

# Review & Planning with Schools

## Summary Report June 2016

### Introduction

Aberdeenshire Educational Psychology Service (EPS) engage in review and planning meetings with their schools during three key points within the academic year. The purpose of these meetings is to allow the EPS and schools to jointly reflect upon, and evaluate their work together over the given period. This enables them to consider where things have been going well, what improvements could be made and identify next steps to provide a focus for their future work together.

The current summary draws together the key points derived from the collated May/June 2016 review and planning meetings. These meetings were all framed around the following 5 questions:

1. What has gone well in our work together this year?
2. How effective has our work together been this year? (scale rating question)
3. How could our work together be more effective?
4. Are there any systemic issues emerging from work at the casework level which the EPS can support?
5. Are there any areas of the Improvement Plan that the EPS could support?

### Analysis process

A thematic analysis was used to identify key themes emerging from the review & planning meetings.

### Participating schools

In total, review and planning information was received from 65 schools (52 Primary Schools, 11 Academies and 2 free-standing Community Resource Hubs) out of the 171 schools in the Aberdeenshire Area (38% participation rate). This compares to 53% in 2015 (91 participating schools), and 12% in 2014 (20 participating schools).

### Q1. What has gone well in our work together this year?

After analysing the individual responses to this question, 8 themes emerged (see figure 1).

**Figure 1:**

Themes of what had gone well in the work together



## Support and guidance from the EPS: 30% of the responses (N= 84)

Nearly a third of the responses to this question highlighted the appreciation placed from schools toward the EPS' provision of support, guidance and advice. A large proportion of these (41%, N=32) referenced the value of EPS **informal consultation** process.

### *Illustrative examples*

#### **Informal Consultations:**

"Availability to provide advice through informal consultations. This advice has been passed on to parents and has been useful."

"Group informal meetings of HTs from small schools to share strategies and ideas, facilitated by EP"

Some schools liked the **practical nature** of the support provided from the EPS:

"EP sharing very realistic, practical strategies"

"EP has been a 'Godsend' to HT offering support and very practical help throughout a very difficult year"

Although most of the responses related to support provided by the EPS directly to school staff there were a number that mentioned EPS support to **parents:**

"Valuable support and advice to parents and staff"

"Working with parents – support has been appreciated – lots of happy parents!"

"Trialling of informal consultations with a small number of parents has been effective"

Interestingly, there was one response which noted the **two-way nature** of the support:

"Supportive of each other – help from EP to challenge/balance views".

## Organisation/planning: 19% of overall responses (N=52)

Within this theme responses related to better organisation and planning of EPS involvement which enabled more efficient use of their time within schools.

### *Illustrative examples*

"Setting dates in advance has been useful"

"EPS timetable becoming more prioritised"

"Prioritising EPS involvement which has resulted in more streamlined role for EPS in ASN pupils within the school".

"Organisational elements of visits have worked well"

It was not always clear from responses whether it was the school or the EP who was responsible for organising the time better, however most appeared to be the school becoming more organised and better at prioritising where the EP involvement should be.

Almost a third of these responses (27% - N=14) referenced the **flexibility/accessibility of EP** as being a positive factor in working well together. This flexibility was mainly in regards to EPs being flexible with their time and providing additional time to deal with unplanned events. However, schools also showed flexibility, for example, their flexibility in arranging assessment/observation times or in developing and reviewing their blended placements.

“School and EP have appreciated the level of flexibility from both sides”

A number of the organisational/planning responses (13% - N=7) related to the impact of having a **consistency of EP** or when there was a change in EP there was **consistency within practice/good handover** of EP which made this easier.

“Although the school has had a number of a changes of EP over recent years, the school notice and value the consistency of approach provided by all the EPs they have had”

### Relationships and communication: 18% (N=51)

There was value placed in the positive working relationships which had formed. These were enhanced by strong levels of communication. Some of these extended beyond the school and EPS level, toward positive working relationships with other agencies.

“Working closely with school and other agencies to develop individual packages”

“Working well together in an open and trusting professional relationship”

“Good relationship, able to challenge”

Almost half of the responses within this theme (41% - N=21) referred to **collaborative working** in some form.

“Collaborative work around best meeting children’s needs”

### Training and development/Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL): 16% (N=45)

Training and development/CLPL from EPS to school staff was mentioned as being something that worked well. Examples of topics covered included restorative approaches, self-regulation, attachment, Mindset, Visible Learning and Person Centred Planning (PCP).

Some of the training/CLPL was focused on initiatives/research across the whole school or cluster. While others had a more specific set of learners as its audience, for example, parents in the parent workshops, or inputs to Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) as well as sessions with children.

“PSA session in the cluster to look at mindset”

“The anxiety workshop for parents was a great success”

“Brain works sessions with all children – fun, informative and lots of good ideas to take forward for class teachers”

### Case work: 11% (N=30)

There was value placed in the individual case work completed by the EPS. This case work included work through Formal Consultations, Multi-agency Action Planning Meetings (MAAPM) school reviews and other forms of assessment/interventions such as observations of children.

“Worked well together in MAAPM/review meetings/Formals”

### Systemic working/support with policies: 3% (N=8)

A small number of responses related to the EPS’ work to help schools at a systemic level as well as discussions to support schools regarding policies.

“There has been more involvement at a systems level and discussion around policy”

### Positive outcomes for children/young people (YPs): 3% (N=8)

A handful of schools mentioned being able to see positive impact and outcomes for children/YPs as a consequence of the support provided by the EPS.

“Support for children with ASN valuable advice and clear actions from meetings that have had an impact on the children”

### Capturing pupils’ voice: 1% (N=3)

Linked to positive outcomes to children/YPs, a very small number of responses made mention of pupils’ views being gained, for example through questionnaires being given to pupils prior to a meeting.

## Q2. How effective has our work together been this year? (scale rating question)

EPs and schools were asked to rate how effective their work together had been. The scale ranged from 1 (which was extremely ineffective) up to 10 (which was extremely effective). Figure 2 displays the results of these ratings.

**Figure 2:** scale rating for how effective the work has been between the EPS and schools



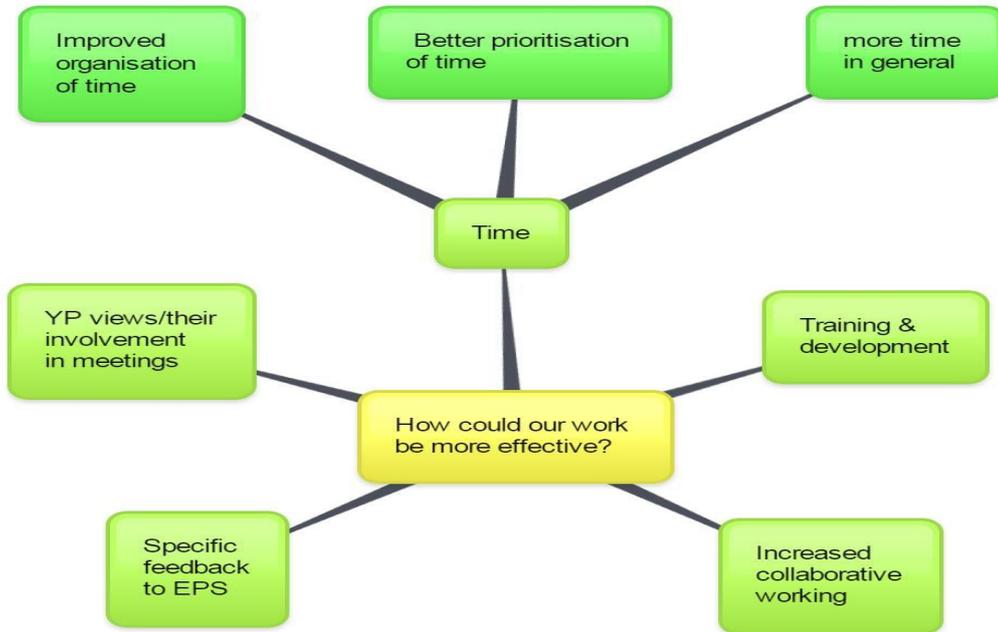
NB: 3 school review and planning forms did not complete this scale rating (5%)

The average rating for this question was 8.6 and the median was 7.5. Figure 2 shows that 89% of respondents rated the effectiveness positively, as being 8 or above. There has been a positive shift in the figure from last year (2015) in which 82% of respondents rated the effectiveness of the service at 8 or above. Previous years review and planning documentation did not ask this question so no comparison to 2014 and 2013 figures can be made.

### Q3. How could our work together be more effective?

Schools and EPS were asked to consider how they could work more effectively together. After analysis of responses to this question, 5 key themes emerged. **Figure 3** displays these 5 key themes (with 3 additional subthemes for the theme of 'time').

**Figure 3: Themes on ways to be more effective**



**Time** – overall 64% of responses fell into this theme (N=76)

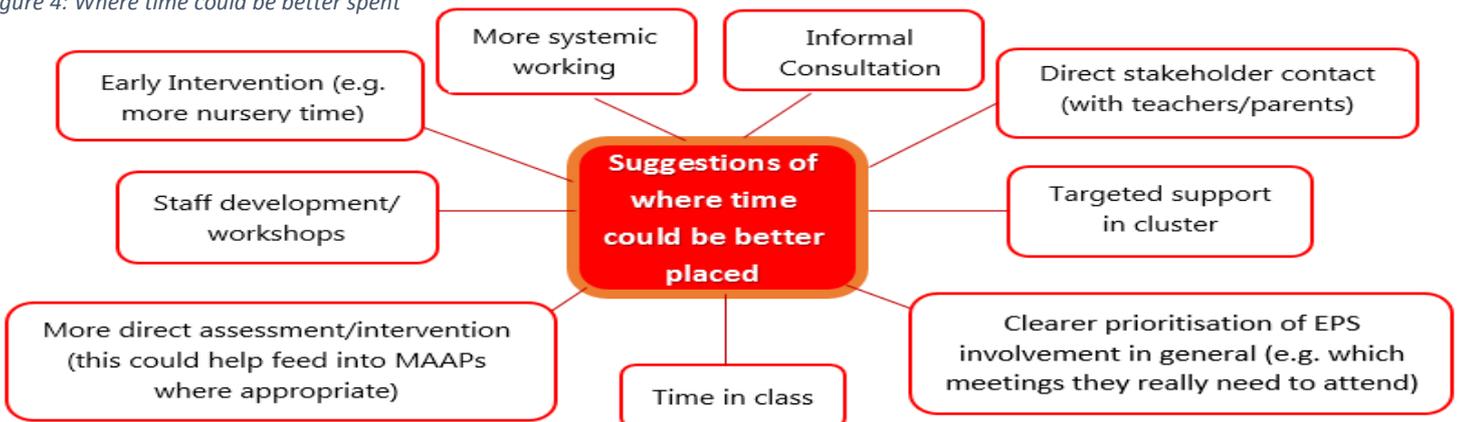
Almost two-thirds of the responses to the question about ways to work more effectively together related to time. This theme was further broken down to identify where schools and EPS felt the time could be better used. There were 3 areas suggested; **better prioritisation** of the EPS time, **improved organisation** of the EPS time and finally a desire from schools for **more time in general**.

**Prioritisation of time** almost a third (32%, N=38) of those respondents citing time as a factor made reference to the need for EPS' time with schools to be prioritised better towards specific areas. It was not always clear from the responses whether it was the EP suggesting better prioritisation of time or the school.

“Clearer prioritisation of EPS involvement”

Ideas of where EPS time could be better placed included the following:

Figure 4: Where time could be better spent



### *Illustrative examples*

“Using EPS time for activities other than reviews”

“Arrange ‘surgery times’ next session to increase informal consultation...”

“EP spending more time in class to gain a broader picture of the school”

**Organisation of time** made up almost a third (30%, N=35) of the time responses. It encapsulates the views expressed that better organisation could help effectiveness of time use as well some suggestions that changes to processes may help. Examples of ways in which things could be better organised included:

- Flexibility from both sides (for new ways of working, time use and visit pattern)
- Better planning (e.g. CLPL times, arranging appointments in plenty of time, looking at visit patterns)
- Staffing issues – these related mainly to school staffing issues including difficulty freeing up staff for meetings. However, mention was also made that the part-time aspect of some EPs can throw up scheduling challenges
- Paperwork – issues with missing minutes from schools/timelessness of dissemination of minutes from school
- School staff gaining better knowledge of staged intervention in school and the role of EPs
- Collegiate CLPL opportunities across cluster

### *Illustrative examples*

“Further flexibility for new situations and to explore new ways of working”

“Meeting times can be very difficult to schedule owing to constraints on schools’ and EP’s timetables”

“Reconsider the processes within the school for involving the EP”

A small number of the time responses (3% - N=3) proposed that having **more time in general** would help but gave no indication what that time would be used for.

### **Training and development – 16% (N=19)**

A number of schools felt more training and development would be beneficial. Some of the schools focused on specific topics that they would like to concentrate on. These included Mindset, whole school nurturing approaches, Restorative Approaches, cognitive skills and Visible Learning. Whilst others thought more follow up training or whole school initiatives would help.

### **Increased collaborative working: - 13% (N=15)**

Closely followed by training and development was the feeling that work together could be more effective through increased collaborative working. Some suggested the collaborated working between schools and EPS could be geared towards the cluster/collegiate level while others wanted to focus on more systemic work together.

Furthermore, there was some desire to work with other colleagues/agencies out with school but that there is need for these groups to organise/plan better in regard to their attendance at Multi-Agency Action Planning (particularly Health/Social Work).

“Working with other health colleagues and having attendance at meetings has been tricky...”

### Specific feedback to EPS: - 5% (N=6)

Among the responses relating to ways to be more effective, there were 6 responses from schools which were aimed directly at ways the EPS could be improved. These responses suggested the following:

- Considering deprivation weighting for allocating time for visits
- Flexibility in time allocation model to take account of recent role increases
- Consistency of which EP is involved in the school
- Collegiate/buddying up small schools
- One school would like more knowledge coming from an experienced EP
- Consideration for whole day visits may enable more systemic work

### YP views/involvement in meetings – 2% (N=2)

Two responses suggested that there needs to be more pupil input into the work between schools and the EPS.

“YP views/involvement in meetings?”

“...thinking more about pupils’ voice and how we include them more fully.”

### Positive comments/no suggestion:

Among the responses in ways to make the work more effective, some schools contributed some positive remarks about the EPS or had no suggestions of ways to improve.

“Meetings are really effective”

“...excellent at working with our classes introducing specific work and also demonstrating to teachers how this would present itself.”

“HT considers the whole EPS service is currently being stretched – EP and HT acknowledged that time allocation for monthly school visits has been met this year + some additional sessions”

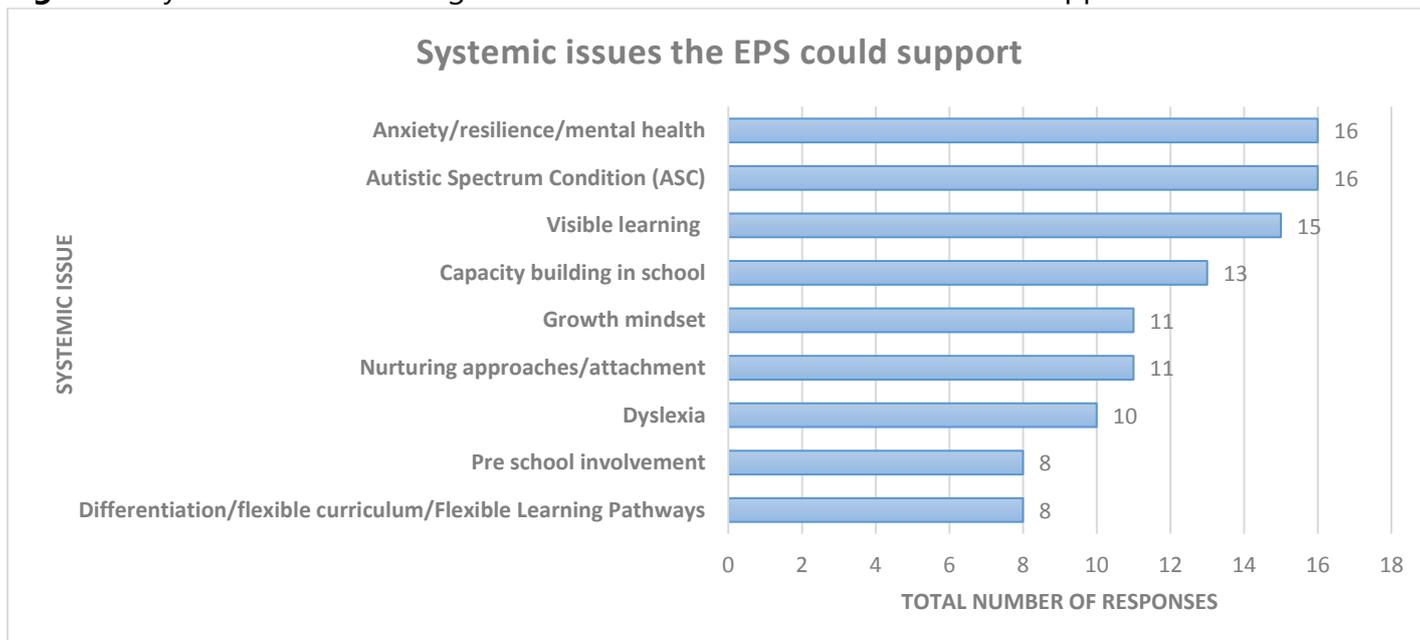
“10 - can’t be more effective”

#### Q4. Are there any systemic issues emerging from work at the casework level which the EPS can support?

A key function of the EPS is to bring about positive systemic changes to the contexts they operate within, in the hope that work at this level will provide a wider impact for all. As such, discussions around the casework level may help identify commonly occurring issues within the school context that may be more effectively addressed at a wider systemic level.

Due to the wide scope of work that the EPS and school are involved in, a substantial list of specific topics were proposed within the collated review and planning responses (170 suggestions put forward). Analysis identified 37 discreet themes that could potentially be supported by the EPS. Please see **Appendix 1** for the full list of these areas. **Figure 5** displays the top 9 areas of focus (the areas which contained 8 or more responses) proposed by schools. The majority of responses given were related to **specific topics** the EPS could support. However, there were a number of schools who realised the potential for the EPS to focus their support on helping to build more capacity within the schools.

**Figure 5:** Systemic Issues arising from casework level that the EPS could support



The above graph shows that the two top emerging areas for EPS support at the systemic level were **mental health and wellbeing** and support with **Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC)** (N=16 for both of these areas, equating to 9% of total responses). These two areas were followed closely by **Visible Learning** (N=15 – equating to 9% of total responses). It is important to note that within the topic of Visible Learning, 3 schools linked this to Individual Education Plan (IEP) development.

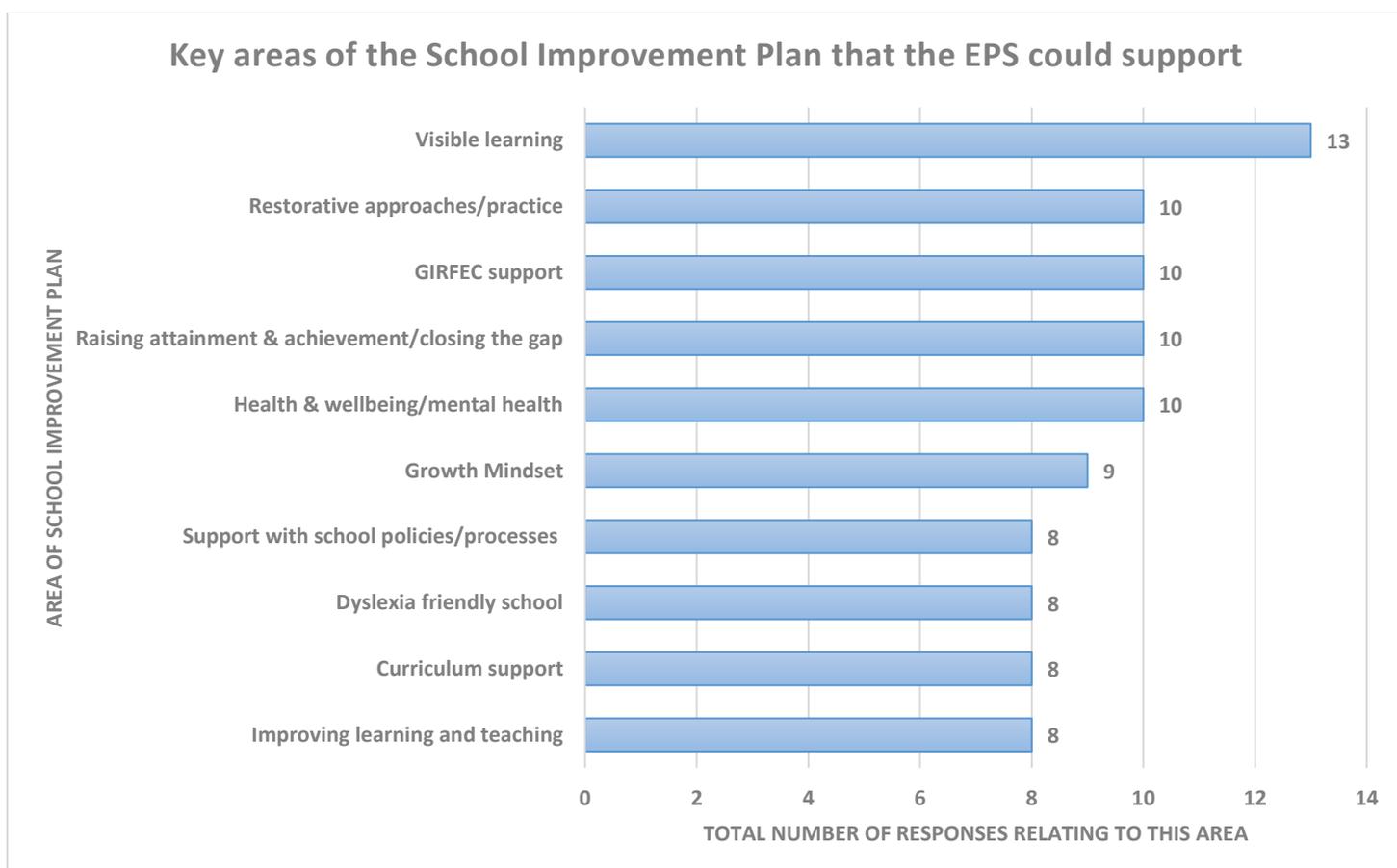
## Q5. Are there any areas of the Improvement Plan that the EPS could support?

Within this question there were a number of schools who stated that they had yet to finalise their School Improvement Plan – 11 schools in total (17% of participating schools). This compares to 9 participating schools in 2015 (10% of participating schools).

As with question 4 looking at systemic issues, there was a wide scope of suggestions put forward as to where the EPS could provide support (N=140 responses). These were grouped into 28 discreet areas – please see **Appendix 2** for the full list of these 28 areas.

**Figure 6** displays the top 10 areas suggested by schools (areas that had 8 or more responses). **Visible learning** was top of this list with 13 participating schools mentioning this (which equates to 9% of the total responses). This was closely followed by **Restorative Approaches/Practice, GIRFEC support, raising attainment and achievement/closing the gap and health and wellbeing/mental health** (N=10 for all of these topics, which each equates to 7% of the total responses).

**Figure 6:** Areas of School Improvement Plan that EPS could support



## Discussion

### Response rate information

**Table 1** below displays the figures for the number of schools participating in the review and planning process. As can be seen table 1, in the current year (2016) there has been a 26% increase from 2014 in the number of schools participating in the review and planning meetings. However, in comparison to the figures for 2015, the current 2016 participation rate dropped by 15%.

**Table 1:** the number of schools completing the review and planning process

Year	No. of participating schools	% of total schools in authority participating
2016	65	38%
2015	91	53%
2014	20	12%

A possible reason for differences in participation rates of schools could be as a consequence of a big drive within the service in 2015 for EPs and schools to complete the review and planning meetings. In this respect, the EPS management team sent out additional reminder emails before and after the completion deadline which helped prompt higher return rates.

In a similar vein, there were further difficulties with the current year (2016) return rate in that some review and planning documents were being returned significantly after the deadline date and even late into the analysis stage. This made carrying out the analysis more difficult.

**Recommendation 1: More emphasis and support in place to both EP's and schools to encourage higher completion rates and keep the completion momentum going.**

Possible solutions include reminder emails of completion deadline to staff as well as information highlighting the importance of engaging in the review and planning process

### Q1. What has gone well in the work together?

From this question 8 themes emerged as areas the EPS and schools felt had gone especially well between their work together. Of these 8 areas, **support and guidance** provided by the EPS arose as the most frequently mentioned aspect that had gone particularly well, with almost a third of all responses relating to this theme.

"HT feels she has not had a need that hasn't been responded to"

Within this theme just under half of these responses made specific reference to the EPS' **informal consultation** process as something valued by schools. This is a promising finding as informal consultation within the Aberdeenshire Consultation model acts as form of early intervention, aiming to support collaborative solution focussed discussions around an aspect within the school requiring some additional guidance (for example to address a particular child's need, explore a classroom issue or assistance with an area of practice). The idea is that support at this early level can help generate new ways of working that may help resolve an issue faced and prevent things escalating.

The ultimate goal of the EPS is to help remove any barriers to learning children and YPs may face. As such it was promising to see that some schools were able to identify specific impact on children/YPs as being a positive outcome of the work together with the EPS (8 schools). Linked to this, a theme of 'capturing pupil's voice' emerged, with 3 schools remarking that this was something that had gone well. Although the number of responses within both these themes were relatively low it is encouraging to see this impact being recorded and hopefully can be built upon further in future work together. It would however, have been beneficial to have more detail within many of the comments as to the evidence of said impact.

In relation to the EPS' key aim of removing barriers to learning, there are 5 core functions of a Psychological Service, as defined by the SEED Review of Provision Education Services in Scotland (Currie Report), which can be used towards eliminating barriers to children/YPs learning. These are:

- Consultation
- Assessment
- Intervention
- Training
- Research

It is reassuring to find that almost all of these were areas identified in some way by participating schools as something that had gone particularly well within the work together with the EPS. As already mentioned **consultation** arose within the theme of 'support and guidance from EPS' but also within relationships and communication. **Assessment** was captured within the 'case work' theme, as too was **intervention**. **Training** emerged within its own stand-alone theme and was valued at various stakeholder levels. It is interesting to note, of the 5 core functions, **research** was one area that was not clearly mentioned within this question.

### *Question 1 Reflections*

It must be noted that within the analysis, it was not always clear from the review and planning documents whether the comments put forward were something that the school or the EP, felt had gone particularly well or whether it was from both sides. For example "setting dates in advance has been useful" – it is not clear whose view this was. This example also helps highlight another difficulty within the analysis process, in that at times it was hard to attribute whether the comment referred to the EPS or the school. A further illustration of this can be seen in one response which just stated "Consistent".

<p><b>Recommendation 2: More clarity within the written review and planning documents needs to be considered in order to help identify more clearly who the comments are directed toward</b></p>
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### *Q2. How effective has our work together been this year? (scale rating question)*

It was reassuring to see that majority of respondents (89%) rated the effectiveness as being 8 or above and no ratings were below a 5. This was a positive shift from last year (2015) in which 82% of respondents rated the effectiveness as 8 or above.

### Q3. How could our work together be more effective?

As already mentioned, when looking at the scale rating question regarding how effective the work together had been, it is important to identify what can be done to improve this effectiveness.

From the analysis of responses, 5 key themes emerged. Almost two-thirds of responses related to the factor of **time**. In relation to time, comments were placed into three main categories – *improved organisation of time*, *better prioritisation of time* or just *more time in general*. Encouragingly, the majority of responses fell into the first two categories and so were more specific and purposeful about how the time could be used more effectively and for what purpose.

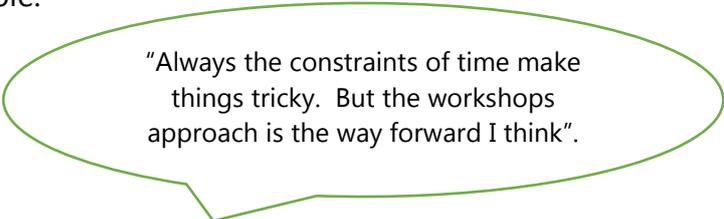
Ideas were put forward that ways of working could be altered to try and make more effective use of the time together. For example, making sure that dates of visits were planned in advance and that there was a clear plan for EPS involvement. Additionally, comments were made regarding prioritisation of EPS time (e.g. prioritising what meetings EPs really needed to attend in order to free up time for other activities they could be involved in).

However, it was noted that a degree of flexibility from both sides needed to be incorporated into their work together. Furthermore, there were a number of schools that mentioned staffing issues within the school as being something which can make things more difficult (e.g. ability to free-up staff to attend meetings). Schools were not in isolation with this problem as mention was also made toward the EPS in regard to the part-time nature of some EPs which can make it tricky to organise their work together with schools as well as the changes in EP staff within the school (due to factors such as maternity leave).

There were 6 responses from schools which were targeted specifically at ways the EPS could be improved. Two of these were aimed towards the allocation model for EPS visits suggesting a deprivation model as well as looking at changes in school roles. Since the May/June 2016 a new allocation model has been implemented so it will be interesting to see what impact this has.

Other ideas for improvement focused on trying to think more smartly about how EPS time could be used. In this regard a suggestion of collegiates and buddying up small schools to access EPs was put forward whilst another school proposed the idea of using whole day visits so that more systemic work could take place. Two other responses related to EP staffing; one in relation to the desire for consistency of EP within the school while the other wanting a more experienced EP involved in the school.

Although overall within this question, there were many responses which indicated schools were facing significant barriers (e.g. time or staffing) within their work together with the EPS, it was promising to see that many of these responses were solution focussed, positing possible solutions these barriers. For example:



"Always the constraints of time make things tricky. But the workshops approach is the way forward I think".

Other suggestions included considering finding different ways to work the time used, for example whole day visits, providing colligate training/support, adding more informal consultation time space within a visit and enabling more staff to access it – perhaps using lunch times or changing the format of visits to help facilitate this.

### *Question 3 reflections*

With the question of effectiveness, it was not always very clear whether the responses were aimed at things the EPS could do to improve or whether it was something the schools needed to work on, or something they both needed to do together. Examples of this included “Discussion re following through agreed actions from planning meetings”. Therefore greater clarity in the write up of the review and planning documents are needed.

- Recommendation 3:      Ensure that any suggestions put forward in the review & planning with schools is reflected upon and actioned if appropriate in future working engagement together to ensure more effective working**
- Recommendation 4:      Particular attention should be paid to effective use of EPS time within the school, ensuring that work is prioritised appropriately**
- Recommendation 5:      Greater clarity within the recording of comments within the review & planning documents as to who’s responsibility the suggested improvement rests**

### *Q4. Are there any systemic issues emerging from work at the casework level which the EPS can support?*

Given the scope of the different activities that schools and EPS are involved in, it was not surprising that there was a wide variety of systemic issues suggested as to where the EPS could help support schools. Reassuringly, some of the top areas suggested by schools matched the key Aberdeenshire EPS development plan and service priorities. For example, improving mental health and wellbeing, using Visible Learning, universal support for all (providing nurturing, dyslexia and ASC friendly schools) and improving learning in the early years.

Of particular note, it was interesting to find that the top responses in 2016 were very similar to those given in the review and planning process last year (2015). There was however one noteworthy difference, in that the top systemic issue mentioned in 2016, that of Visible Learning, has emerged more strongly (15 responses in total) within the current years’ (2016) review and planning discussions than in 2015 (where there were only 6 mentions made, placing it 8<sup>th</sup> in the top list that year).

When coupled with the fact that overall there were less participating schools in the 2016 review and planning process than in 2015, it helps highlight the growing awareness and importance placed on the Visible Learning approach within Aberdeenshire schools. This is encouraging to see, as there has been considerable focus placed on Visible Learning over the last 2 years with the Aberdeenshire EPS development plan and activities. The growing number of discussions within the review and planning process in 2016 perhaps provides some evidence for the impact that this drive within the Aberdeenshire EPS to promote Visible Learning has had.

#### Question 4 reflections

As already mentioned, there were a wide range of systemic issues put forward that could be supported by the EPS however this made analysis more difficult when trying to reduce these into more manageable and informative themes. It could be beneficial to trial a new way to record responses to this question in the 2017 review and planning process. For example, within the review and planning document the recording could be more clearly aligned with the service priorities.

Additionally, within the recorded responses within the review and planning documents, it was not always very clear what was being said in the responses, particularly when there was specific terminology that would be unique to the school or cluster.

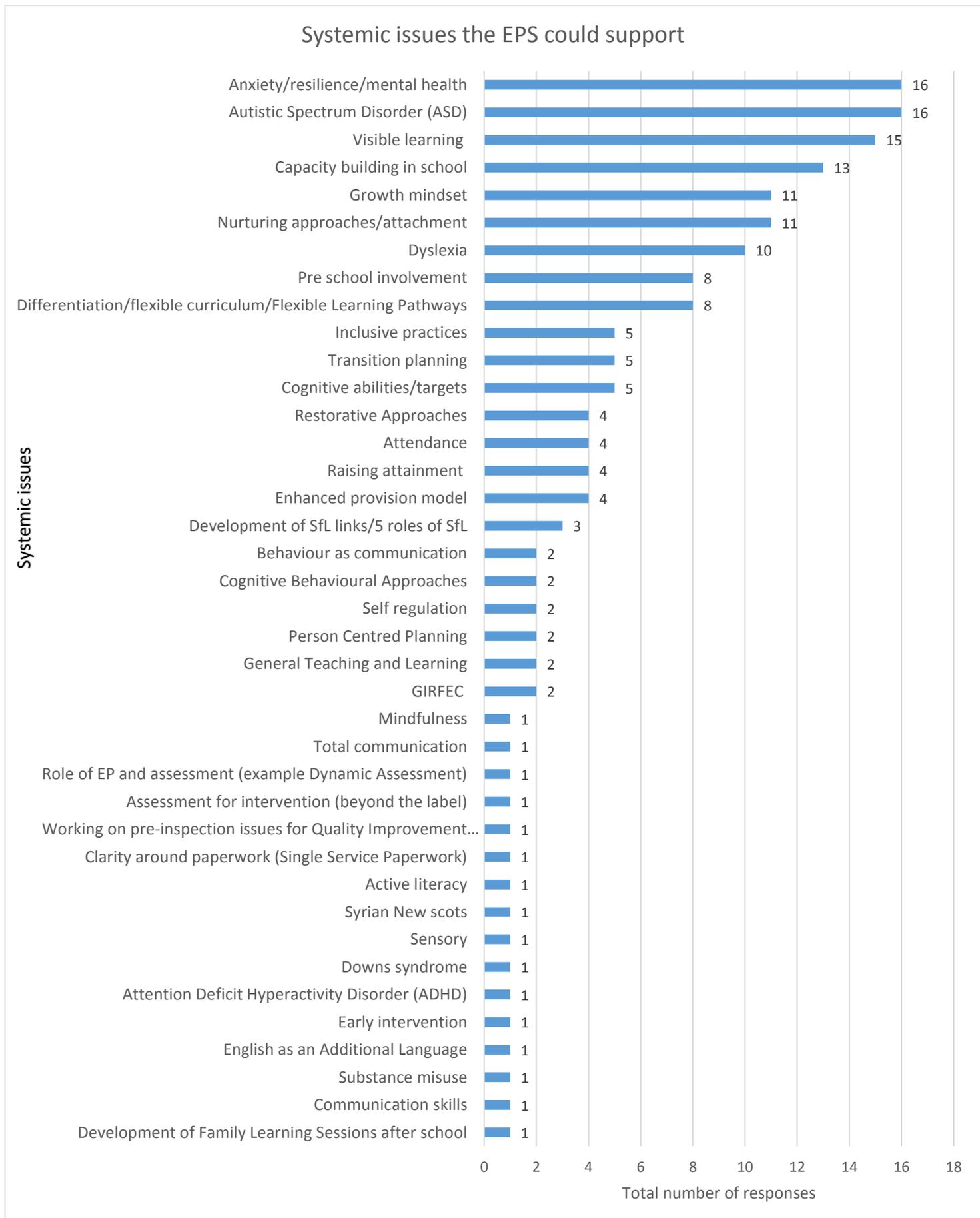
**Recommendation 6: Trial a new way of recording responses to question 4 in the 2017 review and planning process whereby recording could be more clearly aligned with the service priorities**

**Recommendation 7: Discussions had within the EPS, perhaps at a Full Service Team meeting, highlighting the importance of recording clearly the dialogs had with schools within the review and planning process so that others looking at the document (such as a new EP to the school) could easily understand any information recorded within the document.**

#### Recommendations

1. More emphasis and support in place to both EP's and schools to encourage higher completion rates of the review and planning process and keep the completion momentum going.
2. More clarity within the written review and planning documents needs to be considered in order to help identify more clearly who the comments are attributed toward
3. Ensure that any suggestions put forward in the review & planning with schools is reflected upon and actioned if appropriate in future working engagement together to ensure more effective working
4. Particular attention should be paid to effective use of EPS time within the school, ensuring that work is prioritised appropriately
5. Greater clarity within the recording of comments within the review & planning documents as to who's responsibility the suggested improvement rests
6. Trial a new way of recording responses to question 4 in the 2017 review and planning process whereby recording could be more clearly aligned with the service priorities
7. Discussions had within the EPS, perhaps at a Full Service Team meeting, highlighting the importance of recording clearly the dialogues had with schools within the review and planning process so that others looking at the document (such as a new EP to the school) could easily understand any information recorded within the document.

**Appendix 1:** Question 4 – the full list of systemic issues emerging from work at the casework level which the EPS could support



**Appendix 2: Question 5 – the full list of areas within the schools’ Improvement Plan that the EPS could support**

