

Voice Is Not Enough

May 2026



Today

- recognition of your journey so far
- thinking about impact
- so what? What's next?

Where will you be in the next 10 years?



Renfrewshire's Nurturing Relationships Approach

Commendable progress

Well-thought out strategic approach – not reliant on nurture groups but on whole school approaches

Accreditation framework – who doesn't like a certificate?



Renfrewshire's Nurturing Relationships Approach

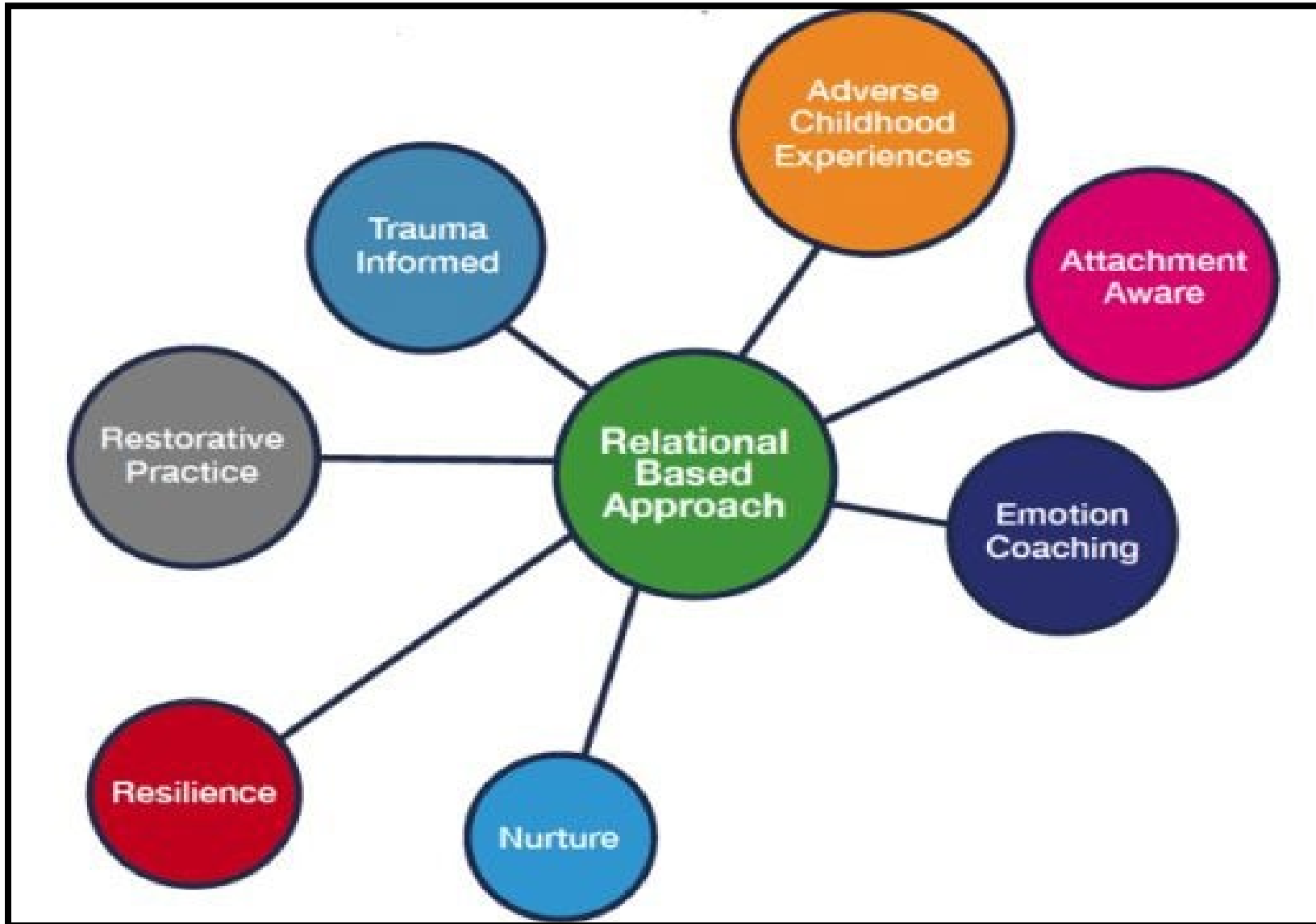
67 Jade - level 1 awards

35 Ruby - level 2 awards

15 Amethyst - level 3 awards

10 Gold - level 4 awards





Centrality of children's voices

- Clear that the voices of your young people are front and centre
- Wider achievement given a high priority



However comma ... how nurturing are we really?

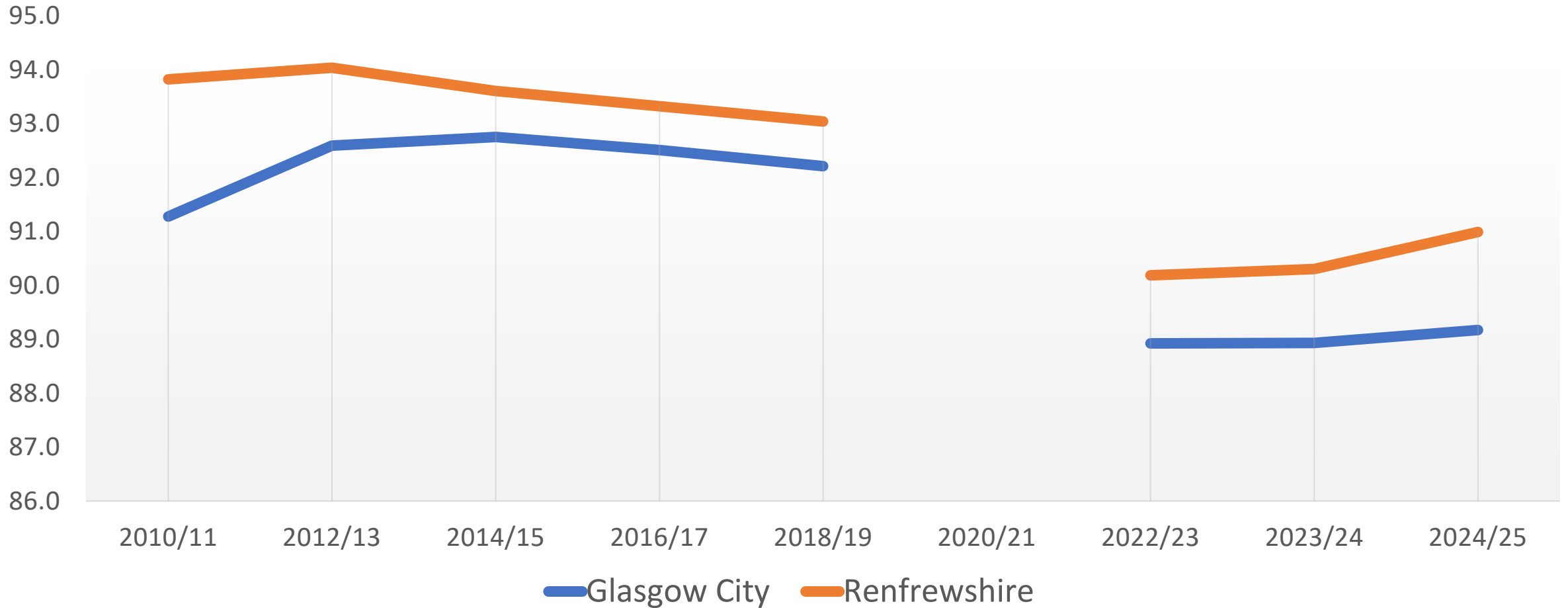
- In the staffroom and classroom/playroom
- In the playground
- In how we respond to parents who appear aggressive
- In the design of the curriculum
- In our learning and teaching

Remember – this is about raising the bar not lowering it



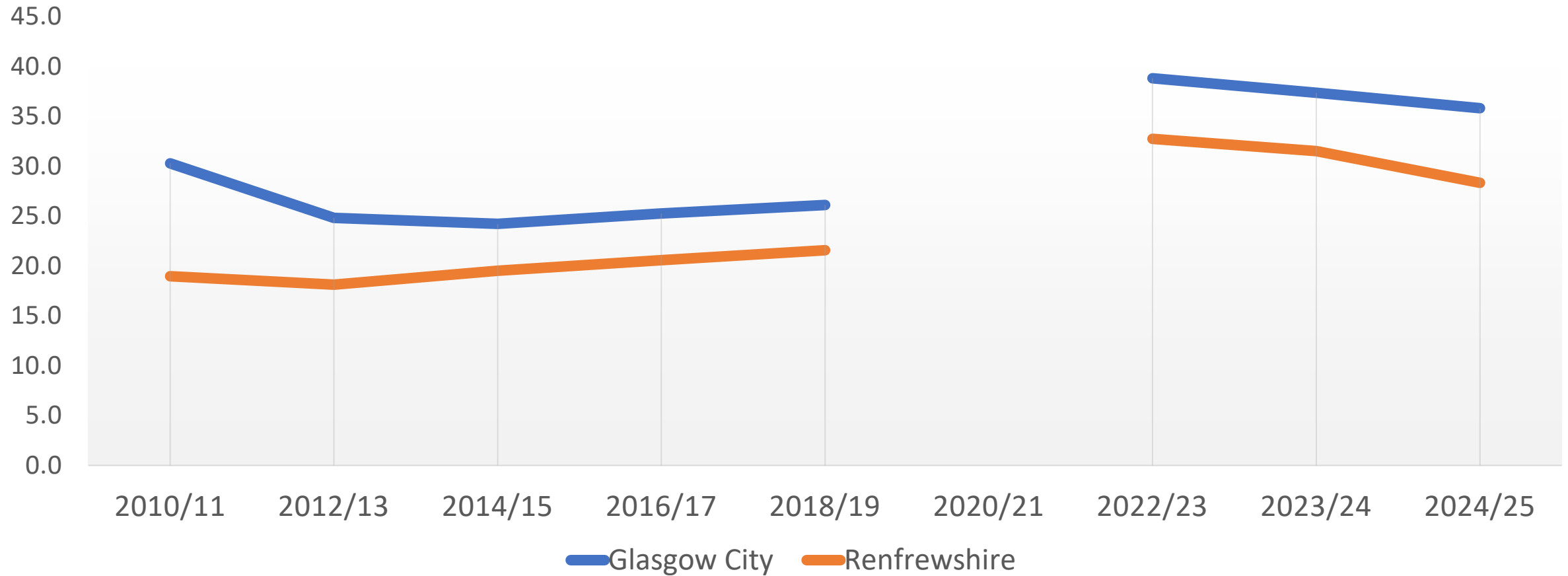
So, have we raised the bar?

Overall attendance



Looking through a different lens

% of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)



Research on attendance

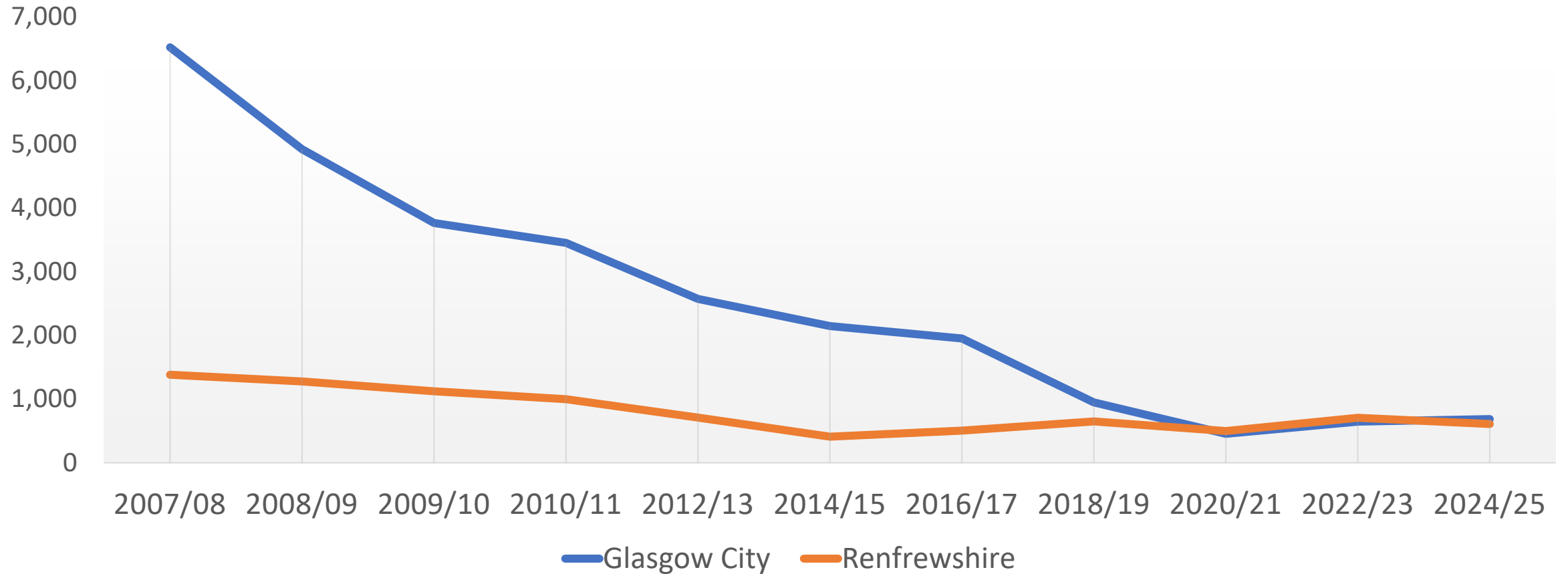
There is a shift emerging in how pupils relate to school - attendance is no longer assumed, but increasingly a daily decision for children shaped by stress, disengagement and competing pressures. This reframes the challenge: improving attendance is not only about getting pupils through the gate, but ensuring school is somewhere they feel able - and want - to be.

Listening to, and learning from, young people in the attendance crisis, Impetus Sep 2025



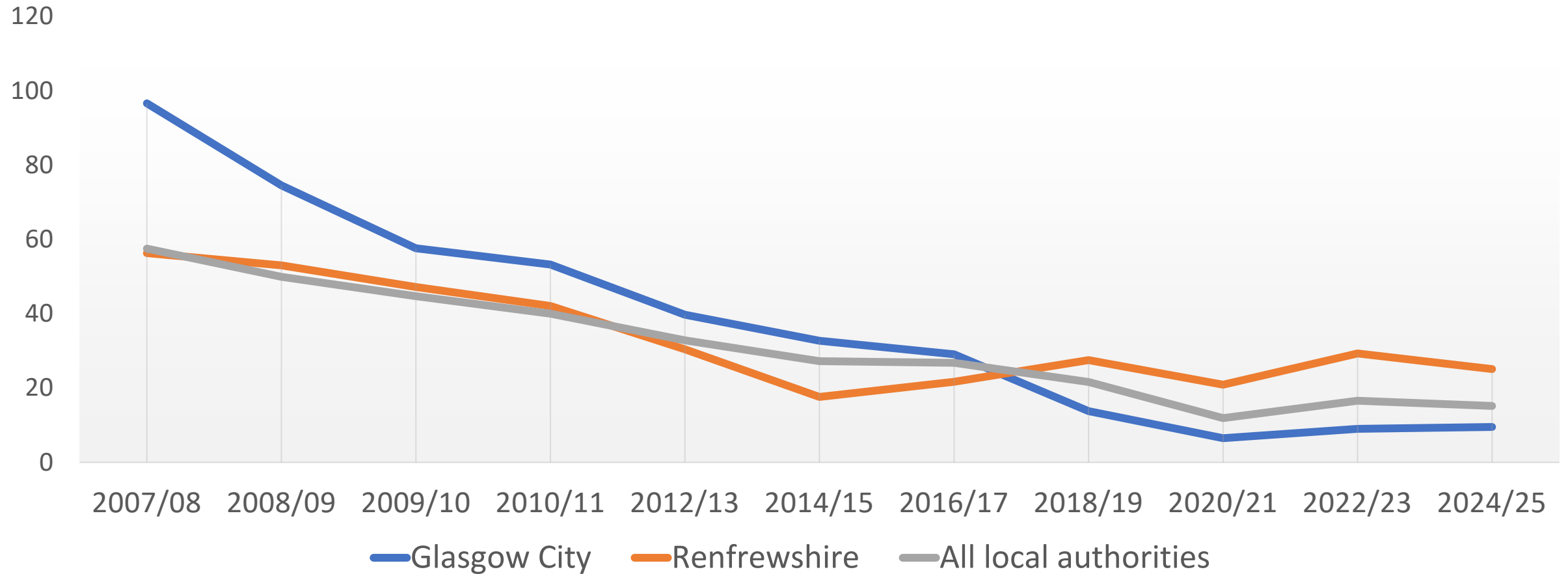
So, have we raised the bar?

Exclusion incidents

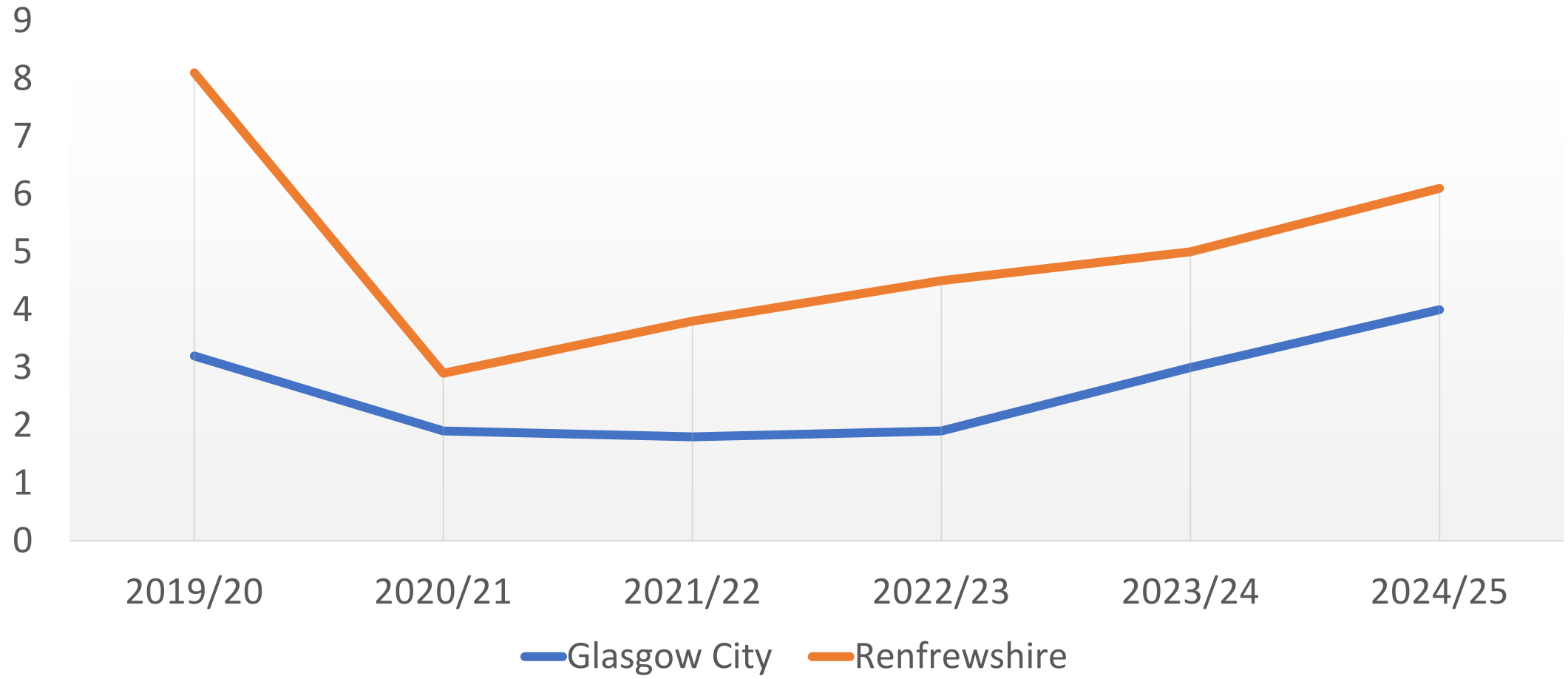


Looking more closely

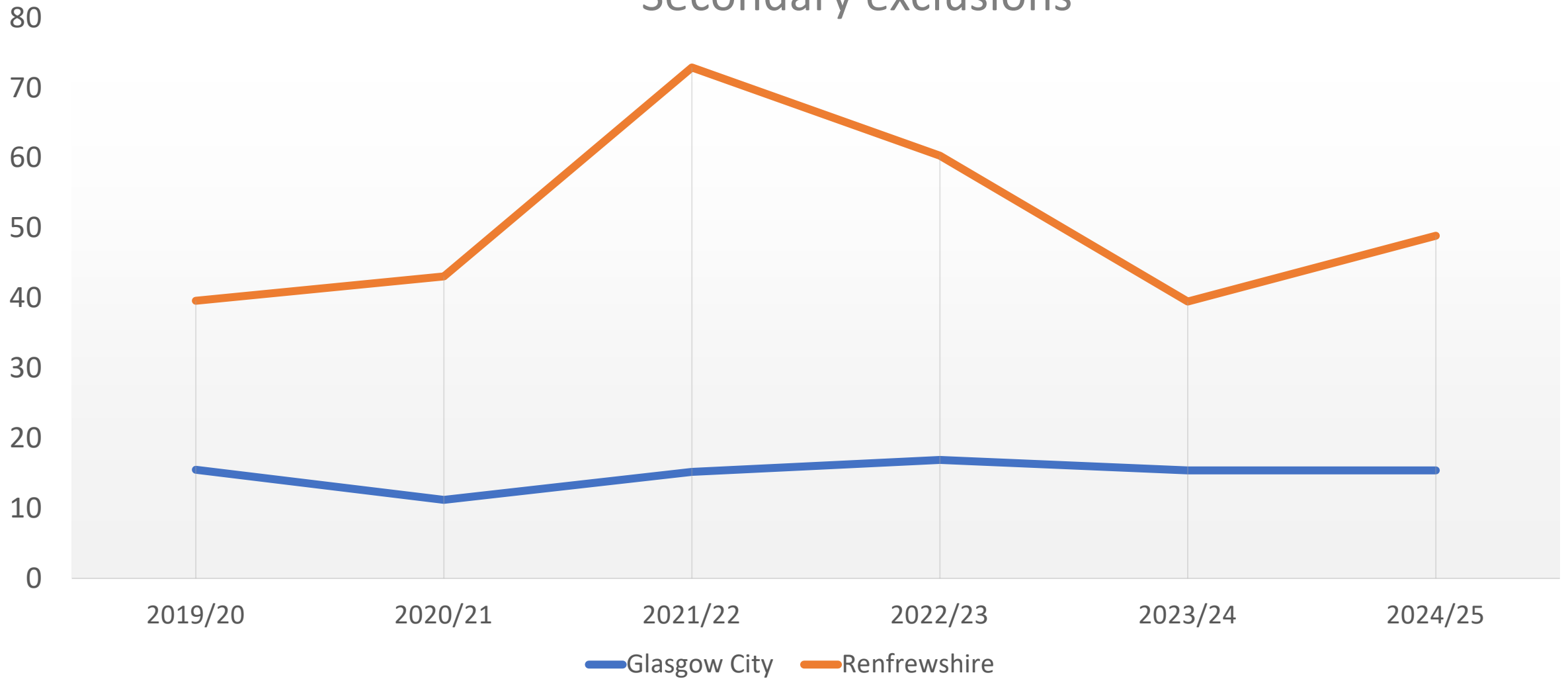
Exclusion incidents rate per 1000



Primary exclusions



Secondary exclusions



So what? Nothing surprising in there – is there?

Let's go back to 'how nurturing are we?'

- In the staffroom and classroom/playroom
- In the playground
- In how we respond to parents who appear aggressive
- In the design of the curriculum
- In our learning and teaching



This is where we need to build brave leadership

- High expectations are essential – if relational practice is to work then those expectations need to be kept high but this applies to staff too
- Sometimes this will feel uncomfortable
- Leaders need to model and promote consistency

Remember consistency doesn't mean everyone doing in the same thing



Sustainable School Leadership

“What drains leaders in Scotland?”

Staffing issues topped the list, followed by poor work-life balance and the escalating challenges of special educational needs and inclusion. Behaviour challenges ranked higher in Scotland than elsewhere, reflecting the intensity of what headteachers described as an increasingly dysregulated post-COVID student population.”

University of Nottingham 2026



So, what's driving the dysregulation?

- Is it really all post-COVID driven?
- Is it dysregulation of adults as well as young people?
- What steps can we take to address?



Sustainable School Leadership

“Yet despite these pressures, what sustains leaders remains powerfully relational and altruistic. Relationships with students, seeing young people succeed and grow, and collaborating with colleagues within school were the clear top factors.

The moral purpose that drew people to teaching still keeps them going, even when everything else threatens to grind them down.”

University of Nottingham 2026



Don't lose sight of why we are here

- Schools cannot expect to do this on their own
- Do we have the right blend of staff in our schools?
- Should we be always asking teachers to extend their skill set?
- Use third sector as a bridge between you and the community



My three suggestions ...

- Rights of the Child alongside the importance of a Trusted Adult
- Relentless focus on learning and teaching and the curriculum
- Building partnerships with community organisations



And finally ...

- If this was easy we would have done it years ago
- Be relentless and diligent
- Don't forget this is also about humility and courage
- And never forget the immense privilege we have to teach other people's children

