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils. This includes care experienced children and also children and young people with caring responsibilities. Education authorities are supported in implementing their duties under the 2004 Act through the [statutory code of practice](#) on additional support for learning.

We are keen to work with colleagues in local government through the Education and Childcare Assurance Board to understand any barriers to identifying care experienced children and young carers with a view to improving their experiences where required.

SCQF and National Qualifications

With regard to the different measures used to assess progress nationally, and by local authorities when setting stretch aims, I offer the following clarification.

When the National Improvement Framework measures were developed, they matched the SG Official Statistics on school leaver attainment, which were based on SQA National Qualifications only.

More recently, the approach to setting local stretch aims was developed in collaboration with ADES, whose preference was for them to include “All SCQF” achievement on the basis that it correlates with what LAs and schools typically use through Insight and with existing local tracking and monitoring processes. The “All SCQF” measure also captures the breadth of young people’s achievements as they undertake a range of pathways through school. When developing the stretch aims approach, we did not want to introduce a requirement for local aims that might have undermined work to develop a broader curricular offer in schools.

The Scottish Government is committed to adding the “All SCQF” measure to the NIF key measures, and to aligning this with the measures used by the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (currently reported at 5+ awards at SCQF Level 5 and 6). We are currently in further discussions with COSLA, ADES and the Improvement Service about this.

Attendance

Mr Greer advised that good work had been done by the Children’s Commissioner for England on attendance and it was agreed that this would be raised with the Commissioner for Scotland. An update will be provided directly to Mr Greer on this point.

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PEF being used to compensate for cuts to other services

Across the country we trust Scotland's headteachers to use this extra funding to support their pupils - whether through extra support staff, family link workers or through support for mental health, for example.

Schools run a range of projects using PEF and can work in partnership with local services where they see fit. We know headteachers have welcomed the flexibility of PEF in schools and because of investments like this we now have, for literacy in primary schools, the lowest poverty-related attainment gap on record in Scotland.

Meaningful engagement with COSLA and Councils ahead of the Scottish Budget 2025-26 was instrumental in the delivery of a record funding Settlement for local government including real terms protection to General Revenue Grant, additional funding to increase teacher numbers, additional funding for ASL and maintaining £130m for Pupil Equity Funding.

We are also very clear that local authorities should not be 'top slicing' PEF monies - this is set out in national guidance. Despite the financial challenges facing the public sector, Scottish Government and Local Government have prioritised education services and official national statistics indicate that Local Authority expenditure on Education increased by 15 per cent in real terms between 2013-14 and the most recently published expenditure statistics relating to 2023-24.

I trust this further update is useful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

JENNY GILRUTH
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

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