REPORT TO: **EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S AND LEISURE SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 20 FEBRUARY 2024**

SUBJECT: **BEHAVIOUR IN MORAY SCHOOLS**

BY: **DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 In response to the request of the Committee on November 2023, to advise Committee of escalating behaviours in schools and actions to support staff, pupils and the wider school community as well as ongoing work with partners.

1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (D) (1) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to all the functions of the Council as an Education Authority.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that Committee:

(i) acknowledges National work ongoing around increased disruptive behaviour across schools and society;
(ii) acknowledges and endorses the local approach as set out in Appendix 1; and
(iii) agrees that this work will be led in a multi-agency approach with a short, medium to long term action plan and refers the matter to the Community Planning Partnership Board for consideration.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 At the ECLS committee on November 2023, during consideration and discussion of the Performance report (Education Resources and Commmunities), the Committee asked for a report to be prepared for next committee with information on how behavioural issues and incidents of violence and aggression are being addressed to deliver outcomes for pupils. This report responds to that request.

3.2 The Scottish Government commissioned the National Centre for Social Research to conduct the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR). The latest report (November 2023) indicates that the majority of pupils are still well behaved, however low level and more serious disruptive behaviours have

increased in Scottish schools, including physical violence and aggression, since the report in 2016. This would be mirrored in Moray.

3.2   The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills committed to convening a summit on relationships and behaviour in schools, in order to establish a robust evidence base, informed by practitioners, on this issue of relationships and behaviour policy in schools. A number of Councils, schools and organisations were involved in this however Moray was not represented. The summit comprised of a series of themed events between June and November 2023 to enable relationships and behaviour policy to be carefully explored with partners. The summit focussed on the theme of relationships and behaviours in schools. The aims of the summit were: to identify the challenges and barriers to creating a safe and consistent environment in schools; and to identify practical solutions necessary to tackle these, at a school, local and national level.

3.3   Emerging work around this has been a request from the Cabinet Secretary of Education Scotland that during inspection, His Majesty's inspectorate will gather evidence about relationships and behaviour. As a result the authority received a guidance note in January 2024 regarding behaviour in schools and settings. This approach will allow Education Scotland to learn from and deepen their understanding of the challenges faced by schools and settings in dealing with this issue. In addition, it will recognise across Scotland the successes in implementing policies and guidance to support positive relationships and behaviour.

3.4   Post Covid there has been an increase in incidents of challenging behaviour in Moray particularly in secondary schools. During a planned Head Teacher (HT) meeting with Education senior officers in Autumn 2023, incidents of challenging behaviour from secondary school aged young people both in school and in communities were reported by HTs as increasing in number and seriousness. This culminated in serious incidents at Elgin High School and Buckie High School which triggered emergency meetings of the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) Leadership Group to consider a partnership response. Meetings were held in December 2023 and January 2024.

3.5   Alongside this locally we are seeing an increase in Violence and Aggression reporting across schools. However, this requires careful analysis and interpretation. The increase could be as a result of a move to an electronic format for the Violence and Aggression form and also encouragement from the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT) to complete for every incident. In addition to this, there has been a lot of interest from media outlets of late due to the national interest and publications.

3.6   In addition to this, local reporting would require to be further analysed to determine whether the incidents relate to learners with additional support needs or not. Currently there is a lack of capacity within the service to undertake this additional work due to ongoing reviews and operational demands.

3.7   There has been a significant increase in relation to concerning behaviour incidents within schools and in communities. The young people involved are predominantly of secondary school age and although there are less than 10%

involved from each school, the disruption is having a wide impact on other young people and school staff. From initial trigger points, behaviour in school escalated as a few young people absent themselves from classes, are disruptive in and around school and encourage their peers to participate a become disruptive. There have been a number of common features in schools, such as the use of substances or attending school under the influence of substances. Young people present at school and then refuse to attend classes or to leave school when behaviours are inappropriate and affect the safety of others. Exclusions in schools have increased, including care experienced children and young people, where the target for local authorities is to reduce them to zero. Moray is on track to exceed the number of exclusions in secondary next year which will impact on our Stretch Aim as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) priority. A decision to exclude is not taken lightly and hinges on whether or not the school can ensure the safety of a young person or the wider school. Typical behaviours exhibited in secondary schools from a minority of pupils are:

- Disengagement with learning in the classroom – often resulting in removal or leaving the room.
- Leaving the classroom without permission – often to wander the corridors, go missing, leave the school premises, encourage others to join them.
- Failure to follow instructions of classroom teacher, PT subject / guidance and member of the Senior Leadership Team
- Poor social interaction with peers
- Difficulty in regulating emotions (becomes heightened, agitated, aggressive, violent)
- Staff or students subject to verbal abuse and or threatening, aggressive, violent behaviour.
- Poor attendance
- Vandalism
- Substance misuse
- Offending in the community
- Absconding from home
- Refuses to engage with supports / interventions in place.
- Repeated alternative to exclusion (in school) or Fixed-Term Exclusions
- Failure to adhere to the conditions of the alternative to exclusion or Fixed Term Exclusions (returning to school, re-entering the building, refusing to leave)

3.8 Parent/carer support and engagement with schools is variable where some fully engage and are working with the school to lack of support for what the school is trying to put in place. This is particularly the case where young people are excluded and parents/carers choose not to attend readmission meetings. Schools are also finding that they are having to deal with negative behaviours displayed by parents towards school staff including when young people are present. This lack of engagement and support for the school impacts negatively on the attitudes of some young people and their respect for school or other staff.

3.9 Attendance and exclusions in schools are also a concern. These are key targets for Scottish Government and as part of the Council's National

Improvement Framework (NIF) priorities set stretch aims must be set for attendance and exclusion which is scrutinised closely by the SAC team. Statistics to date (mid January 2024) around attendance and exclusion are:

Attendance				
Sector	National 22/23 %	Moray 22/23 %	Moray Stretch Aim 23/24 %	Moray Jan 2024 %
Primary	92.2	92.7	92.5-93.5	93.03
Secondary	87.7	88.9	88-90%	88.5

Exclusion (per 1,000 pupils)				
Sector	National 22/23 %	Moray 22/23 %	Moray Stretch Aim 23/24 %	Moray Jan 2024 %
Primary	16.6	2.9	n/a	3
Secondary	16.6	42.1	37-42	22

3.10 There have also been issues reported in local communities involving violence between young people, social medial issues, bullying and aggressive behaviour, damage to property and disturbance to local residents. Schools are often approached to resolve these issues by parents and community members even though the occurrence is outside of school time. In addition issues out in the community at the weekend often spill into school on a Monday morning. Points of concern around the impact of behaviours are:

- Risk of physical harm from violent behaviour (young people and staff)
- Impact on the mental health and wellbeing of staff and young people
- Negative impact on learning and teaching which impacts on the attainment of all
- Increased pupil absence, missed learning which impacts on attainment
- Increased school staff absence and increased demand for Occupational Health referrals
- Reduced leadership capacity from call upon resources and absenteeism, and consequent negative impact on recruitment
- Detrimental impact on education outcomes for all learners
- Developing and ongoing pattern of behaviour becomes the norm
- Capacity within partnership to support schools
- Duplication of the work of partner agencies and groups - need to have focus of responsibility and oversight of actions vested in single partnership group
- Long term impact on life outcomes for those who become marginalised
- Wider issues in families and communities escalate
- Concern around the possibility of the issue becoming larger with more young people engaging in such behaviour

3.11 Although the behaviours and concerns raised are predominantly across secondary schools, there is an emerging trend in primary also and not only in the upper stages. Similarly, nursery settings report an increase in poor behaviours of a small number of young children. Senior leaders and staff

across schools and settings are proactive in implementing a number of interventions using Devolved School Management (DSM) budgets as well as Pupil Equity Funding (PEF – although this is targeted to support the poverty related attainment gap). They are supported by partner agencies although as previously stated, capacity or thresholds for intervention can be an issue. In addition, Strategic Equity Funding (SEF) is being used across Moray to target specific areas in order to support projects which will provide additional support for children and young people eg Primary to secondary transition, alternative curriculum packages, youth work, inclusion and wellbeing support and so on.

3.12 Interventions across schools include:
- Nurturing ethos and culture
- Promotion of inclusive classrooms
- Relational policies with approaches in place to promote
- Differentiated work and involvement of Principal Teacher (PT) Support for Learning (SFL) or Additional Support Needs (ASN)
- Alternative curriculum offers and packages including use of Outfit Moray, Revolution for Good, The Paddock etc
- Small group teaching with appropriate support
- Adapted timetables (soft start, reduced number of lessons, early finish etc)
- Use of focus sheets (smart targets reviewed and monitored eg attendance, behaviour, effort etc)
- Out of class cards, alternative in school provision
- Support with health diagnosis
- Targeted parental engagement
- Use of Inclusion workers, Moray Social, Emotional and Behavioural Needs (SEBN), Pinefield Parc, Youth Work, Equity Teacher etc
- Alternative to exclusion and ongoing review and monitoring
- Fixed term exclusion – a last resort
- Engagement with external agencies including Social Work, Moray Youth Justice, Aberlour Youth Point/Zone, Police Scotland, NHS etc

3.13 The service is fully aware that for some children and young people, behaviours can be as a result of their additional support need and in **Appendix 1** there is a clear plan to further support staff by offering training and development to supplement existing knowledge and to share strategies for supporting learners further.

3.14 This is currently being discussed at the GIRFEC Leadership Group where a HT and a Deputy Head Teacher from secondary schools provided case studies and profiles of the pupils causing concern. Committee are aware of anti-social behaviour across a number of schools post Covid, including at weekends and for a time on bus transport and that this has been a focus for locality groups working with local communities. It has become evident that there is much happening in Moray in various partnership groups to tackle this issue however there are benefits to be gained from ensuring that the governance around this is correct and work is currently being undertaken by the Chief Social Work Officer, Chief Education Officer and a partnership Police Scotland Inspector to progress this.

3.15 Any solution has to be a shared partnership approach akin to the African proverb 'It takes a village to raise a child'. This requires to be multi-agency, multi-disciplinary, and preferably a community based team to work on a preventative basis to support families, children and young people to secure more positive outcomes. This is a medium to long term objective that the GIRFEC Leadership Group (GLG) which is a children's services partnership strategic group will set out a work plan for in 2024 including accessing available funding such as the Whole Family Well-being Fund as Moray progresses with the vision of implementing family/community hubs in localities. This is work across the wider children's services partnership.

3.16 In the meantime education and other agencies will work together in the short term to support children and young people and families by:
- Sharing information on thresholds
- Police deployment of harm reduction officer to priorities
- Enhanced response and support from Police in recognition of issues
- Multi-agency actions from child's planning meetings
- Engagement with Head Teachers from Social Work colleagues
- Need for all agencies to have a joined up approach which is solution focussed
- Check-in with Locality Networks for any other issues/gaps
- Deployment of Education team to support hot spots or to provide support when major incidents

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))
This report supports the LOIP outcomes:
Building a better future for children and young people in Moray:
- A place where children and young people thrive;
- A place where they have a voice, have opportunities to learn and can get around;
- A place where they are able to reach their full potential.

Also the aims of the Corporate Plan to:
- Provide opportunities where young people can achieve the potential to be the best they can be

(b) Policy and Legal
There are no policy or legal implications arising directly from this report.

(c) Financial implications
There are no financial implications arising directly from this report although if behaviours escalate this may put a strain on the Out of Area (OOA) Budget. In addition, schools are using their DSM budgets to implement interventions and this may result in overspend.

(d) Risk Implications
The risks have been listed in para 3.10 above.

(e) Staffing Implications
There are no staffing risks arising directly from this report although the impact on staff has been included in the report as above.

(f) Property
There are no property issues arising from this report.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact
The National Improvement Framework is aimed at reducing inequalities.

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts
None.

(i) Consultations
The Head of Education Resources and Communities, Chief Social Work Officer, Quality Improvement Managers, Early Years Service Manager, Secondary Head Teachers, Head of Financial Services, Head of HR, ICT and OD, Quality Improvement Manager, Business Support Team Manager, and Caroline O'Connor, Committee Services Officer, have been consulted on this report and agree with the sections of the report relating to their areas of responsibility.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Committee is asked to review the updated information provided regarding current behaviours demonstrated by a small number of young people in schools and to acknowledge the work to date and plans moving forwards. The Committee is also asked to endorse the importance of a partnership response to these matters and to refer the report to the Community Planning Partnership Board for consideration.

Author of Report: Vivienne Cross, Head of Education
Background Papers: Behaviour in Scottish Schools 2023

Ref: SPMAN