

Part 2
Glasgow: A Comprehensive Case

Glasgow Perspective

Improving Educational Outcomes through Getting It Right for Every Child in Glasgow

MAUREEN MCKENNA

Glasgow City Council, Glasgow, Scotland, UK. Email: maureen.mckenna@glasgow.gov.uk

This article sketches the context of education in Glasgow, which is Scotland's largest local authority, serving some of the most deprived communities in Scotland and the UK. It considers the ways in which we work with our schools to raise aspirations and extend young people's horizons, and explores some of the successes and some of the challenges we have faced and continue to face in bridging the gap between school and higher education. In Scotland, higher education can be delivered through colleges as well as universities. This is an important dimension for our young people, as colleges offer a different learning experience for them and, for some, this can be a more successful learning pathway. There are also other pathways to higher education, for example through work-based learning, such as apprenticeships. Our partnerships with universities and colleges is very strong. Through this partnership there is a range of programmes which support young people across the city to learn about life in university. This is especially important for young people from deprived communities as, often, their families do not have prior experience of higher education. The means of funding and planning these programmes can be viewed as both an enabler and a barrier in certain contexts.

Glasgow City Council is the largest of Scotland's 32 local authorities. The city has a population of around 680,000 and is growing. Around 30% of Scotland's 15% most deprived data zones are in Glasgow. Nearly 28,000 school-aged children and young people in Glasgow live in the 10% most deprived postcodes in Scotland. Around 20% of our school population have English as an additional language and, as with many parts of Europe, the number of new arrivals is growing. Many of our families face significant barriers, for example, through domestic abuse, alcohol or drug addiction and the overall impact of poverty.

Against this challenging backdrop, the city has been transforming. It is no longer seen as a 'dirty, violent city' as it was many years ago. It is now a vibrant tourist

destination with a thriving cultural and arts community. Social housing has improved and continues to improve and, in the last ten years, education has become one of the key drivers to help families move out of poverty.

In March 2019, the education department in the city (known as Education Services) was inspected to evaluate how well the Council was improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The quote below from the report describes the Council's priorities for the city:

The Glasgow Council Strategic Plan 2017 to 2022¹ sets out a powerful strategic vision for the council, 'to have a world class city with a thriving, inclusive, economy where everyone can flourish and benefit from the city's success'. Glasgow City Council's vision is effectively translated into four themes and priorities which provide a strong drive for change and improvement:

- promote human rights and reduce inequalities across Glasgow;
- improve the life chances and choices for all our citizens;
- embed social justice in our policy making; and
- empower our citizens, giving them a stake, and a say in what happens in their local communities and communities of interest.

The overarching priority of Glasgow City Council, its elected members and education authority staff is focused on excellence and a persistent drive to reduce inequality across Glasgow. This aspirational agenda is focused on addressing the barriers created by child poverty. It runs through corporate and service planning, including Glasgow: A learning city, Annual Service Plan and Improvement Report 2018–2019² and importantly, Glasgow's Improvement Challenge³ to achieve improvements in learning, raising attainment and mitigate the impact of poverty on the educational outcomes of all learners. It is firmly founded in strong evidence-based practice, promoting high-quality learning and teaching in educational provision across the city.

Education Services

We have set ourselves an aspiration to be a Nurturing City. Our overarching policy of *Towards A Nurturing City* is our moral compass. It sets our direction and frames our thinking. We want our schools and nurseries to be places where all children and young people, and their families, feel that they belong and that their lives and experiences are valued and respected. And where all children and young people, and their families, feel that staff listen to their views and that, if disagreements arise, staff respond sensitively and thoughtfully and work to resolve them.

This is challenging territory for teachers, support staff and early years' practitioners. It is a rights-based approach, where the culture and ethos places children's needs at the centre of all decision-making. It also takes time – we need to be relentless

1. <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=40052&p=0>

2. <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=41724&p=0>

3. <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=23800>

in our focus and drive our key policies deeper and deeper so that all understand them and contribute positively.

Distressed Behaviours

In the last 10 years, educational outcomes for children and young people across the city have transformed. There has been an 87% reduction in exclusions. We have shared data in an open and transparent way, looking at the data in different ways in order to ask questions rather than draw conclusions. For example, we know that only 1% of all children in our schools are affected by exclusion. We know that 75% of children being excluded are excluded only once. We have continued to invest in nurture through our nurture classes and nurture groups.⁴ We have invested in professional learning on nurture and on developing whole school nurturing principles.⁵ One of our most successful professional learning initiatives has been *All Behaviour is Communication*, which is one of the six nurturing principles. Our staff, both in education and in partner agencies, will talk more now about children's distressed behaviour with a deeper understanding of the context in which these behaviours are manifesting. In this way, we are able to place children's needs at the centre of our decision-making rather than focusing on the more negative outcomes of the distressed behaviours.

Since 2008, there has been a 48.3% reduction in youth crime in the city. This shows that schools and nurseries are having a much wider impact and it gives our staff an increased sense of their own value and worth with the affirmation that we are 'doing the right thing'.

Learner Pathways

In Scotland, young people sit examinations in their fourth, fifth and sixth year of secondary schooling. Attainment in examinations in fifth year is often seen as the benchmark for entrance to higher education at either a university or a college. To become a medical doctor you would need five high quality Highers⁶ in your fifth year examinations. In Glasgow, in 2007, only 5% of the cohort achieved five or more Highers by the end of fifth year; by 2019, it was 12.0%. This figure remains below the national average of 16.6% but the rate of increase over the period for Glasgow is much better than the national one. In 2007, 28% achieved one or more Highers and by 2019 this had increased to 50%. Nationally, the figure for one or more Highers improved from 39% to 55% – so again, the rate of increase in Glasgow is notably better than the national rate.

However, it is not all about being a doctor or a lawyer – our young people do not lack ambition, but some lack the resilience, confidence and family framework to go into

4. Nurture groups evaluation and practice

5. Education Scotland: Whole school approach to nurture

6. Highers are the name of the examination – further information is available at <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/70972.html>

unfamiliar situations and be successful. So we need to consider a range of learner pathways and prepare our young people for all the transitions they may encounter in school and beyond school. If a young person achieves one Higher Qualification then they could go to college to study for a Higher National Certificate – this could lead to a Higher National Diploma which could provide them with entry into a degree course at university. It might take them a bit longer but they could achieve the same positive outcomes as those leaving school with a strong portfolio of qualifications. We know that the longer young people stay in education beyond the school-leaving date the better are their longer-term outcomes; therefore, we need to work with our children from the earliest age to give them the confidence and resilience they will need in the future.

We need to encourage our schools to develop a range of learner pathways using our strong partnerships across the city – giving our young people the confidence and resilience to be able to make the right choices at the right time. Our partnerships with colleges, employers and training providers allow us to develop a range of learner pathways to meet the needs of all our young people regardless of their background. It requires us to be creative and innovative with the curriculum on offer – we also need to be courageous with our decision-making, keeping our focus on positive outcomes for all children and young people.

Given that 60% of young people in secondary school live in the 20% most deprived postcodes of Scotland we know we are closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

This view was confirmed through our inspection report published in March 2019:⁷

Glasgow City Council is making excellent progress in improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. HM Inspectors are confident that the evidence and evaluation to date indicates the following strengths and aspects for development.

Strengths

- The very strong council-wide vision focused on reducing the impact of poverty on children, families and communities.
- The relentless drive of the Executive Director in improving the educational outcomes of children and young people living in poverty in Glasgow.
- The exceptional progress made in reducing the impact of poverty on the educational attainment and achievement of children and young people.
- Outstanding approaches to career-long professional learning and leadership, which have strengthened the skills and knowledge of staff and, as a result, improved children's and young people's attainment.
- In-built sustainability through capacity building is at the heart of the professional learning approaches undertaken across the city. Education Services have strongly promoted the importance of long-term sustainability across all aspects of their universal and targeted approaches to permanently reduce the impact of poverty on outcomes for children and young people.

7. <https://education.gov.scot/assets/contactorganisationinspectionreports/glasgowlains110319.pdf>

So Much More than Attainment

As previously noted, we know that we need to work with our children from the earliest age to give them the confidence and resilience they will need in the future. We do this by extending their experiences and giving them the opportunity to be leaders in playrooms, in classrooms, in playgrounds and in communities.

In playrooms and classrooms, we need to keep learning and teaching at the heart of our work, ensuring that children are given the chance to lead their own learning, given the language to describe their learning, and given the confidence to direct and influence their learning. Education is our business and so we must maintain a strong focus on the consistent delivery of high-quality learning and teaching.

However, we recognise that there are other drivers for improvement, such as sports. We have over 1500 young people as Sports Leaders and Sports Ambassadors in their schools. They receive accreditation, which adds to their portfolios of qualifications. As a major sporting venue for national and international competitions, we need to provide our children and young people with the chance to see first-hand major sporting events. So we enable primary school children whose families would not have the capacity to do this to attend competitions through free-ticketing with the organisers. We can do this by working with them on their ticketing strategy and keeping venues with strong audience levels. Our Sports Leaders extend their experiences through being volunteers at the events. They also volunteer as part of their awards in their communities, working closely with local sporting clubs.

Duke of Edinburgh awards are used to broaden young people's experiences who may not have had the opportunity to climb mountains or take part in expeditions camping outdoors. This award also has a volunteering element which provides other opportunities for young people to lead and contribute to their communities. Other awards are also used to give young people accreditation and build their confidence and resilience with a wide range of volunteering not just through sports.

We track data from these awards to ensure that we are targeting the right young people and that we are providing progression and not just one-off activities.

This activity is not restricted to secondary-school-aged young people but also extends to primary-school-aged children, leading a wide range of activities in their schools, such as junior road safety officers, eco committee, student council, peer to peer counselling, anti-bullying committee – the list is endless. All that matters is that the pupil voice is at the centre – growing Glasgow's citizens.

More Drivers for Improvement

We need our communities to be strong, with schools and nurseries at the centre of communities. Schools and nurseries can provide trusted spaces where vulnerable families can start their learning journey. Our staff work positively with trusted third sector partners who act as a bridge between statutory services and our most vulnerable families.

We have used the principle of 'One Good Adult' in a child's life to develop a city-wide mentoring programme that is focused on care-experienced secondary-school-aged young people. Volunteer adults from all walks of life come into our

schools to build positive relationships with young people supporting them through sharing life experiences and opening their minds to broader opportunities. We have emerging evidence that this is contributing positively to our success in raising attainment and having more school leavers go into further and higher education or employment.

There is no ‘Glasgow curriculum’ – instead, we empower our staff in schools to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of their local communities with the focus on positive outcomes not on input measures. Our head-teachers are senior officers of the Council and, as such, need to take responsibility for improvement, not just with their own school but across communities of learning. They report that they feel empowered but know that they work within a strong accountability framework.

We have invested in high quality human resources. We need to continue to invest in the well-being of our staff, ensuring that they are equipped to face the challenges of the twenty-first century. Our commitment to professional learning was highlighted in the recent inspection report as being an essential driver for improvement. We work closely with teachers’ and support staff professional associations. We negotiate agreements which care for our staff but place priority on children’s and young people’s learning. We have high expectations for the performance and behaviour of our children and young people, which means we need to have equally high expectations for the performance and behaviour of our staff.

More than anything else, we are:

- placing children at the heart of everything we do
- having a relentless focus on learning and teaching
- intolerant of anything that results in a weak outcome for children and young people.

Wider Role of Schools and Nurseries

As previously noted, our approach to reducing exclusions and raising expectations has contributed to a halving of the numbers of young people involved in youth crime. Our schools and nurseries also have a role in helping families with their own learning. Just as we need confident and resilient children and young people so we need confident and resilient families.

We are not expecting our schools and nurseries to deliver learning to families, although families’ learning journey often starts there because families feel safe and secure. We want our schools and nurseries to build positive relationships and to work with partners to open learner pathways to families. For example, this could be as simple as helping a mum with her reading to enable her to read stories with her child. This could lead to a group of mums working with the local library service to be introduced to a different range of books for themselves. Then it could be that they feel confident enough to be supported by family learning officers to explore college. Our third sector partners in the communities are exceptionally well-placed to support this work. Our focus is on helping families to be better able to help themselves.

In 2004, 22% of Glasgow's working age population had no qualifications. In 2017, this had declined to 12.4%. We need to continue to decrease this through working together to maximise opportunities for young people and their families.

Similarly, we have a role in growing our own employees across the Council – valuing the role of learning for their personal and professional growth. Many of our employees are city parents – if they are better learners then they will be better parents and their children will feel better supported, more confident and more resilient.

Summary

Education improvement is multi-layered and we have a much wider moral purpose, which needs to be kept central. It is all about culture and ethos – keeping relationships at the forefront. Working in Glasgow is not easy, it is challenging but the rewards are immense.

Planning for transition needs to start at the earliest stage – many families find transitions challenging, particularly those who are vulnerable. For some children, transition between home and school is a challenge and some need soft starts to enable them to transition successfully from one context to the next. Nurturing principles equip our staff with strategies but also the confidence to include all children regardless of their challenges.

Our holistic approach to children's well-being through focusing on getting it right for each and every child is delivering positive outcomes for many children and young people. However, we need to constantly review and reflect to continue our journey of improvement to enable us to be sufficiently flexible and agile to respond to the differing needs of families in this fast-changing world.

Finally, this is my message to Glasgow's staff:

Don't lose sight of, and never forget, we have much to be proud of in Glasgow and Scotland.

You need to

- keep an unrelenting focus on improvement – putting learning and teaching at the heart of your work;
- keep nurturing principles at the core for children and staff;
- empower heads, staff and young people to lead from within.

Remember to say thank you – it is a wonderful privilege to have other people's children to teach.

About the Author

Maureen McKenna has been Executive Director of Education in Glasgow City Council since December 2007; HM Inspector of Education, Scottish Executive (2000–2007); a mathematics teacher and senior manager in various schools in Scotland (1982–2000). She was awarded an OBE for services to Education in Glasgow and Malawi in 2015.