

## CPC Neglect and Education: Data, impact and solutions

So we'll just make a start, if that's okay. Good morning, welcome everyone to this the fourth and final in the current series of webinars focused on learning from practice on child neglect. And this Webinar is entitled, "Neglect and Education: Data, impact and solutions". My name is Joe McGinty. I'm one of the consultants that work in the protecting children team at CELCIS, and I've been asked to step in to chair the webinar by Alan Small who's the independent chair of Falkirk and Borders Child Protection and Public Protection Committees, and also the current Chair of the CPC Neglect Subgroup, as he unfortunately is unable to attend this morning. Once again, I'm delighted that so many of you have been able to make it to this webinar today. I think the numbers are testament to the interest in this topic from the sector. It's a great pleasure for me today to introduce colleagues from the sector, and particularly colleague from CELCIS, Dr Alex McTier, who's the Evidence and Evaluation Specialist, who's been joined this morning by Gillian Carroll, who's a Children's Services Planning and Performance Lead Officer, and Ian Leishman, who's the Inclusion Coordinator, Attendance and Attainment, who are both from South Ayrshire Council, they have all generously taken time out their busy schedules to speak about the issues arising from school non-attendance. Firstly, the webinar will focus on the national data and what that is telling us, with an input from Alex, and then we'll move on to hear from both Gillian and then Ian on how we support the growing number of children who are missing substantial periods of their education. We will hear about the impact that this can have, including a specific example of significance from South Ayrshire - Child B, where child neglect have become chronic, and how we can learn from this to support preventive improvements from a multi-agency GIRFEC perspective, that puts the child's needs at the centre. As I said, it's clear from the large and wide-ranging attendance today, this is an area that has considerable resonance nationally. I'm sure you'll find this webinar of great interest, and it'll be stimulating, and it'll be interesting to hear the Q&A discussion. And without further ado, I'm going to hand over firstly to Alex and then to Gillian and Ian. Thank you, Alex,

Thanks Joe and good morning everyone. It's terrific to have so many people on the webinar today. So, welcome. I'm going to kick things off today by setting the context for what we know nationally, and probably as much, if not more important, what we don't know. And I think that's where the contributions of Gillian and Ian will be really helpful to provide that that local context and insights from their work in South Ayrshire.

So the title is Neglect and Education. That's the webinar. But I've rightly or wrongly gone more with a focus on educational neglect, and it'll become apparent why I've done that. And my focus here is setting the scene a little bit at a national level, but also delving into what the numbers say and as much as what they don't say. So to set the context,

beginning with the national definition of neglect as contained in the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland that's outlined in blue italics.

It's quite a lengthy definition, and that's because neglect is a complex, multi-dimensional term, and it's very hard to bring that just down to a single sentence because it brings in instances of failure, parental or carer failure, it brings in issues around physical, psychological needs or impacts on the child health development. And if you read on poverty and wider societal factors there. So it's a very wide ranging term, and from a data or statistical point of view, they're fairly tricky terms to try and get accurate data on, and that is where my role initially came into this area - that the Neglect Subgroup of Child Protection Scotland Committee were interested in trying to get better understanding of neglect within Scotland and try and bring together the available statistics that can tell us something about neglect. And when we approach that, and I worked with a number of the members of the Neglect subgroup back in 2022, when we approached that, we realized that it's definitely not, it's not a task of identifying one or two measures. Actually, we need a whole suite of measures, and linking in with that, we recognize that there's different aspects of neglect, that there are many risk factors that can could potentially contribute to the neglect of children. Societal factors can come into that, for example. There's then a question of other indicators out there that tell us how many children are experiencing neglect at any one time. And then there's a question of, are there indicators that tell us about the longer term impact or outcomes on children's lives and longer term development as a result of neglect? Now I don't think we've nailed it in any stretch. But what we've been able to do through the reports we've produced in 2022 and 2024 (and we can provide that link later on and for the latest report), is to show what data we already have in Scotland, see if those indicators have been improving or worsening over time, and that providing a framework for, or support the prioritization of next steps. So you will share the link in terms of the wider report, so you can see that in full, but the way we organized the report and recognizing that neglect is such a multi-dimensional term is we decided to organize the indicators under a series of headings and actually going full circle with the very first neglect webinar, which involves Dez Holmes from Research in Practice, which she pointed to the value of Jan Horwath's work from 2007 where she organized or brought a sub-categorization of neglect, and if I'm being specific, Jan Horwath's work referred to medical neglect down to educational neglect -so those six areas. But Dez Holmes suggested is there's value in including societal neglect and thinking about indicators around poverty, Food Bank use or food parcels, for example, and homelessness, to give a sense of neglect, needs to be contextualized in the wider socio-economic factors and conditions that children and families are living in. So this was the structure we took, and you'll see educational neglect at the bottom. And this is not the bottom for any reason, and perhaps we should have organized it alphabetical, then educational would have been at the top, but that this is the structure that we used. And in terms of just

clarification, we only used existing published indicators to give us our understanding on the each of these themes. And we were looking at a national picture, but in the report, we've outlined where that equivalent local data exists and the source of that data, so if there were local areas interested in replicating this at a local level, and then we've given you the tools and wherewithal to do so. Indeed, if you're interested in taking this further, please feel free to get in touch and we can think about what could be done locally. Indeed, I think I've got a call next week with one local area to do just that. The second pointer is that all the indicators we brought together, bar perhaps two or three, from the Child Protection sphere, which is around neglect being a factor, or key factor, that's led to child protection registration. But most of these indicators are proxy indicators. They've not been designed, they've not been used and collected on an ongoing basis to measure neglect. Instead, they've been measured to tell us something else, for example, educational attainment or educational attendance. However, by bringing them together, they do tell us something about neglect. So first and foremost, the primary focus is not around telling us about neglect, but they do tell us something. So what about educational neglect? It was one of the terms Jan Horwath used, and there's nothing like having to speak to a lot of people to actually make you do your homework and to dig a bit deeper into what we mean by this term. And interestingly, and it might not come as a surprise to colleagues here on the call, that it's not actually a term that's widely used in Scotland, but it's probably one that feels familiar, but it's not one we probably use. And actually, the best academic paper I could find around it, or most relevant, was one conducted in Canada, in which Van Wert and colleagues took a systematic review back to the history and progress that have been made around educational neglect in Canada. So they provide context here, again, saying it's perhaps an understudied phenomenon, but that there's multiple factors to it, and really focusing perhaps on the rights here - the right to an education, and that the parent or caregiver is neglecting that right to an education. And they've outlined, and I think it's quite helpful, some concrete examples of what that could look like from the Canadian setting. I think with all of these, and I think this is helpful as well. We're not talking about home education here, that formal, that clear arrangement to school from home, which we know, we know as being on the increase. This is about where the child is enrolled with school, but for whatever reason, or multiple reasons, is not attending on a regular basis and not being supported to attend, and Van Wert and colleagues then go on to say that that can go on to have longer term impacts. I think within Scotland, we've not done that - I'm not familiar with that longer term impact in terms of outcomes into adulthood around this, but you can see Van Wert and colleagues offering some views around that. So while educational neglect might not be the key term that we used in Scotland I think the closest approximation we have within our policy landscape is the sense of children missing from education. So we have Scottish Government guidance for 2022 around this that provides some clarity and consistency around what we mean by this. So they've offered a couple of bullets around definitions. The first one I feel, and I can't say

with utter confidence, but I feel will be a very, very small proportion of children of compulsory school age who are just not, not known at all. They're not on a school roll, and there have not been clear arrangements for them to be schooled elsewhere, for example, at home or privately. I feel that's going to be very, very small, and hopefully I'm correct there and that there aren't huge numbers of children in that situation. So the bigger focus here are on enrolled children at schools who have not attended for a period of time, and the Scottish Government guidance here suggests up to four weeks. And for children where there are welfare or protection concerns that that we're not waiting four weeks or for a four week period, that we should be getting in touch and following that up at a more regular basis.

In terms of who takes that forward, or who's accountable for the missing from education guidance. They refer to the guidance refers to the Children Missing from Education (Scotland) service. I've got to be honest, I don't know a huge amount from this. There's not a huge amount available. And in meetings where I've been involved I've only heard it mentioned at a local authority level once or twice. So I am really keen to hear from Gillian and Ian what that looks like, or how that's been taken forward in local authorities, because I suspect it might not necessarily have that name at a local authority area level, but that missing from education service is the function that should be in place, and I'm sure is in place across Scotland. And coming into how that takes effect, is really that multi-agency dimension - that to address this we need within local authorities or Getting It Right For Every Child, we need all the different partners coming together to support the child and understand their needs, but it also means working, potentially working across local authority boundaries, because of movements - moving homes across the country. So being open and collaborative and sharing information across local authority boundaries. Okay, so that's the context. That's the bit of a definitional context, a bit of a policy context.

So the next few slides is just going to is going to talk about the data that we have nationally. And as I say, these are proxy indicators for educational neglect, however, they can tell us something about its factors, its prevalence and potentially its impact. So the one indicator, if you'd like to that headline indicator, would be school attendance. And here we've got all pupils' average attendance as of 2019, through to 2023. Broken out, primary school to secondary school. And if we look, notwithstanding primary versus secondary differences, overall, let's say it's 90% attendance, average attendance in 2023, and I'm always thinking, is that a good thing or a bad thing? 90% sounds pretty good in most parlance it's near enough 100%. But what does that actually mean? Well, a couple of things here from the chart. Well, one thing from the chart here is that it's been falling. Average attendance has been falling. COVID, and multiple factors probably at play here, but it is on the downward trend, so that that's not good, and that's something we need to monitor and seek to address. But also, what does 90% mean? Well, 90% actually means, on average, every school pupil in Scotland, which there are

700,000 pupils in Scotland, on average, they're missing one day every fortnight. So over a 40 week school year, give or take, 40 weeks, they're missing on average, 20 days per year, or four weeks. That's quite high volumes for me. So that's the average position. Now the average is going to be skewed. It's not going to be distributed equally. That's not saying every child is missing four weeks of school per year. And this chart here from the Scottish Government's own publication around absence highlights that variation. So if we take the three data points that they picked out from here. This is all pupils, primary and secondary combined. So 31% are, on average, missing more than one day every two years. So that's 220,000 pupils have missed four weeks of school over the last year. So these aren't averages now, these are absolute figures. So, that's 220,000 pupils have missed four weeks, all told, over the last year. If we come down to the 11.9% that's 83,000 pupils have missed more than one day of school per week. That equates to eight weeks over a school year. And 2.5% of pupils - so that's 17,500 pupils have missed over half of the school year. These are substantial numbers, and even if we focus on the most persistent non-attendees, that's still significant work to understand each child or each family's individual needs, and understand the barriers and put in supports and process to address those. Looking at the primary versus secondary, because that previous trial was all pupils. And this helps, because we can see the change over time. And just to note that along the bottom axis, we've got two year intervals, but I've just provided the latest year as well the 2023/24 data. So there's just a one year gap at the end, we can clearly see the impact of COVID here. There's been a big jump pre COVID to the 40% now in secondary schools missing, sort of that's one day every fortnight, on average. So we're seeing the impact of COVID there, but at the same time, it was creeping up before COVID. So if we look at the secondary school pupils, it was 27% in 2014/15, and that had gone up to 31% in before COVID In 2018/19. So we were it's not all down to COVID. We were seeing that that trend increase, but it seems as though the COVID period, and the lockdown period has exacerbated issues. Perhaps encouragingly, the latest data suggests there's been a flattening out - slight decrease, so that's positive, and let's see how that that factors out over the years to come. So that's national data. And I'm always aware that national data does not necessarily reflect local positions. So this using that same indicator of 31% at a national level of all pupils missing 10% or more school sessions, so one day for fortnight on average. So the Scotland figures there in red, 31% and you can see your distribution. I'm sure each of you are depending on where you're looking trying to crane your neck to see where you are on this measure. Now, for me, there's a couple of things here. On the one hand, you can say, I can see the link here to deprivation levels, North Ayrshire, West Dunbartonshire, North Lanarkshire, Glasgow, Dundee - high levels, or figure highly in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. And also, if we went through to the number 16 to 19 year olds who are not in employment, educational training, we'd see that close relationship there as well. So yes, I am seeing that. But actually for Scotland, which often sees real variation across its local authorities, I would say on this measure, there's not that much variation. If you take

Stirling towards the right hand side, 25% up to 35% - all those areas are fairly closely clustered around that national average. So even the top performers there, if that's the right terminology on the right hand side, it's still 20% or more. So I would say it's a national issue, and it affects all local authorities to a greater or lesser extent, but still is a significant issue.

A couple more slides around educational neglect, and then I'll hand over to Ian and Gillian. On a more positive note, we look at attendance, but attainment is another proxy for educational neglect. And here's the data from primary schools for Scotland as a whole, and we can see again the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown periods that the increases in Curriculum for Excellence, levels of Primary One through to Primary Seven have been increasing from 2018/19 or for a one year period. But then we've seen that fall, that drop in terms of 2021 though, over the course the last three years, that's been increasing, so that's positive, so that's good, and hopefully that will factor through into secondary schools as those children make that transition.

But at the other end of the scale, in terms of school leavers, not as positive a picture. We've got two indicators here. So we've got the percentage of school leavers achieving less than an SCQF level four qualification. So a Nat Four, national four qualification.

It's not the highest level of qualification, and we're only talking about one qualification. This isn't five Nat fours. This is just achieving one, at least one, level four qualification. And so that's now at 4.8% and been increasing over the last two years. And then entering a non-positive initial destination, which means after leaving school, they have not entered employment, education, training or other positive destination, activity agreements, if that's still the terminology used that had been falling, but over the last year, it's gone up from 4.1 to 4.3% so that, that if we are thinking about what's the outcome or impact of non-attendance or educational neglect, it's these types of areas and indicators that are probably really worth looking at, particularly they are quite timely, because they're looking at that 15/16/17, year old age group. And so it feels quite live in terms of the data that that's offering.

The last set of indicators is just trying to pull it together, and some will be more closely related to educational neglect, others you may feel is a bit too remote, but it's bringing together what we have nationally. So pupil exclusions is a key area potential indicator. You can see that it had been falling well, it had fallen to 2019 to 2021 but in 2023 have been an increase on the 2021 levels. There's survey data around parental participation. So in 2020 I can't remember exactly the sample size, but around 11% of parents did not

participate in any activities at the child's school in the previous year, I'm sure the local level and school level, that type of information is being tracked, for example, attendance at parents evenings. And then from their health and well being census, for the 16 or so local areas that participated in that health and wellbeing census, we saw 10% of P5-S6 pupils disagreeing that they had a trusted adult to talk to at school if they were worried about something. So that's a whistle stop tour of the available data and some of the context and I will now hand over to, I think Gillian first, or Ian to offer, I think it's Gillian that's to offer a South Ayrshire perspective.

Thanks, Alex and thanks Joe for welcoming us this morning. It's equally encouraging to see so many of you on the call this morning, but equally daunting to see so many of you on the call this morning. My name is Gillian Carroll. Currently I'm the Lead Officer for Children's Services Planning in South Ayrshire, but at the time of this review, my role was as the Education, Child Protection and Wellbeing Officer with lead reviewer responsibility in the Child B Learning Review. This particular review brought about a lot of learning for us, locally. That was across agencies in South Ayrshire, around that recognition as Alex has spoken about as school absence is a potential safeguarding concern or a symptom of neglect. Further to this, it also highlighted learning needs, focused on improvements to our GIRFEC processes and supporting our children, young people and families, but also in supporting our multi-agency workforce and the team with the family to offer the right help at the right time. So I'll go through the learning review, mainly from that GIRFEC perspective, and then I'll hand you over to Ian Leishman, one of our inclusion coordinators, who has just been the absolute driving force of our attendance centred improvements in South Ayrshire. Also important to note before we move forward - Child B is a young person who lives in South Ayrshire and the team with the family who were involved with this review, they are still South Ayrshire council or Health and Social Care Partnership employees. so being mindful of that, I'll try and take you to the review as sensitively as possible, but also exploring that key learning the systemic challenges and also our ongoing improvement journey.

So to protect Child B's anonymity, I'll only briefly share a bit of context to help you to understand how we came to the decision to progress to a learning review. Back in 2022 a child protection concern that was received into our social work department from a sheriff officer who had attended Child B's family home, accompanied with the property's landlord. So they were attending the family home in order to execute a warrant to enter the property as they needed to perform the required electrical safety checks. And this had been granted actually, following, I think, around six unsuccessful attempts of the landlord to gain access to the property and on entry to the family home, concerns were raised in relation to the condition of the home. It was said to sadly be

significantly unsafe for a young person to reside in, and it caused them great concern for the wellbeing and safety of both Child B and parent. So social work carried out a home visit on that day, and it agreed with that assessment that sadly, the family home wasn't inhabitable or conducive to an environment that was either safe for Child B or mum to reside in. The named person in school was made aware of that home visit and an inter-agency referral discussion (IRD) took place, which in turn highlighted that Child B hadn't been seen by any services for just under nine months. So a child protection investigation commenced, and very shortly after this, we decided as a Child Protection Committee that the circumstances surrounding Child B met the criteria for us to take forward a learning review.

So some of the most critical findings from this learning review are identified through the collation and the analysis of a multi-agency chronology. So initially, concerns about child abuse, school absence were potentially presented as an education-only issue, where a learning review might raise mainly education only learning. However, when a full chronology was compiled across services, it became clear that wider safeguarding or wellbeing, support opportunities had been missed for the family, and learning was much broader in terms of those multi-agency opportunities within our GIRFEC processes. And early whole family supports our ongoing support, so in pulling that education chronology together, I took the analysis period back to preschool when Child B came to South Ayrshire to the present day. At that point, which was 2022 the decision not to focus solely on the period running up to the event in 2022 was a decision led by our knowledge that it wouldn't be reasonable or likely that education were the only service involved or providing support over the course of Child B's life. Particularly, you see multiple significant events on this slide, so we wanted to explore this further. And ultimately, the education chronology document did then naturally evolve into a multi-agency chronology and that process continued. Services such as Social Work, Health, police and Barnardo's shared their supports for Child B and mum over this period. So acknowledging that period that child B was missing in education, what else did the multi-agency chronology highlight of significance? So the impact of trauma and loss on child B and mum's network of support and potential missed opportunities like really early help back at the point where it was identified. So in 2017 the family experienced a significant bereavement, losing a family member who had been a great source of nurture, care and support for both child B and mum. Following this, mum had informed the school at the time that she had lost support, she had attempted to re-establish contact between child B and dad, which was rejected, and at the same time and the same year, sorry Child B had alleged that when staying with another close family member, he had been physically assaulted. So three incredibly significant events for a young person and a child in a short period of time.

And I mention these events as when we had chats with mum throughout this learning review process, she noted 2017 as a particularly significant time and essentially a turning point for the family, and a catalyst, I suppose, for the period of crisis that followed. Prior to this, child B had around 99% attendance, no emotional behavioural concerns noted. And Mum acknowledged that early Whole Family Support at this point could potentially have supported them to avoid crisis later. The chronology also highlighted a previous Child Protection investigation in 2018 with previous referrals into social work. So in primary five, a child protection investigation was commenced, again due to home conditions. So really mirroring the events in 2022 - really similar circumstances. This investigation concluded with the decision not to place Child B's name on the register, but significantly, for the learning review, it also concluded without that ongoing support for the family, which potentially highlighted another missed opportunity for early help back at that time period. There were other wellbeing concerns highlighted through the chronology that weren't consistently shared or acted upon. Examples of this being missed opportunities from police to share information. There were recorded welfare concerns in 2022 potentially calls from concerned neighbours, and when officers attended the property, although the calls were in relation to Child B, they didn't see Child B, again potentially missing vital opportunities to assess wellbeing and concerns weren't shared with the named person. And we also found that mum and child B had visited the GP on occasions for wellbeing support at that point, citing non attendance at school, again, not communicated to the named person. So that gives you a sense of all the most significant interactions across that time period where we had additional opportunity to pull together and offer that support.

So there was a lot of learning for us here in South Ayrshire, culturally, across services and particularly within our GIRFEC processes, I'd highlight the role of the named person to coordinate support is particularly significant within this learning review. But you'll see multiple learning points here that required to be taken forward. Alongside the learning points you see here, and potentially, most importantly, this learning review did require us to acknowledge a culture in South Ayrshire, potentially nationally, around school attendance that being the attendance in school is an education concern that requires an education only response. So this is something that we've worked really hard to move away from in South Ayrshire. Shifting that culture, we've brought our collaborative, multi-agency work on school attendance and attainment into our children's services plan and our Whole Family Wellbeing Fund spend and a massive investment into our family first model of early help. Family First is just GIRFEC in action, and I know that Ian will touch on it in more depth, but I wanted to acknowledge it because that sees education, social work, thriving communities, health, housing, third sector colleagues

all present in forming collaborative plans supporting school engagement for young people across all eight of our school clusters. And this has massively contributed to our continuing work to shift the culture in promoting relationships and collaboration locally in South Ayrshire.

So ultimately, this learning review demonstrates the importance of fully embedding GIRFEC principles of early help, not in times of crisis, but in our everyday safeguarding practice, and acknowledging attendance as a safeguarding issue. Child B had a history of either wellbeing or child protection concerns, but these didn't form part of assessment during the time that they weren't seen by school. We also had to acknowledge that Child B's transition to secondary school took place in the summer of 2020, obviously a significant time. Staff absence from 2020 to 2022 due to COVID, multiple lockdowns, COVID attendance monitoring challenges and changing guidance teacher on more than one occasion meant that the interim named person actually felt unsighted on the worries in primary school. Therefore you can see why they weren't forming part of assessment at certain points. So what could we have done differently in South Ayrshire, the role of the named person and identification or sharing of concerns was definitely a key learning point for us. Guidance staff were aware of Child B's non attendance, they didn't actually slip through any cracks in our system. But the learning here was in strengthening the function and responsibilities of those in that in-person, role to coordinate appropriate support and pull in services when needed, but also for those services to recognize their role in school attendance and keeping our children safe. So albeit in this case, impacted by changes to the named person due to sickness, Child B might have benefited if attendance concerns were consistently highlighted to the team with the family or if requests for assistance were made. However, findings here were that team of the family processes were actually underused for child B, and this particular young person might have benefited from the structure provided by those meetings for multi-agency collaboration and ensuring that collectively, the right supports are in place. Child B's circumstances also required us to ask questions around the voice of the young person, and planning and assessment, a fundamental GIRFEC principle is that our children and young people must be seen and heard and have their views considered in all the decisions affecting them. And we want our young people to be at the heart of planning. And in this case, direct engagement with Child B was extremely limited, and assessment was often made on parental accounts, rather than actively seeking Child B's perspective on their needs and what might support them back into school. GIRFEC obviously promotes that graduated approach where children and young people can move between the continuum of wellbeing support and child protection responses and the guidance tells us that even when risk reduces, appropriate well being support should remain in place to prevent repeat concerns. And in Child B's case, particularly following the previous Child Protection investigation in

2018 there was limited whole family supports or ongoing help to prevent future escalation.

So following the learning review, an action plan was developed to address the gaps identified in the case of child B, and the focus areas for improvement were owned across agencies, which was really important. The action plan was quite extensive, and a significant volume of work was actually led by Ian, who I'll just hand over to in a minute, so I'll just highlight a few other key pieces of work for you here. So enhancing our attendance monitoring and interventions, embedding GIRFEC principles into daily practice. So for example, through our Family First forums and that journey towards help being available for families and for our schools to support families at that earliest possible point. Quite a few of our learning points were and also continue to be, those increased opportunities for services to connect in development sessions relating to GIRFEC, increased messaging around GIRFEC, including workshops supporting the strengthening of understanding of the named person role, lead professional role and team with a family processes. So that includes a rolling program of online sessions, but also quarterly multi-agency graphic in person sessions about to roll out, focusing on key areas from a subsequent needs analysis, where we asked staff what felt most important for them to learn in these sessions. So including creating a multi-agency child's plan in terms of that ownership for services around this issue. Also included in that training and developing program is ensuring our staff confidence around those escalation and de-escalation processes and pathways from GIRFEC to child protection, including ongoing supports to prevent reoccurrence. So since the interview, we continue to increase those opportunities for multi-agency reflection, but also understanding what services are out there locally. That also forms part of our children's services plan to increase the focus on understanding what supports are out there and how we can access them as a named person. And also we've got great support from colleagues and the Children's Reporter. We revised and refocused our Children Missing in Education protocols, which Ian will touch on. And finally, for us, ongoing promotion of AYRshare - an amazing resource that we have here in Ayrshire is our information sharing system with the team, with the family, and it's a mechanism for creating that multi-agency chronology. And although we have this amazing resource, we can never take our eye off of AYRshare improvement work. It continues, and it's ongoing, and it was highlighted again as something of importance within this learning review. So the action plan hopefully created meaningful practice improvements to reduce the likelihood of cases like Child B's from reoccurring. It would be unrealistic, obviously, to say that the action plan is complete in terms of GIRFEC, because some of those actions remain ongoing and in continuous evaluation to make sure that they're embedded into practice. And that seems like a nice time to hand over to Ian, who'll take you deeper into our attendance improvement journey in South Ayrshire. Thank you.

Hi good morning, everybody. I'm Ian Leishman I have been name-checked twice this morning, which is unusual. My role here as a coordinator within the Inclusion team. I started my career last century as a PE teacher. So I'm a long way from home this morning, so bear with me. I was voluntold the remit of leading on school attendance in the summer of 2022 and we've made progress, in done so through the hard work and the dedication of our leadership, our staff, our learners and their families. We've engaged with multiple services and agencies. And I'd like to mention just two people for this. I would like to mention Kylie Watson at Education Scotland. Kylie is the Senior Regional Attainment Advisor and the National Attendance Lead, and I'm really grateful for the support and guidance she's given us, but also to our data analyst, a guy called Gordon Scobie, without whom there wouldn't be enough light for me to do my job. So today, I'll speak really briefly about our immediate actions, post the learning review, and then I'll move on to discussing what we're doing to increase attendance in our schools. And I'll be focusing on our culture, our systems and our practice. I want to caveat all this by saying that we are not trailblazers, and others are way further ahead in this journey than we are, particularly around improving attendance. But as with all things in education, we've mirrored good practice from elsewhere, and we've innovated where necessary. That's just a really polite way of saying, steal everything and make it your own. Okay, so just a little bit in terms of South Ayrshire. School absence is not a South Ayrshire issue, as you could have seen from Alex's data that he showed, it is replicated across Scotland, the rest of the UK, and also internationally. As you can see from my slide here, school attendance was declining for us from 2014 we'll ignore the COVID years, because, as almost all learners were coded as having attended during the lockdowns, that gave us a really kind of skewed perspective. And I think COVID overall has skewed school attendance quite considerably. South Ayrshire has got five main towns, and within them as a mix of poverty and affluence with a higher disengagement in their lower deciles, we are a rural area, and rural poverty is a consideration too. So in the rural areas, transport links are poor, and if you miss the school bus, then this generally means you'll miss the school day. Looked after learners at home is greater than a way, although we have made significant progress with this group due to the work of a virtual head teacher and those with additional support needs fall below the authority average for attendance, around seven percentage points of a difference. Our primary data is better than secondary, and our non-mainstream is amongst the strongest in the country. Non-mainstream would be maybe what you would know as special schools. Why is that for special schools? Are we so strong when we are not so great elsewhere? Probably because we taxi almost all of our children into school every day, and that does make a difference. However, you can imagine the cost when you're charged six pounds per mile for by our local taxi companies to get school kids into school. Persistent absence or, as Alex said, that's children who have got an attendance rate of less than

90% - the latest figures in 2023/24 just to give you kind of a wider picture, in England, is 19.2%, in Northern Ireland it's 30%, in Scotland is 31.4% but although this year, so far this session, we are sitting at 27% and in Wales it's 40.1%. Just a little word there that I want people to be aware of, which is beware of the destructive nature of assumption. Assumption, actually, way back in 2018 contributed to our issues, and it shifted our focus away from the real problem, and that was learners not attending. There was a belief that we didn't have an attendance issue, rather that we had one with coding. However, a code being changed does not equate to a child being present in school, and that, I think, has been one of the biggest bits of learning that we've taken forward. And we'll talk a lot about data as we go through this presentation this morning. So although this slide is about the immediate actions, everything I'll talk about this morning is really as a result of the review. The first thing that we had to do post that review was to review and update the CME (Children Missing in Education) guidance. Skills and training were an issue at the time of the Child B incident, and we had had a reasonably significant turnover in leadership across both primary and secondary schools, with Head Teachers and Deputy Heads, leading to a skills and knowledge gap. This was exacerbated by COVID. We also had to really relaunch that. But we also, at the same time, we strengthened our onboarding for new senior leaders, who are now required to engage in a series of professional learning modules that cover our policies and our practice. So the relaunch took place at both Head Teacher and Pupil Support Coordinator conferences and our key message, as Gillian has mentioned as well, is that attendance really is safeguarding. School is one of the most protective factors in the child's life, and all agencies involved with a child must recognize and support this. Improving school attendance was added to the Children's Services Plan, which underlies the importance of this fact. Anyone who works within Children's Services must embrace that school attendance is crucial to creating successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to the community in which they live. We are also fortunate enough in my team to have four of me, and we all have a role in supporting our schools and identifying CME, but also just asking some of those trickier questions. Someone's always available to advise and discuss the issues with schools at the earliest opportunity where concerns begin to form, and if they can't get us, they'll get Gillian or one of our colleagues as well. So that's probably a bit of a difference since the review. Any educators on the call will likely recognize these cogs of improvement. Making changes to culture systems in practice will help us implement sustained positive change for the benefit of learners, schools and communities. I'll do my best to detail the factors which have led to us improving our overall attendance picture. The first thing that we looked at was our culture. To change and embed a culture that focuses improving in school attendance, the first thing that we required was really strong leadership in this. And that started with the Director of Education, who, along with the Health and Social Care Partnership leadership, included the School Attendance in the Children's Services Plan, and thus begins the golden thread of

improvement that permeates each services plans. All schools had to include attendance and engagement within the school improvement plans, enhancing accountability. In a perfect world, all stakeholders understand the importance of attendance, and whilst we make progress on this, we can and we must do better. Equity and inclusion are embedded in everything we do, along with compassionate and flexible relationships that support families in building their confidence and prioritizing feelings of safety and belonging, we have significant evidence that families are now much more confident in communicating with key school staff when they need help and support with their children's needs that in the past would have contributed to absence. We created a multi-agency forum with partners called Family First, which Gillian mentioned, and that targets those who are at risk from exclusion, transitions and learners with chronic school attendance. I'll detail more about this as we go through. Cross sector working takes us away from a really discrete problem-solving approach. It's not just about education. We cannot do this alone. And I genuinely look forward to the forums that I chair, and that's because of the quality, the multi-agency and support that we have, and also the improving outcomes for our children and our families.

A really big part of what I've been doing over the past two years is our every learner every day campaign. The children that you can see here on this slide, they all have their own success stories in turning around poor attendance. It's really been fundamental to what we try to do. The strap line tells you everything we need you need to know. We want to see every learner, and we want to see them every day. We've created two YouTube videos using our children, which have over 65,000 views. We've targeted our communities with bus stop adverts, and that's like the one that you can see here, as well as social media. And we have targeted Google ads, which I've got to say in terms of bang for your buck, is pretty impressive. Everything that we have done has involved our learners, and they have been absolutely nothing short of brilliant. They are the stars of their show. From creating the scripts to taking the starring roles, they embody the four capacities of our curriculum. We're about to launch phase three of our campaign, where with phase one and phase two taking place in August, when we return from the summer break, and in January after Christmas, phase three involves similar things. We're looking at putting livery onto our council vans, but we're also going to have a really nice billboard in the town centre where, which will get roughly about 25,000 people driving by every day. You can see, it says, I feel connected. We really try to sell the benefits of being in school.

The second aspect of what we looked at was our systems. Data analysis, and I mentioned Gordon Scobie, our analyst, is absolutely crucial to identifying early warning signs. We've embraced the work of Christopher Kearney, who developed the School Refusal Assessment Scale, and our schools rigorously track and monitor all absences and seek actionable data to highlight where they can intervene and make a difference. We've done a lot of work around thresholds about who should act and when. The first trigger point is 94%. Get in early, stop the slide. That's the key message. Understanding the historical picture of absence for a learner is really helpful. We know that poor attendance in early years leads to poor attendance in primary school. Some learners start secondary school a considerable distance behind their peers, and it's actually really unusual for them to catch up. If anything, the picture worsens. Poor attendance in nursery is the best time to interview and support families. After all, who is responsible for getting the child there on time every day when you are between the ages of two and five? Early support can lead to early success. There will be some really good examples of that. There's an opportunity for us to change the picture as it develops, because waiting until it's fully developed is generally too late, and we continue to engage with health visitors who are the early years named person to get support with this. For the educators in the room, you'll be aware that SEEMIS Management Information System is a problem in this area. To get meaningful data from it, we need our data analyst to write code to get everything we need out of it, which holds back schools in this respect. We're endeavouring to put data back into the hands of schools, and we'll work with our partner to do so with some costs attached. And this will involve using Power BI (an MS data visualisation tool) with their own data, and we're always ready to launch that in the next couple of weeks. What that'll mean is that they can look at patterns, they can look at trends. They can look down into bespoke groups. They can slice and dice the data that is in SEEMIS, anyway they like and it is really visual. The feedback that we've had from the early adopters or the people who are kind of running our pilot on it, is brilliant. It's absolutely brilliant. And we're already seeing some improvements in their schools as a result of this. To support our systems, we've seen Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) being used really creatively to bring on board welfare officers or education welfare officers, and we've developed some walk-in busses with Active Schools, and in one of our largest secondary schools, the introduction of Attendance Leads to support guidance staff who traditionally supported attendance. That school asked one question in particular, and it was really straightforward, how can one person with a caseload of 250 learners keep on top of attendance, the GIRFEC agenda, UCAS applications, Children in Crisis, amongst other aspects of the role, and still be required to teach 17 periods a week, all within 35 hours? The short answer to that is they can't. And the attendance leads support only one aspect of their job. However, Gillian spoke about what happens when we don't get it right, and were determined that won't happen again. Stronger systems and robust and well managed policies and practice stand us in good stead. Just on the walk-in bus - the walk-in bus is phenomenal. It's in two of our most deprived schools, and both of those

schools have seen an increase in their overall attendance over the past two years of between 3% and 4% which is huge, really significant. But it's about your school being out there in your community, building relationships. Because when it comes to education, it really doesn't matter what the question is, the answer will always involve relationships in some shape or form. Just when I mentioned Christopher Kearney's work, this is one of the tools that's in it, and that's about the continuum of school attendance. So on the left hand side is green. It's like everything's hunky dory. Kids in. They are one of those early learners who are in every day. But as we go forwards, and we go along, and we start to see things like, well, what are these early warning signs? The early warning signs is late coming for us. When we start to get late coming, we have the big push in that just now in one of our primary schools we've developed a bit of a system where to influence parents, you have to motivate the child. So what we have in there is that the school with the best attendance, or sorry, that there's the least amount of late coming each week, gets an additional 20 minutes of play time on the following Monday. I have never seen children as motivated to get to school when I've been there at drop off time at nine o'clock in the morning. I see them dragging their parents in. That is a bit of a good news story. However, they're still behind where they need to be, but it shows that you can have an impact by motivating and engaging those learners to be back at school.

The next aspect that we looked at is practice. Our practice aligns to our values and aligns to our culture. Getting the right for every child is at the heart of everything we do. Our children and young people's voices are essential. They are heard and they're acted upon. Very few things are more powerful to a young person than feeling listened to and valued, and I'm a great believer in "You said, we did". We're working really hard to update our curriculum to make it irresistible and to encourage our learners that school will take them where they want in life, no matter where it is. Improving our pathways will enhance positive and sustained destinations for post school. Over the past 18 months, we've introduced interdisciplinary learning into secondary schools, and that's activated our young people's motivation, and we've used a project called Solar Punk Island, where children in secondaries bring their skills, to plan, to build and to collaborate to make their island the best. The output for that was incredible. It brought in kids who hadn't been in school for a considerable amount of time. My favourite quote was from one of the girls who texted her pals and said, this is alright, by the way, you should come in tomorrow. And she did that allowed us to start to get a hold of her again, to start to find out, what were the issues, what stopped me from coming to school? How can we help?

That was such a success that that pilot school has now formally timetabled it for all of their S2s, and we've got a takeover day planned for the summer term in all of our secondaries. Gillian mentioned the Family First forum. The Family First forum helps us

to support our schools in prioritizing social and emotional support, allowing our most vulnerable learners to connect and to build connections with a key person. Alex's slide, about 10% of kids not feeling that they had a key person is horrifying, because, as I said, it's all about relationships, our job. Each of our eight clusters has an additional teacher attached to it and a supporting developing worker. And they form part of our multi-agency response to supporting those at risk of exclusion, poor attendance or at risk through transition between primary and secondary school, our colleagues from Active Schools, school nursing, social work, educational psychology, the campus police officers, thriving communities, also known as CLD and employability and skills, housing colleagues with some input from third sector, alongside our School Pupil Support Coordinators, and chaired by myself and my colleagues in the team, that's what every cluster gets. And we fund this using the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, and we're seeing its impact coming through really strongly.

We target the underlying absence causes such as well being and additional support needs. Over the past two years, we've had a big push to address the barriers to school non-attendance. Emotionally based school non-attendance and the impact of neurodivergence can make the school environment too hard. Can make it too challenging, and at times, it can be detrimental to a significant portion of our school communities. Our educational psychology team has created and delivered training for our schools to support our learners where required, and they are often supported by our autism outreach team. Poor attendance at school leads to poor attainment. Who would have thought it?

I want to have a wee look at this infographic, and that demonstrates just exactly that. Alex mentioned the myth of 90%. 90% in an exam is a great result a band one, 90% attendance means you've missed 20 days of school. 90% attendance from primary one to the end of s3 means you have missed one year of your school journey. One of the biggest contributing factors, I think, to the 90% - the 90% club if you want to call it - is parental holidays - term time holidays. The cost of living is having a massive effect. This is perhaps one of the unintended consequences of it. It is really challenging for our schools, because in primary it's 50% greater than in secondary. We kind of lead you to believe, I suppose, in some respects, that primary school doesn't matter as much. However, that is not the case. It comes down quite sharply. You can see that it comes down quite sharply there. When you think about the work of Sosu and Klein, they tell us that any absence impacts on your learning journey, regardless of what the coding behind that is.

This is only about National 5s, so that's your kind of like your real top benchmark for S4, and that's where we would strive to have all our learners meet, however, with additional support needs and various other factors in play, we do secure Nat 4s we secure Nat 3s, but even getting 92% that's the average. So there will be some families, and again, we talked about cost of living. Some of those kids likely had a two week holiday at Prestwick Academy. Some of them, most likely had tutors. So there's this inequality. But if you're a kid who doesn't have access to those means, and your attendance is sitting below 90% you're not coming out as well as your peers, and it comes down really sharply, as you can see, even within the 80% bracket, it goes between five and two. So what the outcome has been for this huge piece of work that continues to be ongoing and will never stop. We are striving - the stretch aim, if you like, we're striving towards, is 97% attendance. It's probably unobtainable due to some of the factors that I've mentioned. However, that's where we want to be. That's where we'll strive to get to. We often talk about marginal gains. We'll do whatever we need to do to try and get us there. We are realistic, but I would say that it's good to have your eye on a prize. It does motivate our schools. We often produce kind of statistical data for them, generally weekly. Last year it looked as if it came out as a league table. We so we had to spend a lot of time saying it looks like a league table. It reads like a league table, but it's not a league table. However, schools are always competitive by nature, and they always see that. This year, we've changed it. We've changed how that looks and what it is about a comparison between where they were last year and where they are this year, almost all of our schools have improved, almost all.

So in terms of our outcomes, the number of additional days of attendance required to shift by 1% is statistically significant. So whilst it doesn't look like a lot, I can assure you it is. As a local authority, it's well over 100,000 openings or 50,000 days of a difference. Progress is progress. And as I said, we often discuss the importance of marginal gains with our schools. This year, you can see that data there's got an asterisk next to it. We're not on track. However, we've seen this year, I think why we're doing so well is we've seen a dramatic improvement in December statistics, which, along with June, are every local authority's poorest months, and we remain hopeful that we could influence during the same way we did December, and we're striving to break the 90% mark overall. This year the stats look promising, but we have a long way to go, and we accept that. Thank you for your time this morning, I hope I've given you some food for thought. I'm happy to answer any questions that will come up at some other stage, and if you want to email me, I'm sure we'll be able to share that with you at a later date. Thank you.

Thanks so much Ian and Gillian and Alex. That was a really great presentation, and it took us on a journey, actually, from the National stuff right down the very detailed local initiatives that South Ayrshire have developed on the back of that significant case.

Personally, I found it quite inspiring. I think other people on the call have as well, and it's brought up a lot of themes that are reflected in the questions, which I'm hoping we'll have time to get through some questions. But people have asked about and, I suppose they've made comments about the importance of collaboration, which you spoke about the important of multi-agency working. There is this prevailing culture of the you know, it's down to education to fix this, but we know it's not. It's actually it's a societal issue, and it's a multi-agency issue. Someone early on had asked about who's primarily responsible for this. And we've heard loud and clear, it's not just education. I think parental responsibility comes out quite strongly in what Alex was saying in the kind of definition he gave it earlier on these slides. So that's part of it. But how do we support parents that need that additional support as well? And that is a GIRFEC response initially. But if I could just start with a question about culture, you've talked about the shift in culture in South Ayrshire, and I suppose it tells a lot about the challenges that because, what you've described, Ian, sounds still a lot of work that's been done by ourselves in education, and focuses very much on that. But actually the wider, multi-agency responsibility there remains, and what were the challenges in getting the other, wider agencies involved, or was there a sea change after the learning review?

I think when you think about the culture, I mean, when you deal with that in terms of kind of senior leadership, it's there, you know, they want to improve. Where I think the challenge comes is the further away you get from the top of the tree right down into classroom practitioner level to social worker level to family engagement worker level. That's where the difficulties I think are. I mentioned the health visitors earlier on. I think they suffer a bit like guidance teachers - they have got huge case loads and a kid not attending a non-compulsory part of education is a really challenging one for us, but I think that that's been our biggest challenge is getting that message to who need it most, and that is the front line, the practitioners, the guys that are in the firing line every day, the guys who are there doing the job. Sometimes, I think in education, you can often be quite glad that so and so is not in today, because it allows you to get on with your lesson. But that in itself, is a massive indicator you need our help, and we continue, and we will strive to continue to make sure that message seeps all the way through till it permeates absolutely every part of daily life in all of our services. I'm hopeful. But there's always, there's often a lot of change in personnel. So you kind of feel as if you're starting again all the time. But if we get the leadership part right, and then we can get that embedded within our middle management, I think we'll go a long way.

Thanks, Ian. Any other comments, Gillian or Alex about that question?

Yeah, I think I would mirror what Ian said. I think where we've been really fortunate as well, in South Ayrshire, as Ian said, as at that most senior level. So having attendance being such a focus within our Children's Services Plan, which is, you know, owned

across the Community Planning Partnership, not just in Children's Services, has allowed us to share that responsibility in terms of school attendance at every level. But like Ian says, you know, it needs to be something that filters and permeates through all of our staff, which is obviously something that is on going in terms of culture change, but that sign up and collaboration that this is our children's services plan, and one of the main things that we're focusing on in terms of whole family support, is families are telling us they need help bringing their kids back to school or keeping their kids in school. And we've made attempts to respond to that through our children's services plan as well, so that, I suppose, gives us that increased focus across agencies and shared responsibility outwith education only.

And I suppose you're on a journey in South Ayrshire, so you're working hard, but there are still challenges with like you say, the culture to trickle down from leadership level right down at the kind of practice level, I think that there's certainly comments in the in the Q&A about that. Again, it's seen primarily as an education issue when it isn't. And I think it was really powerful to state that in the kind of Children's Services Plan, actually, non-attendance is a safeguarding issue for children, and it's everyone's concern. So someone had asked the question, and you touched on this, Ian about the kind of how do we improve the school experiences and in turn increase attendance for our neurodiverse young people? If you were to say a wee bit more about that?

There's no silver bullet for this. If I had the answer, it wouldn't be sitting here. I would've sold it to our country, and I'd be sitting on an island. But neurodivergence has not exploded, it's always been there. I feel it's always been there. We're just much better at identifying it. And I think the thing for me about schools is the environment is what it is. We need greater investment in terms of Additional Support Needs. You know, we've had a big, massive ASN review, but there was no additional funding came as a result of it. Inclusion, which is, which is my daily job, my bread and butter - that's what I deal with every day. And we've got a significant portion of our kids that are neurodivergent, and you know, you need to take that into two ways. You put your kids who have got ASD, you've got your kids you'll get ADHD. You've got kids who are dyslexic, you know, but a lot of these kids have all of them. We spend a lot of time and a lot of money investing in training again, you know, I think when you've got kids with ADHD in your class, ADHD is terribly named because it's just a collection of symptoms that annoy people, but actually getting people to understand how to get the best out of a kid with ADHD is really paying dividends. Where it becomes much more difficult is where you've got kids with a lot of sensory needs, noise, the unknown of what everybody else is going to do next. You know, if you're if you're a kid with a autism, in one of our biggest secondaries of about 1200 (pupils) that must be terrifying day in day out. We have developed in Prestwick Academy, they have created some called The Hub, and that's a safe place for kids who are mainstream learners, who are neurodivergent, to go to sit, to have time to wind down, to have time to regulate, but to reach back out into the mainstream. Because

they need that. They need that input from staff and from teachers. They need to be out there because we want every learner to be successful. And that's that that remains, and will always remain a challenge, I think, until we can start to get to the point where we can potentially have, like I say, a school, a secondary ASD school, for example. I would say that those kids often are better in the primary because it's a different environment. But once you put them up into the secondary school, even if it's one of our smaller secondary schools, of around 400, it is still completely overwhelming. So we have an autism outreach team, and they're out there every day, working with our most challenging kids, in this respect, building capacity, working with families, signposting to the right places. I'm not going to get into the national issue with CAMHS, because we all understand it, but I do think that everybody's the same, and I don't think anybody's cracked it, but I do believe there is a resource issue.

We've got a question that just talks a bit more about collaboration. It's come up in a few kind of questions - what does multi-agency work and look like? What is collaboration? What can we do to strengthen collaboration? I suppose, is the question. And it sounds like, again, you're on a journey there with that in South Ayrshire, but other things you've done, and you mentioned a team that is a multi-agency team, but that looks at particularly pupils that are coming up as ones where attendance is maybe getting flagged as an issue, and what can we do to support families? So do you want to say a little bit more about that?

The answer, in short, is relationships. You know, when I first started my career, I remember going to multi-agency training, and I got to know loads of different social workers and people from different areas and agencies. That's kind of stopped, COVID almost killed it. We're trying to get back there. But I think what we've got in the beauty of the Family First model, you've got people who are there who want to make a difference in the community in which they're working. Everybody there is engaged. Everybody there wants to improve outcomes for children and young people. I wouldn't say it's had to do with me chairing it. I just think that we're lucky with the people that we have around that table that they want to make a difference. How can we strengthen that? I think that can be a challenge, because it can sometimes come down to personalities. One of the things that we stated at the very beginning was, this is a three line whip. You're not getting out of this. Do not send your apologies. If you're sending your apologies, then we want to know why, but also we'll speak with somebody above you. Getting that level of buy-in, I think, at the very beginning, and setting the scene. It does sound kind of harsh, but we covered this with the children services plan, and all of these agencies are included within it, but we've recognized at times that there's a gap here. So that's why we brought housing on there's a gap here. That's why we brought in colleagues from CAMHS. At times, wherever we find a gap, we seek out somebody who can support us and help us. And I think the fact that people are there and they're seeing that we are making a difference, and we are looking at the outcomes, just builds the esteem of the

group. And when you can build the esteem of the group, it becomes a really powerful vehicle for change.

Thanks. Ian, actually, someone's just posted from CAMHS saying they are seeing so many young folk out of school, which frequently stems from the COVID times, but often from families where there's a lot of chaotic stuff going on, there is often generations worth of neurodivergence. Is there a scope for a closer relationship between education and health without compromising data sharing? I mean, you've talked about bringing CAMHS on board with that, the sort of Family's First approach. But has there been issues with the data sharing in terms of a GIRFEC approach there in South Ayrshire, and if so how have you got around that?

Yeah, so one of the things that we've done is because of that, the pathways, or the lack of pathways, just now, we have a screening group that runs between. So my immediate Gaffer, Gil Ferguson, who's a Quality Improvement Manager, then the service manager from CAMHS and other partners from Health and Social Care Partnership, we're bringing kids because we can't put kids back on to the to the waiting list, because the waiting list needs to be tackled. But one of the things that we're doing is looking at who are the kids here right now that are most in need and would benefit from a diagnosis but not benefit from medication? So we do that through the GIRFEC pathway. We get information from schools. We have the parents telling us that, you know, we're happy for this to go forward. We want support for our kid. That kind of takes away a bit of the information sharing issue. It can't be done discreetly. I think it has to be done really out in the open. It has to be done with parents understanding that you might not get anything from this, but we recognize that you need something right now, and it could be, and I love this phrase from CAMHS, by the way, they may be meaningfully redirected to somewhere else, and that may be something called NEST, which is a service in Ayrshire, across Ayrshire and Arran that supports neurodivergent families, that gives guidance. They're on the end of the phone whenever you need them. Where is the support that I need to try and manage this kid when they're having a meltdown? We can also sign post them from there to kind of local support groups as well. We do need better working, we absolutely do need to get around that to the colleagues in CAMHS. If we can find a way, I'm pretty sure we would be more than happy to do it. Because when I go to speak with my colleagues in schools. it'd be really unusual for me not to go in and have a conversation like, how do we manage this - this kid is really not getting the best out of school. We're not seeing the best of them. It's having a knock on effect, and we want to make it better. So, where there's a will, there's a way, I think is probably how I put that, is not that we don't want to, I'm pretty sure it's the same for CAMHS. They also want to do it. But the data sharing thing, there is a way around it, and I think that's by having it out in the opening, parents being aware, but then that maybe stops you from being a bit more strategic.

Thank you. A question that's just been posted, well, it's kind of more of a view than a question, talking about ASN, and it's come up in terms of the data as well. So there's a couple of questions around about Additional Support Needs. And you talked about the example of the use of the taxis in South Ayrshire, and some local authorities will do that, but not all. But somebody asked early on in the Q&A, Alex, just about the ASN data, and was that part of the overall school data? And someone else has put on that question here is probably more for yourself, Ian, and possibly yourself, Gillian as well. Saying: I'm an officer assigned to ASN and home education. There are growing red flags around non-enrollments for P1 and S1 due to there being no legal obligation for a parent carer to do so, and also the commonalities between requests to withdraw and the lead up to this. So I suppose we're kind of getting into the home education loopholes there, which maybe we don't want to get into deeply. But yeah, there seems to be an issue getting flagged there around about that, which might be a pattern that you've seen in South Ayrshire as well. I don't know, because it could explain some of the non-attendance. But just I firstly on the data side, Alex, I take it the data, took in ASN as well, yeah?

Yeah, I can put the original source information from Scottish government there. And I know we've thrown lots of statistics at you today, but if we take the average of 90.3% I think that persistent non-attendance children without additional support needs. That's 92% from children registered recorded as having additional support need, 87.4% so actually, not as different or distinct as we might expect. However, I'm really struck by Ian's point around the need to dig into the data and how various workarounds, by the sounds of it, in terms of really getting into the weeds of what data is recorded, and how to best make sense of it. But also, I think we're all aware on the call how the percentage of children with Additional Support Needs is on the increase. It's not just a small proportion. This affects everyone in the school community, because it's a mainstream issue now, and it's not a them and us. To make the school work as well as possible, and for all pupils to flourish, we need to support everyone so that everyone's having the best support and having the best experience in school or in the school corridors or in between, that impacts on everyone's attendance and attainment, because everyone's thriving. But I'll hand over to Ian and Gillian for more the local insights.

Anything you want to add?

Yeah, just in the home education part. Where to begin, you know, we just had recently updated guidance that didn't particularly change anything. It's, concerning, I think. But one of the things that I'm always struck by is that when we're looking at these things, you've got to remember that kid is with their parent, and for an overwhelming majority,

they're absolutely fine, they're safe, they get great plans, they have a good experience. It's the ones who don't want to engage that concern me a little bit more. And those gaps coming into P1 and also the transition between P7 and S1 those are concerning. However, I don't think we're going to get around that. I don't think the new guidance supports us in any way to get around that. But ASN, you know, it is on the rise, it's been on the rise for a significant amount of time. I think when I first started in this role, in 2008, 2009 maybe, we had roughly 9% of learners had one barrier to their learning. Now, as we are today, we've got 42% but you know, in terms of attendance, if you've got an attendance rate of less than 70% in the previous year, we call it an interrupted learner now, and we allocate resource to schools for that alone. To my colleague, who's on there, from the other local authority, I feel your pain in terms of that, in what you're saying. Those families can be difficult to track down. They often move you don't know. They don't tell you when they arrive. You only find out by accident, sometimes. They often don't want to see you when you turn up at the door. I did have a very hairy, scary moment with a campus cop, in quite literally, the back of beyond in South Ayrshire where a health visitor had reported concerns, and I've got to say, if something had happened to us that day we would never have been found. But it turned out, everything was fine, but you've always got to have your Spidey senses, you're finding child protection, you're constantly, perhaps wrongly, looking for problems when there might be none. But, I share that pain with you, but you know, in terms of how we tackle it, it's very, very difficult. Scottish Government probably don't want to grab the jaggy nettle over that one and look at changing the legislation, because the 1988 education Scotland act it's up to the parents to provide a kid with an education for 99.99% of people, they send their kid to school. For that other 10th of a percent, they choose not to as is their right.

Thank you. Anything you want to add? Gillian, or time for one final question.

I would just totally relate to the circumstances in other local areas. For example, recently, we've had a wee family move up here to South Ayrshire, where actually the local authority in England removed their names from the Child Protection register because they had moved so there wasn't a handover of case. So I think there can be challenges between, so it would be unrealistic to say that these things happen, you know, smoothly, or that the processes that are in place are always going to support and catch where those young people are and those children are. So we've been working across different agencies again, just like Ian said, those relationships to gain that further understanding of what's happening with that happening with that wee family. But it could very easily have been that they came here to South Ayrshire, and us having no prior knowledge of those circumstances. So it's definitely something that we've not nailed down yet. And as Ian says, I don't know that the guidance supports us to nail that down yet, and it's something that we continually have an increased focus on, as I know all authorities do, in terms of how to support and manage these situations, and make

sure that the children, young people and families are coming here ready to get that support that they need as well.

With three minutes to go, we don't want to go down the rabbit hole of home education. We could always spend another session alone on that. And it's like you say, there's loopholes in the legislation. Probably the guidance was emphasizing the importance of relationships, which we've talked about today. But I suppose there's not much more we can say about that right now. Probably just squeeze in one final question, which is one from myself, really, and there's a number of people on the call, I think, from the Children's Hearings, Children's Panel Members and CRA just about the use of statutory measures maybe where all things have failed in terms of that GIRFEC continuum where you've been working with families, but actually you've got chronic non-attendance. Do you use referral to the Reporter in South Ayrshire? And is there a kind of policy around that? And how does that work?

Yeah, it's still a bit of a source of frustration, actually, because we had an initial conversation with one of the Reporters, and we kind of agreed a set of circumstances, if you like, where we would ask schools to refer. So if the family is completely not engaging, and we can evidence this through a significant chronology, and that kids attendance is really, really poor. We've had a couple of schools follow that and gone in, but actually we've not had anything back. It could have been knocked back. I think when you go down that statutory aspect of it, and you are potentially looking at some kind of attendance order, the money involved in terms of getting an attendance order, you may or may not have the sheriff on your side, depending on what the family say when they get there. It's, an issue. It's definitely an issue for us. We'll continue to explore that. I'm actually meeting with one of the Reporters here next week, just to have a kind of further discussion around that, because we do have a hard core of families that we just cannot reach and we just cannot get to engage. So some compulsion around that would be great. I think there's also a challenge there in getting social work on board, because I think, for them, if they look at that and say actually, we've got way worse cases than this. This kid is fed and clothed, they are cared for, they're just not attending school. And that comes back to that part, like, how do you get that buy-in all the way through the system? So we, we find it as an issue, but we are continuing to kind of try and push through that.

Okay, we've got one minute to go, so I'm just going to wrap up. And people are starting to go off the call. Just want to say once again, before I lose my voice completely. Thanks to all the speakers today and thanks to all the people that have attended and put questions in the chat, we've got through quite a few of them. And I just wanted to say again, that was a really inspiring presentation and brilliantly done. So well done, especially in front of such a large number as well. Notice some nerves about that, and

quite rightly so. So, great job. And thank you very much. And just, we'll just, we'll just finish. There you.