East Lothian Council

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
EDUCATION & CHILDRENS SERVICES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 18 MARCH, 10:00am
VIA HYBRID SYSTEM

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Committee Members Present:
Councillor Dugdale – Convener
Councillor Findlay (remote)
Councillor Gilbert (remote)
Councillor Hampshire
Councillor McFarlane
Councillor McIntosh (remote) – left after item 3
Councillor Ritchie (remote)
Councillor Yorkston
Mr S Gilmour-Jack
Reverend Sheridan (remote)

Council Officials Present:
Ms L Brown - Executive Director of Education and Children's Services (remote)
Ms N McDowell - Head of Education
Ms H Barnett – Head of Corporate Support
Ms J Boyle – Quality Improvement Manager for Equity and Inclusion
Ms A Cameron – Service Manager – Early Years and Childcare (remote)
Ms B Skirrow - Principal Officer (Education Service) (remote)
Ms J Allen - Communications Adviser (remote)
Mr N Trussler – Quality Improvement Officer, Education
Ms A Harrison – Principal Educational Psychologist
Ms L Byrne – Head of Children's Services
Ms K Haspolat – Quality Improvement Officer, Education
Ms L Ayton – Principal Officer, Equity & Inclusion
Mr A Stewart – Quality Improvement Officer
Mr B Moffat – Service Manager, Transport & Waste
Ms D Murray – Transport Officer

Teachers Present:
Mr G Clark – Head Teacher, Preston Lodge High School
Ms Z Diggle – Head Teacher, Wallyford Primary School

Clerk:
Ms M Scott
Ms E Barclay

Other Elected Members present:
N/A

Apologies:
Councillor Menzies

Councillor Trotter
Councillor Bennett
Mr R Lesso

Declarations of Interest:
None

Prior to the commencement of business, the Clerk advised that the meeting was being held using the Council's hybrid system and that the meeting would be recorded and live streamed; and that it would be made available via the Council's website as a webcast, in order to allow public access to the democratic process in East Lothian. She stated that the Council is the data controller under the Data Protection Act 2018; that data collected as part of the recording would be retained in accordance with the Council's policy on record retention; and that the webcast of the meeting would be publicly available for up to six months from the date of the meeting.

The Clerk recorded attendance of committee members by roll call.

Councillor Dugdale welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee, particularly welcoming Head Teachers Gavin Clark – Preston Lodge High School and Zena Diggle – Wallyford Primary School. Councillor Dugdale commented on the sad passing of former Head Teacher of Dunbar Primary School, Helen Gillanders who was much loved and appreciated by everyone in the community and gave her thoughts to her family and everyone in the Dunbar community who had been affected by the sad loss.

Councillor Dugdale granted a request from Lindsey Byrne to move agenda item 6 (Fostering in East Lothian) to item 2 on the agenda to allow her to leave the meeting early as she was needed for other commitments.

1.   MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON 19 NOVEMBER 2024

The minutes of the Education Committee meeting of 19 November 2024 were approved as an accurate record. Councillor Ritchie asked for her attendance to be added to the minute. Councillor Dugdale had brought this to the clerk's attention prior to the meeting and this had already been amended.

2.   FOSTERING IN EAST LOTHIAN

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to provide an update to Committee about fostering in East Lothian.

Ms Lindsey Byrne, Head of Children's Services reported East Lothian's commitment to keeping The Promise and their strategic priority continued to be keeping children and young people within their families wherever possible. She highlighted there was a consistent trend of fewer children requiring care out with their family and staff continued to prioritise working alongside families to build supportive networks and plans to build resilience and safety but when it was not safe for children to remain at home the department were committed to exploring all family options and have seen an increase in the number of kinship care arrangements. Ms Byrne noted when no family options are available the hope is children can live with one of East Lothian's skilled and committed foster carers for as long as they need to but as Members

would see in the report foster carer numbers had been decreasing over the last five years due to people retiring and receiving fewer inquiries.

She reported it had been one year since Cabinet approved the uplift to foster carer fees and while it was too early to see the full impact of this, she was cautiously optimistic about an increase in inquiries and foster carers had really welcomed the increase in fee and due to word of mouth within the community there had been foster carers seeking to move their registration to East Lothian which is great news for local children and indeed the Council.

Ms Byrne highlighted the two key areas from the report; the need to attract more carers who want to care for teenagers and young people who are seeking asylum in East Lothian. She noted this type of care required a particular skill set and the team would like to hear from those who would like to explore what they could offer. She also drew Members attention to the key priorities for the year which included broadening the social media presence to improve the involvement from foster carers and care experienced young people in all recruitment processes.

Ms Byrne shared her gratitude to the fostering community and thanked them for all they do for the children and young people within East Lothian to give them the best childhoods, often in challenging circumstances.

Councillor Hampshire asked if it would be possible to produce a video detailing successful fostering stories from current foster carers and young people to give others the confidence to also become cares. Ms Byrne confirmed they have used a video for recruitment before, but it is need of updating so she will feed back to the coms team about making a new video.

Responding to a question from Councillor Findlay, Ms Byrne stated since the fee increase East Lothian now compared favourably to other local authorities, but it was a moving feast, and other local authorities would continue to look at the market and increase their rates accordingly. She added that as East Lothian does not have the same budget as larger local authorities to market fostering however it holds its own in a busy market due to local people wanting to foster in the area due to the reputation and support, they receive.

Councillor McIntosh asked how much work was being done around what the impact is of house prices, both to buy and rent, on foster carers and how that was affecting their availability to foster. Ms Byrne explained the team do receive enquiries from people who do not have sufficient space within their home, as the minimum requirement would be one extra bedroom. She added that the Children's Services department are not able to help families move to larger properties.

Responding to questions from Councillor Dugdale, Ms Byrne stated to be a successful foster carer you really have to love children, have patience, kindness and tolerance and be ready to take each day at a time. She added foster carers have a generosity of spirit and a really special quality which allows for the most amazing stories of success. Ms Byrne encouraged anyone who is interested in fostering to call the team for more information. She also asked Members to share any posts on social media regarding recruitment of foster carers and to speak with people in the community if they get the opportunity.

Councillor Hampshire welcomed the report and the work being done to promote fostering in East Lothian. He suggested the use of community centres with actual foster carers talking about their experiences to the public as opposed to a

professional and noted he was really pleased with where things were going within East Lothian.

Councillor McIntosh thanked the entire social work team and all foster cares for their hard work. She highlighted the positive use of language and attention to detail from The Promise within the report.

Councillor Dugdale echoed the comments of other Members adding she could see the challenge the team faced but was hopeful to get new fosters carers within East Lothian to enable young people to stay within their communities.

Decision
The agreed to:
  i)   Note the current position in relation to recruitment and the early indications of increased enquiries.
  ii) Note the action Elected Members can take to support foster care recruitment in East Lothian.

3.   ATTENDANCE REPORT

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to update the Committee on work to support the school attendance of children and young people and progress towards closing gaps in attendance figures for vulnerable learners.

Ms Jennifer Boyle, Quality Improvement Manager for Equity and Inclusion reported the aspiration was for all children and young people to benefit from a high-quality education which recognises and develops their unique talents and provides them with the foundations required for a happy adult life. She explained at national level and particularly since the pandemic there had been concern about reduced levels of school attendance, particularly from vulnerable groups of children such as having additional support needs, being impacted by poverty or with care experience. Ms Boyle provided Members with information on how effective use of data, education support officers, the Raising Attainment Strategy and the educational psychology team all linked together to focus on the barriers to attendance. She highlighted that reduced school attendance was recognised as an additional support need and this had been reflected in the revised approach to ASN funding which was approved by Committee in November and now the Child Planning Framework Locality Teams were now fully embedded to provide schools with solutions orientated multi-agency forums to refer children and young people with unmet wellbeing needs so creative supports can be identified as well as referrals to the newly established Equity and Inclusion Education Outreach Service. Ms Boyle drew Members attention to the comparable data which included an increase in attendance for all learners and an increase of 2.8 percentage points for those with additional support needs, 2.7 percentage points for those entitled to free school meals, 1.1 percentage points for those living in quintile 1 and 4.8 percentage points for those with care experience and highlighted the percentage of persistent absentees was below the national average. She provided an update on the impact of the Education Outreach Service to date which showed the service had supported 79 national qualifications to be achieved for young people and concluded by making Members aware the national context of challenges to school attendance were mirrored in East Lothian and the department were attuned to this and the reasons for data informed approaches and partnership working together with a tenacity to improve outcomes for all had resulted in a range of impactful interventions to support attendance and educational outcomes for children and young people.

Councillor Hampshire asked for further information about the data used to improve attendance. Ms Boyle explained every month an equity and inclusion tracker was prepared by the team which provides live school data about their overall attendance and hones in on particular groups of young people so schools can easily identify those children with vulnerabilities so they can look at how their percentages compare with other schools in their ASG to think about how those percentages become numbers of children and then how those numbers become individuals and we start to talk about individuals. She added those conversations were supported by the Link Education Support Officer who has a key role in meeting with schools on a regular basis.

Councillor McFarlane asked how approaches to GIRFEC supported attendance. Ms Boyle explained low school attendance can be a symptom of an unmet need therefore the attendance policy is used to help support approaches to GIRFEC that gives a consistent approach to tracking and monitoring so if an individual child or young person's attendance has fallen below a certain level, there are various interventions that could be put in place to help them. She added that Child Plans had been revised to have attendance front and centre so schools can reflect on attendance and look at what barriers that child may be facing.

Responding to a question from Councillor Gilbert, Ms Boyle confirmed that schools work closely with the SEEMIS team to record all different absence cases then the Education Support Officers can look at this data to find out the best way to support pupils. She stated work was also being done on the use of precise codes to record attendance.

Councillor Ritchie asked how the impact of the Outreach Service would be tracked and fed back so we can evaluate how impactful it is. Ms Boyle explained the new Outreach Service was funded through the Scottish Attainment Challenge which is given to all local authorities therefore we want to be tracking the efficacy of that service. She was very clear that the Outreach Service was not a school but instead works in partnership with schools, with all young people referred into the service being given a smart target so the service can support that, and that framework would then be used to evaluate the impact of that support by seeing if the smart target had been achieved at the end of that period. Ms Boyle stated the service had been running for around six months and was therefore still in development, but data would start being gathered shortly to inform and develop the service as it continues.

Responding to questions from Councillor McIntosh, Ms Boyle confirmed the codes used to record attendance were provided by the Scottish Government and the guidance currently provided is children who are unable to attend school due to anxiety should be marked as sickness with educational provision. She explained there were concerns regarding the language used by the Scottish Government which has now been amended from "refusal to attend" to "adaptable timetable flexible" to mirror the fact that if children are suffering from anxiety something more bespoke needs to be done for them. Ms Boyle confirmed that although the Scottish Government provide the codes to be used, it is down to the school to allocate the codes to individual children. She was also happy to provide a breakdown of the number of children being allocated a code 9 and the effect that was having on attendance figures.

Councillor McIntosh also asked what educational provision was being given to the 0.6% of persistent absentees as opposed to the focus being on getting them back to school and were schools maximising the use of eSgoil and iSgoil platforms for these learners. Ms Boyle explained the range of supports provided to young people was

huge and through the new locality teams additional tracking would be done on the range of supports that are on offer. She added that as children's lives and needs are dynamic so the planning to support them also must be dynamic and induvial to each child. Ms Boyle confirmed the online Scottish Government platforms were routinely promoted within schools but agreed more could be done to promote these further within child planning teams and from locality teams.

Responding to a question from Councillor Findlay, Ms Boyle confirmed she was able to break down the table on page 21 to be ward and school specific and provide this to Members.

Councillor Dugdale asked how the Education Outreach Service was funded and the sustainability of this service. Ms Boyle stated the service was funded through the Scottish Attainment Challenge, in particular the funding stream that comes through that is the Strategic Equity Fund which gives local authorities an increasing amount of funding which ends in 2026. She added the Education Outreach Service provides a Depute Head Teacher and ten newly created Education Outreach Officers.

Councillor Hampshire stated there are many reasons why schools face issues regarding attendance, including Covid and the effect it had on children in many different ways as well as medical reasons for children not being able to attend. He added there is however an attitude towards attendance from the child themselves or parents thinking attendance at school every day was not important, and this is something that needs to continually be highlighted to them. Councillor Hampshire was pleased with the work being done to analyse the different reasons why children are not attending school and was hopeful attendance figures could be increased through this hard work being completed by staff.

Councillor Yorkston thanked staff for their hard work and was pleased to see figures increasing across all identified areas. He noted that even children attending school for 90% of the time were still missing a significant amount of time and we should be striving for a higher attendance percentage. Councillor Yorkston added he found the children who are entitled to free school meals who are not attending school particularly worrying as they are not receiving this. He also highlighted the work of the Pennypit in Prestonpans who try and make sure those children are receiving a meal during the summer holidays.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms Boyle for the report and highlighted the different reasons for attendance being affected such as the pandemic, anxiety and poverty and stated within the report how many approaches have been developed to help children and young people attend and achieve in school. She also made Members aware that the attendance policy had been commended by Education Scotland and felt reassured by the range of work and the effort and impact it was having on attendance across East Lothian.

Decision
The Committee agreed to:
i.   Note the initiatives in place to support children and young people to attend school and the impact of this work.

4.   EDUCATION SCOTLAND INSPECTION OF PRESTON LODGE HIGH SCHOOL

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to report to Committee on the outcomes of the Education Scotland inspection of Preston Lodge High School.

Ms Karen Haspolat, Quality Improvement Officer for Education noted the inspection team used the How Good Is Our School 4? (HGIOS4?) quality indicators for primary inspections to evaluate the quality of provision at Preston Lodge High School.

At the end of the inspection process, the outcomes were published in a short letter to parents and carers outlining the key strengths and areas for improvement. The letter provided a statement of the confidence the inspectors have in the school's capacity to improve the quality of its own work which is published along with the summary of inspection findings (SIF). The SIF is a professional report and summarises the findings from all the evidence gathered during the inspection. This document is intended to be used by staff in progressing school improvement. As a result of inspection findings the inspectors agreed that the school needs additional support and more time to make necessary improvements which means inspectors would return to carry out a further inspection of the school within one year of the publication of the letter.

Ms Haspolat reported the summary of inspection findings could be found within the report and highlighted Preston Lodge High School secured gradings of 3 or satisfactory for quality indicators Learning, Teaching and Assessment and Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion and secured gradings of 2 or weak for quality indicators Leadership of Change and Raising Attainment and Achievement.

Ms Haspolat confirmed she would continue to work closely with the Head Teacher and staff to provide professional advice and support and challenge in the areas for improvement.

Councillor Yorkston asked if someone could specify what areas of attainment the inspectors focused on and how confident they are that the school will make necessary improvements in this specific strand of the attainment for the return visit by Education Scotland. Mr Gavin Clark, Head Teacher – Preston Lodge High School reported he was very confident on the school's ability to achieve this as progress had already been made. He provided an update on work that had been undertaken with S1-3 pupils and the senior school pupils to improve attainment and he would expect significant progress to be made by 2026.

Responding to a second question from Councillor Yorkston, Mr Clark explained the school was working closely with Education Scotland and East Lothian Council to develop homerooms after the initial inception following the RAAC issues within the school. He added early on in the process significant benefits were noted in terms of the wellbeing of young people, benefits to attendance and attainment therefore after careful consultation the decision to strategically maintain homerooms with the school currently evaluating the first year of their use. Mr Clark stated the school were about to consult parents and students on making adjustments to homerooms which he thinks will be a positive way forward and in line with education reform agendas in Scotland in terms of project-based learning.

Councillor Gilbert asked for more information on what the leadership of change involves and the plan to improve this going forward. Mr Clark stated that quality indicator related to the leadership within the school as a whole, but he took full responsibility for the grade given as it was down to him to ensure things were running smoothly. He added he believes he had shown strong leadership over the

operational issues of RAAC but there were aspects of the school's approach meriting improvement which had been identified prior to inspection that will continue to worked on. Mr Clark thanked the Education team for their support and challenge since the inspection and highlighted he was now more aligned with regular conversations with the Education team to work on specific improvements as well as a brand new improvement plan which has been approved and addresses all areas for improvement.

Responding to questions from Councillor Ritchie, Mr Clark provided Members with some of the key changes that had been made to the school improvement plan and how they would be assessed and reported back to the wider school community as well as to the Council.

Councillor Dugdale asked for more information about young people receiving entitlements and progress within the school to ensure this. Mr Clark explained homerooms were a profound change in the setup of the S1 curriculum and staff have worked hard in the strategic implementation of them for this academic session. He added that the curriculum model brought in for this year provides more literacy and numeracy and to demonstrate how this is covered in all curricular areas the homeroom Principal Teacher had been working closely with subject Principal Teachers to map this out in a clearer fashion. Mr Clark made Members aware that S1-3 pupils do receive their entitlements but there is more the school can do to demonstrate how this is done.

Councillor Yorkston noted his close connection to the school and highlighted some of the positives from the inspection report. He stated in the recent past Preston Lodge had always been innovative in its outlook to work with other agencies and educationalists and the school itself had significant support within the community, including Friends of Preston Lodge and the parent council. Councillor Yorkston added this support will be crucial for all staff in the school as they move forward for the future success of the school, and he was very optimistic on how things would develop at Preston Lodge in the coming months and years whilst being supported by the Council officers.

Councillor Ritchie stated Preston Lodge was a special school that is really important in its community, and she was confident the areas of improvement would be taken seriously as she knew how seriously the school takes the education of young people in their area that they cover. She highlighted the parts of the report that should be celebrated, particularly around relationships between staff and pupils and the culture of the school. Councillor Ritchie felt assured the school would get to where it needs to be and acknowledged the work that goes on every day within Preston Lodge to meet the needs of its young people.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms Haspolat for her report, and she felt confident after questions and answers today that a lot of work was already underway within the school to make improvements, and she hoped that would be recognised in the follow up inspection. She also thanked Mr Clark for attending the Committee today and to Ms Haspolat for her ongoing support and challenge to the school.

Decision
The Committee agreed to:
  i.   Note the content of the Education Scotland letter (Appendix 1).
  ii.   Note the content of the Summary of Inspection Findings for the School (SIF) (Appendix 2).

iii. Note that as a result of the inspection findings, Education Scotland will make a follow-up visit in connection with this inspection within 12 months of publication of the inspection report to allow more time for the school to make necessary improvements.

iv. Note the key strengths identified by the Inspection Team and progress made since the inspection.

5. **EDUCATION SCOTLAND INSPECTION REPORT OF YESTER PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY CLASS**

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to report to Committee on the outcomes of the Education Scotland inspection of Yester Primary School and Nursery Class.

Mr Nick Trussler, Quality Improvement Officer for Education noted the inspection team used the How Good Is Our School 4? (HGIOS? 4) quality indicators for primary inspections and How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare (HGIOELC?) quality indicators for nursery class inspections to evaluate the quality of provision at Yester Primary School and Nursery.

At the end of the inspection process, the outcomes were published in a short letter to parents and carers outlining the key strengths and areas for improvement. The letter provided a statement of the main findings of the inspection team and a summary of the schools capacity to improve the quality of its own work which meant inspectors would not return to Yester Primary School as a result of the inspection.

Mr Trussler reported the summary of inspection findings could be found within the report and highlighted Yester Primary School and Nursery secured gradings of satisfactory for the quality of Learning, Teaching and Assessment with Attainment and Achievement being evaluated as good. Mr Trussler highlighted the key strengths and areas for improvement found during the inspection.

Mr Trussler confirmed he would continue to work closely with the Head Teacher and staff to provide professional advice and support and challenge in the areas for improvement. He was delighted that the hard work of senior leaders both past and present, staff and the children of Yester primary school have been recognised within the report.

Councillor Hampshire asked what progress has been made to deliver consistent high quality learning, teaching and assessment for children across the school and nursery. Mr Trussler reported all teachers across primary 2 to 7 were being trained as part of the National Improvement Writing Programme which would be completed by the end of this session. He added this would empower teachers to use assessment and quality improvement methodology to plan the teaching and learning of learners writing experiences and to evaluate learners progress in writing.

Responding to a question from Councillor Dugdale, Mr Trussler stated the National Improvement Writing Programme provided frequent opportunities for staff to discuss, share and compare evidence from their own pupils with staff across a range of East Lothian schools who are also participating in the programme. He explained those opportunities were being used to reflect on pupil progress against national writing benchmarks and had provided an opportunity for staff to reflect both on teaching, learning and assessment approaches whilst also supporting the development of their professional judgment against these national standards.

Councillor Hampshire welcomed the report and the work being done at Yester Primary School and felt confident the school would be able to improve their current satisfactory gradings up to good.

Councillor Dugdale echoed Councillor Hampshire's comments and thanked Mr Trussler for his helpful answers to questions.

Decision
The Committee agreed to:
  i)   Note the content of the Education Scotland letter (Appendix 1).
  ii)   Note the content of the Summary of Inspection Findings for the Primary School (SIF) (Appendix 2).
  iii)   Note the content of the Summary of Inspection Findings for the Nursery Class (SIF) (Appendix 3).
  iv)   Note that because of the inspection findings, Education Scotland will not make a follow-up visit in connection with this inspection.
  v)   Note the key strengths identified by the Inspection Team and progress made since the inspection.

6.   **EDUCATION SCOTLAND INSPECTION OF WALLYFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY CLASS**

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to report to Committee on the outcomes of the Education Scotland revisit inspection of Wallyford Primary School and Nursery Class.

Mr Nick Trussler, Quality Improvement Officer for Education noted the inspection team used the How Good Is Our School 4? (HGIOS? 4) quality indicators for primary inspections and How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare (HGIOELC?) quality indicators for nursery class inspections to evaluate the quality of provision at Campie Primary School and Nursery Class.

At the end of the inspection process, the outcomes were published in a short letter to parents and carers summarising the quality and impact of the school's work in addressing the key areas for improvement identified in the initial inspection. The letter provided a statement of the confidence the inspectors have in the school's capacity to continue to improve the quality of its own work.

Mr Trussler reported the summary of inspection findings could be found within the report and highlighted the key strengths and areas for improvement found during the inspection.

Mr Trussler concluded by saying he would continue to work with the head teacher and staff to provide professional advice, support and challenge to ensure the continued impact of improvements upon learners' experiences and outcomes. He added he was delighted that the hard work of senior leaders, staff and the children of Wallyford Primary School has been recognised in this report.

Councillor McFarlane asked what steps had been taken to ensure that pupil attainment in literacy and numeracy was continuing to improve and that all learners had the opportunity to achieve their potential. Mr Trussler stated the school continued to receive support from the Pedagogy Team to build teacher capacity in the delivery of

learning and as the Quality Improvement Officer for the school he would continue to track pupil progress regularly with the head teacher to measure the impact of interventions and supports on improving overall attainment and closing the attainment gaps identified. Ms Zena Diggle, Head Teacher – Wallyford Primary School provided Members with specific examples of how the school was working to improve attainment in literacy and numeracy which included new approaches to early learning and literacy, implementation of diagnostic assessments in numeracy with the Pedagogy Team and looking at the wellbeing and capacity of learners to learn in a safe environment.

Councillor Yorkston congratulated Ms Diggle and her staff on the progress made since the first inspection. He asked how well sustained improvements in teacher pedagogy were leading to better outcomes for all learners. Ms Diggle said the staff within Wallyford Primary were incredibly energetic and enthusiastic about improving pedagogy for all learners through a twofold approach; one around cooperative learning and the other on inclusion work and differentiation to ensure no child is missing out or being left behind. She made Members aware of the shared classroom experiences whereby the teachers would plan together, teach together, and evaluate together, which had been exceptional so that would be developing further over the next couple of years.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Mr Trussler for the report and Ms Diggle for attending the committee today. She was really pleased to see the amazing progress that had been made and the key strengths noted within the report. Councillor Dugdale offered her congratulations to Ms Diggle and her staff for the important work and improvements they had made.

Decision
The Committee agreed to:
   (i)   Note the content of the Education Scotland letter (Appendix 1).
   (ii)   Note that because of the improvements noted in the summary of
            inspection findings, Education Scotland will make not make any
            further visits in connection with this inspection.
   (iii)   Congratulate the Head Teacher and staff on the key strengths
            identified by the Inspection Team.

7.   **HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY**

A report was submitted by the Executive Director – Education and Children's Services to seek the Committee's approval to adopt the refreshed Home to School Transport Policy, noting the legislative context (Appendix 1).

Ms Leanne Ayton, Principal Officer – Equity and Inclusion reported the aim of the policy was to ensure safe, efficient and equitable transportation for all eligible children and young people, supporting access to education across the local authority. She added there was a duty on local authorities to make such arrangements as they consider necessary for the provision of conveyance without charge for the whole or part of the journey between home and their catchment school for children and young people who live more than walking distance. Ms Ayton explained within East Lothian, the Child and Young Persons Planning Framework was used to identify, assess and plan for the provision of support that is required and asked Members to note that since the policy was last reviewed a number of relevant changes had taken place, such as the introduction of Scottish Government funded young persons under 22's free bus travel and this policy was dependent on the continuation of that funded scheme. She stated the number of children and young people with additional support needs had also increased and the refreshed policy clarified our position on applications for transport

assistance from those who required it. Ms Ayton explained the policy had been refreshed so it was now clearer for stakeholders to understand, for officers to apply and had been updated with consideration to today's family dynamics. She concluded by making Members aware the policy would be reviewed annually, and staff would continue to work with schools, parents and transport colleagues as required over that period and she was happy to be contacted after the meeting from any Members wishing to discuss their individual areas.

Councillor McFarlane asked how people would know whether they were eligible for home to school transport. Ms Ayton explained if the policy was approved today then the Council website would be updated with full details including eligibility criteria and details on how to apply.

Responding to a question from Councillor Dugdale, Ms Ayton stated if the policy was approved today then it would be implemented from August 2025 in time for the new school year and no one who was already receiving home to school transport would lose out as no current provisions would be removed.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms Ayton for her report and found the updates to the policy helpful, making it easier to understand. She thanked Ms Ayton for her work on the updated policy, along with colleagues in Roads.

Decision
The Committee agreed to:
   i)   Approve and adopt the refreshed Home to School Transport Policy, noting the legislative context (Appendix 1).

A roll vote was carried out and Members unanimously agreed to approve and adopt the refreshed Home to School Transport Policy.

8.   **RESERVING PLACES IN SCHOOLS FOR CATCHMENT PUPILS WHO MOVE INTO THE CATCHMENT AREA DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2025/26**

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to report to Committee to obtain approval for reserving place for incoming catchment pupils at the primary and secondary schools detailed in 2.1 for session 2025/26.

Ms Leanne Ayton, Principal Officer – Equity and Inclusion asked Members to note that the reserving of places was in accordance with the Education Scotland Act 1996 placing requests which allows education authorities to reserve places for incoming pupils into catchment areas of schools which helped authorities to manage their schools and prevent them from being at capacity at commencement of an academic year and enabling them to accommodate incoming catchment pupils. She outlined the key points and purpose of the report and explained the factors that were taken into account when determining the number of places.

Councillor Ritchie asked what was involved in deciding the number of reserve places for new schools such as Blindwells Primary where the catchment homes were not yet finished being built. Ms Ayton explained Blindwells and Craighall are small schools which initially operate with a small number of classes and increase each year as the school role grows. She was confident the number of reserve places requesting to be held was sufficient for pupils in the catchment area.

Responding to a further question from Councillor Ritchie, Ms Ayton confirmed it would only be pupils out with the catchment area of Blindwells who could potentially be refused a place as they would be in reserve for families moving into the area.

Councillor Gilbert asked for confirmation that there would not be a circumstance where a pupil moved into an area and could not get a place within their catchment school. Ms Ayton felt the question would maybe be better placed under the next agenda item but explained in terms of reserved places, they were specifically for catchment pupils. She added if there were three reserved places available and seven children moved into the area there would be a place for the extra four at their local school. Ms McDowell, Head of Education stated at Blindwells and Craighall specifically, the department had to look at the individual situation in terms of the number of families moving but there were roll projections based on knowing when housing developments would be released for sale which informs decisions being made in terms of reserve places and roll capping. She explained that within new schools there is the capacity to increase the number of children and classes but other schools on the list may not have that capacity.

Responding to a question from Councillor Yorkston, Ms Ayton said the most demand for catchment places within secondary schools was within S1 and S2 rather than S3 and S4 as by then pupils are settled and made their course choices. She added that the demand for catchment places within North Berwick and Knox Academy was higher than other secondary schools due to migration into the area, especially around Letham.

Reverand Sheridan asked if the changes made to Midlothian Council's catchment areas would have an impact on schools within East Lothian, especially to pupils from Loretto looking to attend St David's. Ms Ayton confirmed staff had been working closely with Midlothian and no issues were anticipated.

Councillor Hampshire stated the process of reserving places had been really difficult over the last 10 to 15 years due to the growth in East Lothian and commended the officers for their fantastic work on ensuring there is just the right number of reserved places for pupils within schools.

Councillor Dugdale echoed the comments of Councillor Hampshire and thanked Ms Ayton and all officers for their work on reserving places and their report.

Decision
The Committee agreed to:
  i)   Hold in reserve places for incoming catchment pupils for session 2025/26 in the named Primary Schools
  ii) Hold in reserve places for incoming catchment pupils for session 2025/26 in the named Secondary Schools S1 and S2
  iii) Hold in reserve places for incoming catchment pupils for session 2025/26 in the named Secondary Schools S3 and S4
  iv) Delegate any changes to the number of places held in reserve to the Head of Education in consultation with the Education Convener, should the number of pupils requiring a place at school significantly increase or decrease

A roll call vote was carried out and Members unanimously agreed to hold in reserve places for the named Primary and Secondary Schools and delegate any changes to the number of places held in reserve to the Head of Education in consultation with the Education Convener, should the number of pupils requiring a place at school significantly increase or decrease.

9. ROLL CAPPING IN EAST LOTHIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS SESSION 2025/26

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to ask the Committee to approve the S1-S4 intake levels for East Lothian secondary schools for session 2025/26.

Ms Leanne Ayton, Principal Officer – Equity and Inclusion summarised her report highlighting the main principles for managing secondary school roles within East Lothian are to; provide high quality education at local schools for local pupils, ensure quality of resources throughout East Lothian and commit to a real choice of education inside our schools and not between our schools. Ms Ayton noted that practical classes, such as science subjects, are set in multiples of 20 and non-practical classes are set in multiples of 30.

Councillor Yorkston asked if the set number of pupils for each class could be adjusted if there were more children wishing to take a specific subject. Ms Ayton stated classrooms were only furnished for either 20 or 30 pupils depending on the subject and to do there had not been any issues with maximum numbers within schools but if there was then a full consultation would be held by the head teacher.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms Ayton for the very important paper as it prevents any detrimental impact on children's education and allows head teachers to timetable and appropriately recruit a suitable number of teachers.

Decision
The Committee agreed to:
   i)   Approve a maximum intake level in S1-S4 for session 2025/26 in the schools listed within the report
   ii)   delegate any changes to the maximum intake level in S1 – S4 to the Head of Education in consultation with the Education Convener, should the number of pupils requiring a place at the school significantly increase or decrease

A roll call vote was carried out and Members unanimously agreed to approve the maximum intake level in S1-S4 for session 2025/26 for the schools listed within the report and delegate any changes to the maximum intake level in S1-S4 to the Head of Education in consultation with the Education Convener, should the number of pupils requiring a place at the school significantly increase or decrease.

10. HEAD TEACHER APPOINTMENTS

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to inform the Committee of the Head Teacher made by the Appointments Sub-Committee.

Ms Nicola McDowell, Head of Education reported the appointment of Ms Gemma-Rose Lansdown as the Head Teacher of Blindwells Primary School, who was currently the Head Teacher at Leith Walk Primary School. She added Ms Lansdown would take on her post in East Lothian after the Easter break and would be based in Cockenzie Primary School with the hosted Blindwells pupils until the school was completed in August. Ms McDowell also congratulated Mr Jamie Wilson as the chosen candidate for Head Teacher at Craighall Primary School, who was currently the Head Teacher at Morebattle and Yetholm Primary Schools. Mr Wilson would take on his new role in May, based within Stoneybank Primary School with the hosted Craighall pupils.

Ms McDowell stated once Ms Lansdown and Mr Wilson were in post they would be responsible for the establishment of their respective school communities, recruiting their staff teams and developing their curricular ethos, vision and values and building relationships with children and families who will be joining the schools from August.

Councillor Hampshire asked if both schools were expected to be completed by August. Ms McDowell confirmed she was very confident about that, and regular meetings had been held with builders at both projects to assure us they would be ready by August.

Councillor Ritchie congratulated both new Head Teachers on their appointed posts and looked forward to working with them both in the future.

Councillor Dugdale also welcomed the two newest Head Teachers to the two newest schools in East Lothian. She also thanked all the staff, parents and pupils who were involved in the recruitment process.

Decision
The Committee agreed to note the Head Teacher appointment.

Signed   ....

          Councillor Fiona Dugdale
          Convener of the Education Committee

East Lothian Council

REPORT TO:	Education & Children's Services Committee
MEETING DATE:	10 June 2025
BY:	Executive Director – Education & Children's Services
SUBJECT:	School Uniform Guidance

2

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To allow the S2 and S3 stakeholder group to outline their school uniform proposals based on Scottish Government Guidance, and their consultation process.

1.2 To note the East Lothian School Uniform Guidance (Appendix 1) created by East Lothian pupils in consultation with a range of stakeholders and based on Scottish Government Guidance.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Committee is asked to note the East Lothian School Uniform Guidance (Appendix 1) created by East Lothian pupils in consultation with a range of stakeholders and based on Scottish Government Guidance.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 The UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Act was passed in 2024. This legally protects children's rights in Scotland and requires public authorities to comply with all articles.

3.2 Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is the national approach to improving outcomes for children and young people by offering the right help at the right time so that they can reach their full potential whilst being treated with kindness, dignity and respect and having their rights upheld at all times.

3.3 The Scottish Government's *School Uniform and Clothing: Guidance for Schools and Education Authorities* (2024)
https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-uniform-clothing-guidance-schools-education-authorities/

states that there is no legal requirement for uniform to be worn by children and young people in schools in Scotland. Uniform guidance in schools should take a sensitive and pragmatic approach and be underpinned by an inclusivity that takes into account the individual needs, circumstances and identity of all children and young people.

3.4   A consultation group of S2 and S3 pupils from every secondary school in East Lothian used the Scottish Government Guidance noted above as a basis for discussion about uniform in East Lothian schools and how this guidance could be implemented.

3.5   The ideas were distilled into a set of principles. The principles were shared by the consultation group with a wider group of children from every primary school in East Lothian. The primary school children were instrumental in ordering the principles by importance. These are: affordable, comfortable, inclusive, equitable, practical and sustainable. Children and young people led every stage of the creation of this guidance.

3.6   This guidance sets out an inclusive approach to uniform that can be used and adapted to support the unique context of every school whilst ensuring a fair and equitable approach. It is not a prescriptive document but rather provides a framework to promote reflection and encourages schools to prioritise attendance and inclusion through their uniform guidance.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

3.7   It is proposed that schools refer to this guidance and adhere to the principles when they create new uniform guidance or update existing guidance and if they plan to make changes to existing uniform arrangements. The guidance will be shared with all schools in session 2025/26 to inform local practice.

4   POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1   There are no policy implications to this report.

5   EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1   The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6   RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1   Financial- none

6.2   Personnel - none

6.3   Other - none

7   BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1   School Uniform Guidance: Supporting Inclusive Learning Environments
        https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-uniform-clothing-guidance-schools-education-authorities/

AUTHOR'S NAME	Abby Ingham
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DATE	10 June 2025

Appendix 1

Included, Engaged & Involved

School Uniform Guidance

Supporting inclusive learning environments

June 2025

1

Contents

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1   Introduction

East Lothian Council is committed to being an inclusive local authority which ensures that all children and young people are supported to reach their full potential in learning environments which are nurturing and inclusive for all. A welcoming and positive ethos in school is central to every child and young person's learning experience. This sense of belonging is not created by a school uniform, but it can promote feelings of inclusivity and safety and can positively impact attendance.

There is evidence from the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) that not having the correct uniform is a barrier to children and young people in poverty attending school. [1] Equity principles recognise the impact that poverty can have on the wellbeing, attainment and achievement of children and young people. [2] Schools should be rigorous in their approach to mitigating this, by using inclusive practice to broaden the parameters of success for children and young people.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to schools on creating fair and inclusive school uniform guidance within a context that ensures equity and the best possible outcomes for all children and young people.

2   Legislative and Policy Context

The legislative and policy landscape includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC)
  https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/

How school uniform guidance is developed and applied is covered by several articles of the UNCRC including Article 28 (the right to education) and Article 12 (the views of the child).

- *The UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Act* (2024)
  https://www.gov.scot/publications/statutory-guidance-part-2-uncrc-incorporation-scotland-act-2024/pages/4/ This act incorporates the UNCRC into Scottish law. This legally protects children's rights in Scotland. Public authorities must ensure compliance with all articles of the UNCRC.

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[1] CPAG submitted a paper https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/118122/html/ to the House of Common's Education Committee to support their report on 'Persistent Absence and Support for Disadvantaged Pupils' https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41590/documents/205047/default/. They gave evidence that showed that school policies and practices around uniform and dress-up days can create barriers to attendance for children and young people living in poverty.

[2] East Lothian Council's 'Excellence & Equity: Raising Attainment for All' Strategy https://sites.google.com/edubuzz.org/eastlothianeduhub/enabling-learning/raising-attainment the purpose of this document is to outline our strategy to raise the attainment of all in achieving excellence and to ensure equity by closing the poverty related attainment gap.

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- The Scottish Government's *Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)* *https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/national-practice-model/* This National Practice Model sets out a shared framework and approach to the identification, assessment and analysis of a child or young person's wellbeing needs.

- *The Equality Act* (2010) *https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents* All uniform guidance should comply with this act which covers nine protected characteristics and prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation whilst promoting equality of opportunity for all.

- The Scottish Government's *School Uniform and Clothing: Guidance for Schools and Education Authorities* (2024) *https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-uniform-clothing-guidance-schools-education-authorities/pages/11/* This guidance states that there is no legal requirement for uniform to be worn by children and young people in schools in Scotland. Uniform guidance in schools should take a sensitive and pragmatic approach and be underpinned by an inclusivity that takes into account the individual needs, circumstances and identity of all children and young people.

- The Scottish Government's *Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: Preventing and Managing School Exclusions* (2017) *https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-uniform-clothing-guidance-schools-education-authorities/pages/11/* This document supports the promotion of positive relationships and mutual respect between staff and children and young people in school.

- The Scottish Government's *Supporting transgender young people in schools: guidance for Scottish schools* (2021) https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-transgender-young-people-schools-guidance-scottish-schools/ This document promotes inclusive practice in schools directing them to accommodate transgender young people through their uniform guidance by including a range of clothing options, allowing young people to wear whatever they choose from the options provided and never excluding transgender young people because of how they dress, unless it breaches health and safety regulations.

Throughout this policy the term parent(s) will be used to apply to anyone with parental responsibility, those providing a foster or residential placement, or the local authority where full parental responsibility rests with them as corporate parents. In the case of care experienced children and young people and those in kinship care, this is also taken to mean 'carer'.

Relevant national and local legislation, policy and guidance can be found in Appendix 1.
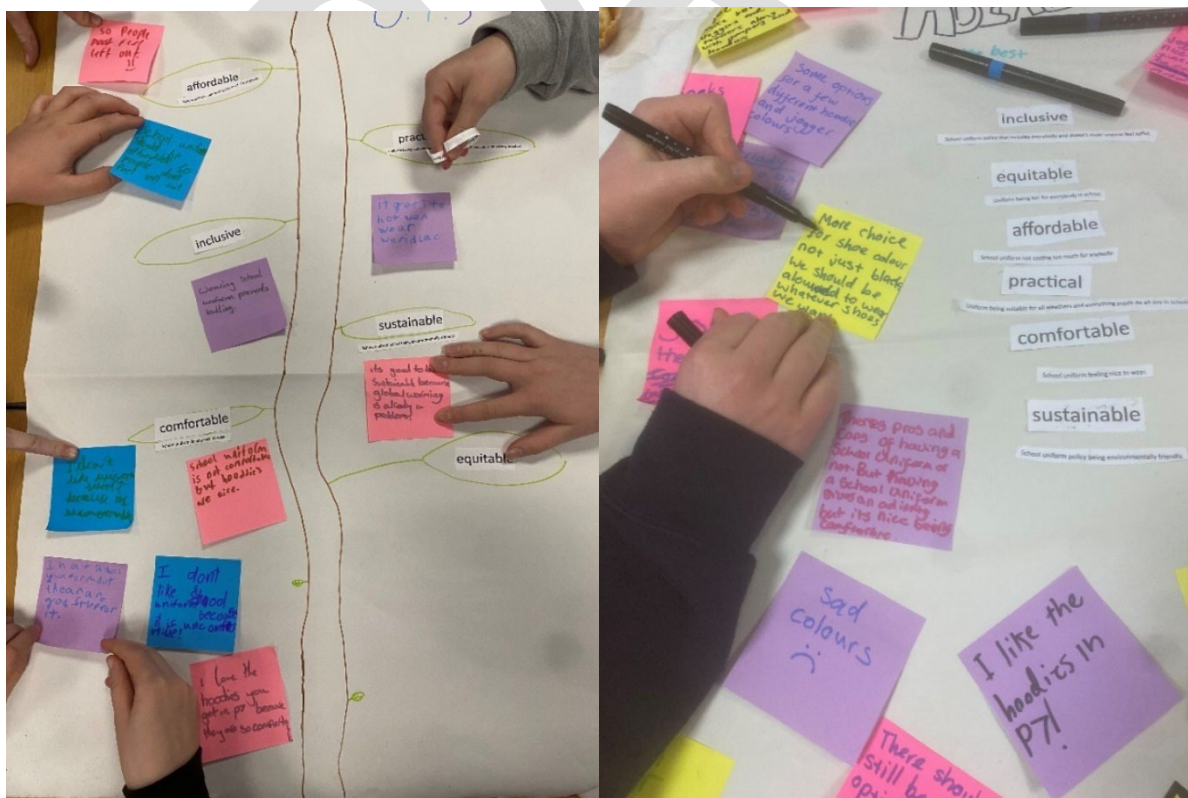
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3   Consultation Process

This guidance was created by East Lothian children and young people for East Lothian children and young people.

A group of young people, from every secondary school in East Lothian, reviewed the Scottish Government's *School Uniform and Clothing: Guidance for Schools and Education Authorities* (2024), used it as a basis for discussion and came up with a set of principles and guidance for East Lothian schools. They went on to consult with groups of children from every primary school in East Lothian in order to further inform this guidance.

All individual school guidance, in relation to school uniform, should be created in partnership with children and young people and should be made in collaboration with the whole school community.

"Our voice was heard, and everyone listened to my point of view."

"I enjoyed being able to freely share my views on uniform and see others' different takes. I enjoyed knowing my views would be taken seriously."

4   Principles for School Uniform Guidance

During the consultation process, young people from every secondary school in East Lothian decided upon the following six principles which should all be considered when creating any guidance on uniform in schools. The principles were shared with children from every East Lothian primary school who listed them in order of priority as follows:

1. Affordable
2. Comfortable
3. Inclusive
4. Equitable
5. Practical
6. Sustainable

5   Planning school uniform guidance

Guidance should remain consistent and only change following robust consultation. In accordance with the UNCRC, Head Teachers should always seek to consult with children and young people when creating or updating any guidance. This guidance should seek to meet the needs of all individuals, in-keeping with the principles of GIRFEC, by allowing accommodations to be made where necessary to promote wellbeing and attendance.

The following table should be used when creating new guidance or reviewing existing guidance. It is based on the six principles along with some other pertinent considerations for schools.

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Consideration	Evidence	Next Steps
Affordable **What steps have you taken to consider:** - Data, including SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation), FSM (Free School Meals) and CE (Care Experienced), to understand which children and young people and their parents might face challenges in affording school uniform? - Parents being able to purchase all items for the school year, plus a reasonable number of spares or replacements? - Promote the uptake of the School Clothing Grant? - Parents being able to obtain uniform items easily and affordably e.g. by choosing generic colours or clothing		

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commonly sold in supermarkets? • That you are not promoting any branded items nor items with school logos?		
Comfortable **What steps have you taken to consider:** • The comfort and wellbeing of all children and young people? • The different activities children and young people will carry out over the course of a school day e.g. P.E., break times outside, art and other practical activities and desk-based work?		
Inclusive **What steps have you taken to consider:** • Giving children and young people a choice about what they wear by giving a variety of uniform options?		

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• Allowing children and young people with ASN (additional support needs) to keep items of clothing on in class (e.g. hats or hoods) or whose sensory needs might preclude them from wearing certain items of uniform? How has this been communicated to all staff so that they are not routinely and unfairly challenged on this? • Adaptations to school uniform for children and young people with disabilities e.g. clothing that can easily be put on and removed, comfort for wheelchair users or specialised footwear? • Children and young people living across multiple households who might not always have the same access to appropriate school wear? Might a child need access to a school uniform bank for part of the week?		

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Equitable **What steps have you taken to consider:** • Gender neutral options? • Uniform that is equally comfortable and practical for all genders? • Different religious and cultural practices?		
Practical **What steps have you taken to consider:** • Uniform that is suitable for all weathers and activities? • Minimising the need for multiple items of clothing needed for a school day e.g. different types of sports shoes, specialist PE wear or art smocks? • Giving children and young people a choice about whether they keep on items of uniform or remove them		

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in class unless what they are wearing is unsuitable for school or poses a health and safety risk? How has this been communicated to all staff so that children and young people are not routinely and unfairly challenged on this? • How some items of uniform might make certain groups or individuals feel if forced to wear them e.g. traditional white school shirts are often made from transparent fabric?		
Sustainable **What steps have you taken to consider:** • Promoting pre-loved uniform as the preferred option? • Schemes to encourage parents to donate and receive items of pre-loved uniform?		

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• The implications of house colours, or any other variations in school uniform, on the ease with which these items can be passed on or re-used?		
Leavers' hoodies/ year-specific items of uniform such as S6 blazers **What steps have you taken to consider:** • Sustainability and affordability when making decisions about leavers' hoodies or other items of school uniform only suitable for a limited period of time? • Safeguarding when designing items of uniform with identifiable markers e.g. names, school and year group?		
Dress-up Days **What steps have you taken to consider:** • The cost implications of dress-up days and ways to		

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mitigate or avoid any cost to parents e.g. alternative reading activities on World Book Day, Halloween costume/ Christmas jumper swaps, or wearing pyjamas or odd socks instead of costumes? • Whether a 'wear your own clothes' day or dress-down day could increase the likelihood of the stigmatisation or non-attendance of any groups or individuals?		
School Trips **What steps have you taken to consider:** • Comfort and practicality when considering clothing for school trips? • Whether any additional actions are necessary to support the safeguarding and easy identification of children and young people when out of school?		

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• The cost implications for parents when asking for specialist clothing to be provided by them e.g. waterproof clothing or walking boots? Is there provision for parents to borrow these items from school or elsewhere?		
Inappropriate school wear **Children and young people who are unable to observe school uniform should never be excluded from school. This includes formal exclusions recorded through SEEMiS, exclusion from class or sending children or young people home to change.** **What steps have you taken to consider:** • The actions to be taken if a child or young person is deemed to be wearing clothing that is inappropriate for school? These actions should be supportive and never punitive. Conversations should be discreet and sensitive with		

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the focus on supporting positive relationships and behaviour and promoting attendance. • What clothing could constitute offensive, impractical or inappropriate attire for school? • Clothing worn in school which could pose a health and safety risk? These risks may be subject-specific or relevant across the whole school. • The promotion of gender equality including the avoidance of potentially stigmatising terms such as 'modest' or 'decent'?		

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6   Appendix 1

- East Lothian Council's *Inclusion, Equality and Accessibility for All* policy (2022)
  https://sites.google.com/edubuzz.org/eastlothianeduhub/caring-relationships/policy-process-and-guidance

- East Lothian Council's *A Positive Approach to Promoting School Attendance* policy (2022)
  https://sites.google.com/edubuzz.org/eastlothianeduhub/caring-relationships/policy-process-and-guidance

- East Lothian Council's *Preventing and Managing School Exclusions* policy (2023)
  https://sites.google.com/edubuzz.org/eastlothianeduhub/caring-relationships/policy-process-and-guidance

- East Lothian Council's *Respect for All A Positive Approach to Preventing Bullying* policy (2022)
  https://sites.google.com/edubuzz.org/eastlothianeduhub/caring-relationships/policy-process-and-guidance

- East Lothian Council's *Managing Distressed and Challenging Behaviour* policy (2018)
  https://sites.google.com/edubuzz.org/eastlothianeduhub/caring-relationships/policy-process-and-guidance

- East Lothian Council's Identifying, *Assessing and providing for Additional Support Needs of Children and Young People* policy (2018)
  https://sites.google.com/edubuzz.org/eastlothianeduhub/caring-relationships/policy-process-and-guidance

- East Lothian Council's *Child Protection and Safeguarding* policy (2023)
  https://sites.google.com/edubuzz.org/eastlothianeduhub/caring-relationships/policy-process-and-guidance

- East Lothian Council's *East Lothian Partnership Poverty Plan* (2021-2023)
  https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/34964/east_lothian_partnership_poverty_plan_2024-28.pdf This plan is linked with the vision of the Local Authority to create: "An even more prosperous, safe and sustainable East Lothian, with a dynamic and thriving economy, that enables our people and communities to flourish."

- *School Clothing: Framework for Action* (2023)
  *https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Rh7UZHjyNrp9acbslQ0OOctGln0JWUI6/edit?pli=1&tab=t.*0
  This document was created by representatives from the University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen for a Fairer World, Child Poverty Action Group and Education Scotland. It contains a framework for considering school clothing under 3 headings: affordable, comfortable and sustainable.

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- CPAG's *Cost of the School Day Toolkit- Scotland* (updated 2023) *https://cpag.org.uk/what-we-do/project-work/cost-school-day/resources/toolkits/toolkit-scotland*
  This resource is designed to help schools investigate cost barriers and poverty-related challenges with the participation of the whole school community.

- *School Uniform CoSD* (2023) A short film created by CPAG in partnership with young people about school uniform and ways of reducing costs for parents.
  Approaches to affordable uniform policies and pre-loved clothing - uniform video

- *Which one? A comparative study of traditional and sports uniforms on academic achievement, cognitive performance, playtime, bullying and discrimination in adolescents: The Cogni-Action Project* (2022) *Comfort/ activity/ play - gender issues*
  A peer reviewed study published in Frontiers on the impact of traditional uniforms versus more relaxed clothing on experience and outcomes for young people.

- *The Children and Young People's Commissioner Statutory School Uniform Consultation* (2022) https://www.cypcs.org.uk/resources/stat-school-uniform/
  The Children and Young People's Commissioner and their Young Advisers Group's response to the consultation on uniform in schools carried out by the Scottish Government.

- *EIS Briefing on the Equity of School Activities https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/Equality/Child%20Poverty/EIS%20Briefing%20on%20the%20Equity%20Impact%20of%20School%20Activities.pdf*
  Factors for schools to consider in order to reduce costs for parents when organising school trips, charity and fundraising events, non-uniform days, dress-up days, schools parties, school proms and leavers' hoodies.

- *Engagement with children on school uniform- The Children's Parliament* (2023) *https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/consultation-analysis/2023/06/analysis-report-responses-consultation-school-uniform-scotland/documents/consultation-national-school-uniform-guidance/consultation-national-school-uniform-guidance/govscot%3Adocument/consultation-national-school-uniform-guidance.pdf*
  Consultation commissioned by the Scottish Government by the Children's Parliament with primary aged children on school uniform.

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REPORT TO: Education & Children's Services Committee

MEETING DATE: 10 June 2025

BY: Executive Director - Education and Children's Services

SUBJECT: National Thematic Inspection

1.   PURPOSE

1.1   To inform Education and Children's Service Committee of the findings and recommendations of the East Lothian Thematic Inspection and the National Thematic Inspection of Local Authorities by Education Scotland.

2.   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   The Committee is asked to:

i.   Note the findings and recommendations of the East Lothian specific Thematic Inspection (Appendix 1) and the National Thematic Inspection of Local Authorities by Education Scotland (Appendix 2).

ii.   Note the actions taken with regards to the recommendations made.

iii.   Note the comparison between the national and local findings.

iv.   Note that East Lothian's Self-Improving Schools System has been cited in the National report as an example of good practice.

3   BACKGROUND

3.1   In June 2024, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education announced a National Thematic inspection of local authorities in Scotland. The focus of this thematic inspection was how local authorities support schools to improve. It provided an opportunity to reflect on strengths, challenges and opportunities for ensuring high-quality education for all learners.

3.2   HM Inspectors visited all 32 local authorities during September and October 2024. They learned what is working well and heard about

challenges that local authorities encounter, and improvements that need to be addressed to ensure effectiveness across Scotland.

3.3 Through the national thematic, HM Inspectors gathered evidence on the following themes:

➢ How local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through implementing effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting

➢ How local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through self-evaluation and quality assurance

➢ How local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through professional learning

➢ How local authorities deliver universal support and challenge for all schools, and targeted support for specific schools to improve the quality of education.

3.4 Visits to local authorities took place between September and November 2024. During the visits, inspection teams met with senior officers and central teams in local authorities to hear about local priorities and approaches to quality assurance and school improvement.

3.5 HM Inspectors also met with focus groups of Head Teachers and school leaders, teachers, representatives of professional associations, Elected Members and chairs of Parent Councils.

3.6 **Key Recommendations from the National Report**

Universal Support Consistency
➢ All schools must receive high-quality, consistent support through robust universal provision to reduce variability within and across local authorities and secure equitable outcomes for learners. The national inspection found notable variability in the consistency and quality of support provided to schools, both within and across local authorities.

Robust Targeted Support Systems
➢ For schools requiring targeted support, local authorities should implement robust action planning, monitoring and accountability to ensure necessary improvements for learners are secured at pace. Only around half of local authorities have clear action plans for schools receiving targeted or intensive support with progress that can be robustly measured.

Leadership Development for Middle Leaders
➢ Local authorities must prioritise leadership development for middle leaders, particularly in secondary schools, where improvement outcomes are less consistent, with a focus on the principles of self-evaluation for self-improvement. The report noted that strategic approaches are improving attainment and standards in primary schools, but much less so in secondary schools.

National Professional Learning Programme

➢ A national professional learning programme should be established for local authority central officers to help build capacity and professional knowledge in school improvement and effective support and challenge practices. The report identified a gap in comprehensive professional learning for central officers in local authorities.

Rural and Remote School Support

➢ Local authorities should develop flexible models of support that address the specific needs of rural, remote, and island schools. The fiscal challenges and geographical realities of rural and island communities create barriers to consistent support and professional learning opportunities.

Collaborative Accountability

➢ Local authorities must embed collaborative approaches to foster collective accountability for school improvement, ensuring these are consistently grounded in robust self-evaluation. A few local authorities have developed effective system leadership approaches across their schools, but many more are working towards this.

Strategic Data Use

➢ Local authorities should improve the strategic use of data at both local authority and school levels, including developing staff capacity to interpret data effectively and use data-driven insights to inform self-evaluation, improvement planning, and resource allocation.

3.7 East Lothian Council Specific Findings and Recommendations

The East Lothian inspection identified several areas for continued development alongside significant strengths.

3.8 Effective Practices Identified

East Lothian was recognised for two specific practices worth sharing more widely:

➢ **Self-Improving Schools (SIS) Model:** This approach creates a culture where schools own their improvement journey and play a key role in supporting the improvement of others, having a positive impact on developing professional collaboration.

➢ **Quality Assurance of Child Protection and Safeguarding:** The local authority requires Head Teachers to complete a child protection and safeguarding return as part of their standards and quality reporting, providing an effective layer of quality assurance.

3.9   **Areas for Improvement Identified**

> Enhanced Evaluative Writing Skills: East Lothian should provide specific professional learning on evaluative writing and creation of clear measures and outcomes for headteachers to improve the specificity of aims and measures.
> **This professional learning for Head Teachers has now been delivered as a result of this recommendation.**

> Precision in Targeting Support: The authority needs a sharper focus on targeted work with specific key areas that will bring about the greatest improvement in learner outcomes, particularly supporting schools where attainment is not yet strong enough. There is scope for targeted work to have an even tighter focus on the specific key areas which will bring about the greatest improvement in learner outcomes.
> **The school visit programme for session 2025/26 has now been strengthened to ensure more support for those schools requiring most improvement.**

> Process Streamlining: East Lothian should consider streamlining school review work, particularly frequency and resource levels, to free up resources for targeted support where biggest improvements are required. The local authority should consider streamlining some of this work, particularly with respect to the frequency and level of resource used on school reviews.
> **As reviews of all schools are now complete, this programme will naturally be rationalised and more targeted to need.**

3.10   **Comparative Analysis: East Lothian vs National Findings**

Areas of Strong Alignment
> East Lothian demonstrates many characteristics that the national report identifies as best practice. The authority has well-established systems in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of education provision in schools, which aligns with the national finding that most local authorities have these systems in place.

> The Self-Improving Schools model creates strong collaborative relationships between school leaders and local authority officers, built on trust and mutual respect, which mirrors the national report's emphasis on positive relationships as underpinning successful improvement. East Lothian's comprehensive professional learning programme through EduHub aligns with the national finding that all local authorities provide universally accessible professional learning opportunities.

3.11   **Areas Where East Lothian Exceeds National Standards**
> East Lothian demonstrates several innovative practices that are not areas of strength in other authorities:

- The Service Level Agreements between schools and Quality Improvement Officers provide transparency and shared understanding of expectations, addressing the national concern about equity in support levels.

- The authority's interactive data tracking systems for attainment, progress, and equity enable robust data-driven decision-making.

- The systematic approach to child protection quality assurance through detailed checklists represents an innovation not commonly found across other authorities.

3.12 **Shared Challenges with National Findings**
- Despite its strengths, East Lothian faces similar challenges to those identified nationally. The need for more precise targeting of support reflects the national finding that around half of local authorities need clearer action plans for schools receiving targeted support.

- The requirement for enhanced evaluative writing skills among school leaders mirrors the national observation that school leaders need more support with evaluative writing and evidence-based self-evaluation.

- Concerns about financial constraints affecting future support levels echo the national finding that budget cuts and fiscal challenges are shared concerns among all local authorities.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no policy implications to this report.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial - None

6.2 Personnel - None

6.3 Other - None

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 National Thematic Inspection – Local Authority Approaches to Support School Improvement – Reporting Stage - East Lothian (Appendix 1).

7.2 HMIe – Local Authority Approaches to Supporting School Improvement (Appendix 2).

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DATE	10 June 2025

National Thematic Inspection: Local authority approaches to supporting school improvement

Summarised Findings

Local Authority	East Lothian Council
Lead inspector	Robyn McIlroy

In September/ October 2024, a team of inspectors from Education Scotland visited East Lothian Council. During our visit, we talked to senior leaders, local authority officers, parents/carers, headteachers, teachers, representatives from professional associations and elected members.

Purpose and themes

The purpose of the visit was to gather evidence about how East Lothian Council supports school improvement, with a focus on how they support schools to improve the quality of education through:

- the implementation of effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting
- self- evaluation and quality assurance
- professional learning
- universal and targeted support and challenge

Context of the local authority

East Lothian Council encompasses a number of rural and urban communities. The population increased by 21.5% in the 10 years before 2021 and is projected to increase by a further 7.2% in the period to 2028. East Lothian Council's education roll projections show a 5.6% increase for the P1 to S6 pupil population to 2028/29.

Thirty-two percent of children and young people in primary and secondary schools live within deciles 1-2 of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

Approximately 31% of children in primary and 42% of young people in secondary have been assessed as requiring additional support with their learning.

The average attendance in 2022/2023 was 90%. The national average is 90.2%.

School aged children and young people are educated across 34 primary schools, seven secondary schools and nine supported learning centres within a mainstream school.

The senior education team comprises the Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, the Head of Education, one Quality Improvement Manager, three Quality Improvement Officers (QIOs), a Service Manager for Early Years

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and Childcare, a Principal Educational Psychologist and an Acting Service Manager for Strategy and Operations. The wider education support team comprises a number of Education Support Officers (ESOs), educational psychologists and a small pedagogy team.

Theme 1 - How do local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through implementing effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting?

- *How clear and effective is the local authority's arrangements and advice to schools on self-evaluation, improvement planning and standards and quality reporting?*
- *How does the local authority ensure that schools' self-evaluation is accurate, rigorous and robust, based on reliable and comprehensive data and information?*
- *In what ways does the local authority promote collaboration with all stakeholders, especially learners, as essential to effective self-evaluation and identification of priorities?*
- *What is the role of central teams in providing critical feedback to school leaders on the quality/robustness of their self-evaluation and school improvement planning processes?*
- *To what extent does the local authority use the data from individual school or cluster improvement plans and standards and quality reports, to direct their officers' work?*

The local authority has been developing a Self-Improving Schools (SIS) model over the past three to four years. This is a key aspect of their strategic work to improve the quality of education. This collaborative model is based on ensuring improvements are led by school leaders and enhanced through support and challenge provided by local authority officers. Through this approach, local authority staff have created the conditions and structures to support effective collaborative working within and across schools. This has helped to promote a strong sense of shared responsibility to improve outcomes for all children and young people across East Lothian.

One of the key principles which underpins the SIS model is that school leaders take responsibility for leading improvement through collaboration with other schools. This process of working together towards a common goal takes place in a number of ways. The first is through collaboration in cluster locality-based groupings, called Associated Schools Groups (ASGs). ASGs are made up of the local secondary school and associated feeder primary schools. The second is through collaboration with schools of similar size and demographic in small groups known as Schools Teams Groups (STGs). STGs were established to enable staff to work together with schools with similar characteristics. Each sectoral grouping of three or four schools works together to share good practice and find solutions to common challenges. ASGs and STGs are owned and led by headteachers. Their work is quality assured by link QIOs who attend ASG and STG meetings regularly throughout the year. Link QIOs set tri-annual tasks for the STGs. These tasks relate directly to improvement activities.

Headteachers also receive helpful guidance, professional learning and support from link QIOs in relation to improvement planning and standard and quality reporting. Headteachers draw on this guidance to complete school improvement plans (SIPs) and standards and quality reports (S&Qs). Local authority guidance provides helpful advice on involving the school community in self-evaluation activities. Headteachers act on this guidance and seek parents' views in a range

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of ways, for example through regular surveys. Headteachers consult with children and young people on improvement priorities in ways suited to their context. For example, in one school, pupil leadership groups are aligned to school improvement priorities. Through these groups, children's views are sought on progress towards achieving improvement priorities. In some cases, schools prepare summary versions of school improvement plans in accessible formats for children, young people and parents.

Commendably, the local authority also requires headteachers to complete a child protection and safeguarding return as part of their standards and quality reporting. This return includes a detailed checklist which relates to the themes set out in Quality Indicator 2.1 of How good is our school? 4th edition (HGIOS4). The checklist contains helpful links to local and national guidance. A local authority officer with responsibility for safeguarding and child protection, reviews the completed safeguarding checklists. This is providing an effective layer of quality assurance for safeguarding.

One of the first tasks of STGs in each school session is for headteachers to undertake peer quality assurance of SIPs and S&Qs. When conducting peer reviews of SIPs and S&Qs, headteachers refer to the local authority guidance and templates. They discuss the range of helpful attainment and other data provided by the local authority. Headteachers within STGs know each other's schools well. They often are visitors to each other's schools through, for example, participation in school reviews. They use their knowledge of each other's schools to support effective peer support and challenge about the impact of improvement priorities. Headteachers complete a peer evaluation form which they return to link QIOs. Link QIOs discuss the peer evaluation form in their first quality assurance visit of each session. Headteachers report that they receive robust challenge from link QIOs in these discussions. Headteachers respect and have confidence in link QIOs' views.

QIOs collate information from SIPs and S&Qs to identify individual school and common areas of priority and need. They use this information well to inform strategic resourcing decisions about, for example, professional learning needs. This information is also key to determining the level of support provided by link QIOs to schools which is clearly set out in service level agreements.

Headteachers have not to date received specific professional learning on evaluative writing or creation of clear measures and outcomes. Having identified this as an area of potential improvement, local authority officers are planning training to improve the specificity of aims and measures. This will support headteachers to have a sharper focus on, for example, measures used to determine the impact of approaches.

Theme 2: How do local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through self-evaluation and quality assurance?

- *What methods does the local authority use to evaluate school performance (review the quality of education) for example, gathering evidence from stakeholders, review/validated self-evaluation visits, attainment analysis)? How effective are these methods? How often does this take place?*

The local authority uses a range of rigorous, evidence-based approaches to support schools to improve through self-evaluation and quality assurance. These approaches are well understood and valued by senior leaders. The approaches focus on building capacity for continuous improvement within and across schools. As a result, there is a strong culture of trust and collaboration within a framework of accountability.

The local authority provides clear and effective guidance to support schools with self-evaluation and quality assurance linked to HGIOS4. All schools are expected to use the local authority Quality Indicator Toolkit which provides a structured approach to evaluate progress. The local authority is clear in their expectations that all improvement must be evidence based, and data driven. To support this, they have developed a range of interactive data trackers. These enable local authority and school staff to access data to support robust discussions about attainment, progress and gaps. The progress and achievement, and equity trackers, enable school staff to interrogate data in an ongoing way using a wide range of filters. This supports them well to drill down to the progress of individuals, classes and cohorts, as well as reviewing overall attainment and inclusion data. Local authority officers support schools well with regular discussion of individual school, local authority and national data. This approach is supporting improvements in data literacy.

Link QIOs provide very effective support and challenge to individual schools to improve the quality of education. They carry out regular visits, for example, to discuss progress, analyse data and carry out classroom observations. These visits support QIOs to evaluate the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. The focus and level of ongoing QIO support for individual schools is agreed in collaboration with headteachers and captured in a service level agreement. This service level agreement ensures transparency and a shared understanding of expectations for both the school and QIO. The service level agreement outlines the key areas for improvement, the support from a range of local authority officers, and outcomes which are evaluated throughout the year. This is leading to coordinated, well considered support and robust quality assurance. As a result, QIOs know link schools very well and have a clear understanding of each school's strengths and improvement needs. Their views are well respected and valued by school teams.

Education Support Officers (ESOs) are effective in supporting and building capacity in equity and inclusion. They work regularly with schools to analyse exclusion and attendance data and the progress of identified children. For example, they routinely focus on those learners with additional support needs or who are impacted by poverty. Together with the QIOs and the wider central team,

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ESOs use local authority data well to identify trends and inform local authority strategies.

Headteachers have regular opportunities to meet together in ASGs, STGs and through school reviews. ASGs meet five times per year with their link QIO. Their meetings focus on analysing attainment and achievement data from across the schools to identify trends, patterns and areas for improvement. For example, one ASG outlined how they used attainment over time data to track cohorts of children from primary into secondary and beyond. This helped them understand where they needed to focus their collective improvement to address attainment dips, particularly at points of transition. The link QIO has a key role in providing specific support and challenge to guide discussions. There is evidence that improvements in attainment in some areas are beginning to be made. There is scope for targeted work to have an even tighter focus on the specific key areas which will bring about the greatest improvement in learner outcomes. For example, there could be a sharper focus on the role of the ASG in supporting those schools where attainment is not yet strong enough.

Headteachers' consistent use of the local authority self-evaluation toolkit supports a common approach and focus for quality assurance. Through visiting and undertaking quality assurance in each other's schools, headteachers develop a strong understanding of the context of each school. This allows them to provide accurate and rigorous challenge where needed to support improvements.

The local authority supports the work of the STGs through mandatory tasks which must be undertaken throughout the year. These collaborative tasks provide a vehicle for headteachers to interrogate data and support external evaluation within each school. Individual headteachers feedback to QIOs on their key learning and associated actions for their school. This provides a level of accountability and enables QIOs to have a clear overview of themes arising across all schools. This helps QIOs to direct where further individual or collective support is required. The local authority may now wish to consider an evaluation of the impact of ASGs and STGs work on improving learner outcomes.

The school review programme forms an integral aspect of the SIS approach. The core purpose of school reviews is to support self-evaluation and self-improvement. School reviews include a particular focus on leadership of change, learning, teaching and assessment, and progress in raising attainment. Review teams led by QIOs involve a range of staff across the ASG. This can include peer headteachers, depute headteachers, middle leaders, colleagues from across the STG and staff from the inclusion team. Being both reviewer and reviewee is improving school leaders' understanding of self-evaluation. Headteachers report that this is a very valued professional learning opportunity which has improved their own skills and understanding. Headteachers value the opportunity they have to request a school review to support their improvement work in a particular area. All new headteachers have a one-day school review to support them with quality assurance. This supports new headteachers to understand quickly the strengths and areas for improvement in their school. The local authority should now consider streamlining some of this work, particularly with respect to the frequency and level of resource used on school reviews.

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Adopting a more streamlined approach could, for example, help free up resource to support where the biggest improvements are required. This will be particularly important to target support where needed to raise attainment.

Theme 3: How do local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through professional learning?

- *What professional learning does the local authority currently provide to support school improvement?*
- *What is the impact of this on developing the skills and knowledge of school leaders and staff on school improvement?*
- *What support systems (e.g., mentoring, networks of practice, peer support groups, cluster support) are available for school leaders and staff? How are these approaches improving school performance and outcomes for learners?*
- *To what extent do senior leaders have opportunities to support improvement beyond their own establishment? What difference is this making?*
- *How effectively does the local authority utilise Associate Assessors (if applicable) to support school improvement across establishments.*
- *Does the local authority's professional learning strategy draw on support from national organisations?*

The local authority ensures professional learning is central to their work improving educational outcomes for children and young people. Staff are supported to improve their practice continually through career-long professional learning. Central officers create, deliver and signpost useful professional learning proactively and responsively based on identified need. This is helping to build capacity across staff teams and is impacting positively on the development of a strong understanding of school improvement.

The local authority's professional learning offer is well informed by national policy and a wide range of local data and intelligence. Local authority officers use information gathered, for example from quality improvement work and His Majesty's inspection findings, to identify professional learning needs. Local authority officers also use this information to construct effective working groups and professional networks linked to local authority strategic priorities. For example, the local authority has identified the need to improve the robustness of teacher professional judgement. To support this, local authority officers have identified members for a new working group focused on assessment and moderation. The work of this group will be an important strand in the local authority's drive to improve the robustness of teacher professional judgement.

The pedagogy team supports professional learning very well through a range of approaches. This includes them modelling best practice through team-teaching in schools. They also create effective professional learning materials to support self-directed learning. Alongside this bespoke support, the pedagogy team provide universal support to all schools through pre-recorded professional learning materials, for example, short videos on assessment approaches. The recently developed 'spotlight' papers provide staff with snapshots of effective pedagogical approaches and examples of effective practice. Promoted staff and class teachers welcome these approaches to support them to improve their practice.

In response to feedback from participants, local authority officers regularly review and improve professional learning and modes of delivery. This is recognised and

appreciated by senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers. For example, the local authority has created a digital platform East Lothian EduHub which is host to a wide range of professional learning. Professional learning offers are organised under the themes of 'learning sails' relating to learning, leadership and relationships. These three threads run through professional learning offered at authority level and at school level. East Lothian EduHub also contains national learning programmes and training materials, for example from Education Scotland. Local authority officers and the digital ESO have recently completed work to expand the resources on East Lothian EduHub by adding a digital 'Learning Library' element. This will further increase the availability of professional learning which can be accessed "anytime, anywhere." When embedded, this has the potential to assist senior leaders in measuring the impact of professional learning on learners' outcomes.

Local authority officers and the pedagogy team foster a culture of collaboration through professional learning within and across schools. This is exemplified through a range of professional networks of practice. For example, secondary subject networks involve curriculum leaders and teachers in development work centred on subject specific professional learning and moderation. Although schools protect time for professional learning within working time agreements, staff at all levels give generously of their time to be members of groups. This is indicative of the value they attribute to these groups and networks.

Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are well-supported through a comprehensive programme of professional learning. This has been recently reviewed and improved following feedback from teachers and discussion with initial teacher education institutions. Local authority officers identify school leaders to deliver sessions within the programme. NQT induction days are used by the local authority to set out standards and communicate priorities for education. From this year, NQTs will work in pairs to plan and take forward a professional inquiry project, based on local authority priorities relating to learning, teaching and assessment.

The local authority encourages staff at all levels to draw on support from national organisations, including from the link Education Scotland Attainment Advisor. Staff engage in a range of leadership national programmes such as In and Into Headship. The local authority has also developed bespoke leadership pathways for middle and senior leaders, which will be fully implemented in the next school session. The local authority offers a range of programmes to support leadership development for headteachers. For example, headteachers have been offered participation in a coaching programme.

Headteachers and depute headteachers value their work on STGs and ASGs as important for their ongoing professional development. Headteachers for example attribute their increased knowledge and confidence in using data for improvement to their participation in these groups. Headteachers and depute headteachers consider participation in school reviews as highly effective forms of professional learning.

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An increasing number of school leaders are Education Scotland Associate Assessors. Their experience and expertise are being used effectively to build capacity. The work of Associate Assessors has been impactful in helping school leaders prepare for inspections. This is helping to strengthen understanding of national standards across the local authority.

Theme 4: How do local authorities deliver universal support and challenge for all schools, and/or targeted support for specific schools to improve the quality of education?

- *What is the universal offer of support and challenge for all schools?*
- *How does the local authority use the data from individual school or cluster improvement plans and standards and quality reports, to provide targeted support?*
- *What measures are used to identify the need for targeted support?*
- *Is there targeted support for specific schools? What might that look like? (examples?) What action is taken if a review of a school concludes that a school is not performing satisfactorily and requires targeted support?*
- *What support systems (for example: mentoring, networks of practice, peer support groups) are available for school leaders and staff?*
- *What is the role of central staff in facilitating/contributing to collaborative approaches, which improve school performance and outcomes for learners?*

The local authority has a very clear approach to both universal and targeted support for schools. As part of the universal support, all schools receive a programme of QIO visits throughout the year. These visits focus on evaluating the progress of school improvement, supporting self-evaluation, and undertaking classroom observations. Specific broad general education (BGE) attainment meetings, scheduled during the year, focus on reviewing attainment information. Recognising the need for greater focus on secondary BGE, the local authority has now developed separate BGE and senior phase attainment meetings. Secondary headteachers recognise the value of these visits to support raising attainment across the BGE.

Local authority officers use a wide range of evidence to identify the level of support required to ensure continuous improvement in each school. This evidence includes rigorous analysis of a range of evidence from, for example information from SIPs and S&Qs, school reviews, attainment data and their working knowledge of each school's capacity to improve. QIOs use this information effectively to agree the overall package of support required to support improvement.

This package of support is proportionate and based on a tiered approach of universal, additional and targeted support. Through this process, QIOs work very well together with headteachers to agree the nature of the support which is captured in the service level agreement. Headteachers and QIOs articulate the value that is being added through this tailored package of support. They cite for example, improving attainment, improvements in the quality of learning and teaching, and improvements to areas of the curriculum. Moving forward, the local authority should continue to review the level of support being provided in each school and be more precise about targeted support. This will ensure the support

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provided focuses on the one or two key areas which will bring about the greatest difference in learner outcomes. This will be particularly important for schools where there is a recognised need to increase attainment significantly.

Schools which require intensive support are visited more regularly. The package of support in place includes work by a range of local authority central officers depending on the specific areas for improvement. The link QIO can visit the school as frequently as every two weeks where intensive support is required to build capacity for continuous improvement. QIOs make explicit the nature and focus of the support through development and monitoring of clear action plans. Through targeted support, the local authority can evidence improvements in the quality of learning, teaching and assessment.

School reviews are planned in collaboration with headteachers. Following a school review, detailed feedback is provided to schools to support continued improvement. All schools then have a follow up progress review at an agreed point in time to discuss progress made in the areas for improvement. This approach supports school leaders to continually focus on improvement. There is scope to consider refining the school review approach to be more needs-based. This would allow targeted support where need has been identified to raise standards, for example in relation to attainment in a few schools.

The local authority pedagogy team is a key resource in supporting targeted improvements in schools. They provide high-quality school based support directly to teachers to improve classroom practice. Pedagogy team members work alongside teachers to improve the quality of learning and teaching through modelling, team teaching and professional dialogue. They monitor and evaluate the impact of their work and provide a summary of impact to feed into school improvement planning and reporting. They also provide support to ASGs to support collaborative improvement priorities across groups of schools. The pedagogy team has had a key role in developing approaches to improving writing through the national writing programme. This work continues to develop and evolve, with new schools coming on board each year. This approach is beginning to result in improvements in writing attainment for those targeted schools who have been involved.

5. Any other relevant information

Focus groups participants highlighted concerns about the impact of present and future financial constraints on the levels of support for continued school improvement.

6. Effective practice worth sharing

Self-Improving Schools (SIS) model
The SIS model is creating a culture where schools own their improvement journey and play a key role in supporting the improvement of others. This approach is having a positive impact on developing a culture of professional

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collaboration. Headteachers welcome the opportunities they have to work in partnership with staff in other schools, and with their link quality improvement officer to support improvement. Whilst the SIS model represents significant time investment, headteachers value this approach and the difference it is making.

Quality assurance of child protection and safeguarding
The local authority requires headteachers to complete a child protection and safeguarding return as part of their standards and quality reporting. This return includes a detailed checklist which relates directly to the themes set out in Quality Indicator 2.1 of How Good is Our School?4. A local authority officer with responsibility for child protection and safeguarding reviews the safeguarding checklist, separate to other quality assurance checks. This is providing an effective layer of quality assurance for child protection and safeguarding.

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Local authority approaches to supporting school improvement

A national thematic inspection report from
His Majesty's Inspectors of Education

12 March 2025

Contents

Foreword

I am pleased to present this national thematic inspection report on how local authorities in Scotland support school improvement. This report reflects insights gathered from all 32 local authorities, offering a comprehensive overview of the strengths, challenges, and opportunities within our education system.

Local authorities play a pivotal role in supporting schools to improve the quality of education. This report highlights how they undertake this critical work, focusing on self-evaluation, improvement planning, quality assurance, professional learning, and the delivery of both universal and targeted support to schools.

Across Scotland, there is much to commend. We have seen strong examples of strategic leadership, robust data-driven self-evaluation, and collaborative cultures where schools and local authorities work together to improve outcomes for children and young people. Positive relationships, grounded in professional trust and respect, underpin many of these successes. In particular, effective leadership at all levels – central officers, school leaders, and middle leaders – emerges as a powerful driver for sustainable improvement.

However, the report also identifies areas where improvement is needed. There is notable variability in the consistency and quality of support provided to schools, both within and across local authorities. The effectiveness of self-evaluation processes requires strengthening, to maximise the progress of children and young people. Strengthening leadership development at all levels is essential for building capacity for continuous improvement.

The fiscal challenges facing all local authorities are significant. Financial constraints and the geographical realities of rural and island communities create barriers to consistent support and professional learning opportunities. The rural and remote contexts of a third of Scotland's local authorities present unique challenges, including attracting and retaining high-quality staff and ensuring consistent in-person engagement with schools. Addressing these challenges requires system-wide collaboration.

Despite these pressures, many local authorities are cultivating a culture of excellence and enhanced accountability. Where this culture thrives, there is a strong, collective responsibility to support every child and young person to achieve, regardless of which school they attend. This should be our shared ambition.

Another notable strength is the high-quality professional learning available to teachers, supported through a variety of courses, programmes, networks, and coaching approaches. However, there is a gap in comprehensive professional learning for central officers in local authorities – an area that must be addressed to ensure that they are equipped to lead and support improvement effectively.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) in developing a framework for self-evaluation. This represents an important step towards strengthening the capacity of local authorities to reflect on their performance and secure improvement. Complementing this, our work to develop a framework for inspecting local authorities will provide an essential external perspective. It offers opportunities to strengthen partnerships and support continuous improvement to ensure that efforts are delivering the best outcomes for Scotland's learners. The learning from this national thematic inspection will directly inform the development of that framework.

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I am grateful to all those who contributed to this thematic inspection, including local authority officers, school leaders, elected members, teachers, professional associations, and parents. Their openness and commitment to improvement are evident throughout this report.

Ultimately, this report reinforces a shared ambition: to ensure that all of Scotland's children and young people benefit from an education system that is inclusive, equitable, and of the highest quality. Together, through continuous reflection, leadership, and collaborative practice, we can achieve this goal – ensuring that every learner thrives in a system committed to their success.

Janie McManus
His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education

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Overview

In June 2024, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education announced a national thematic inspection of local authorities in Scotland. The focus of this thematic inspection was how local authorities support schools to improve. This inspection provides a timely opportunity to reflect on strengths, challenges, and opportunities for ensuring high-quality education for all learners.

This national thematic inspection enabled HM Inspectors to explore current priorities for improving school performance across all 32 local authorities in Scotland. We learned what is working well and heard about challenges that local authorities encounter and improvements that need to be addressed to ensure effectiveness across Scotland. Through the national thematic, HM Inspectors gathered evidence on the following themes:

- How local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through implementing effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting

- How local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through self-evaluation and quality assurance

- How local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through professional learning

- How local authorities deliver universal support and challenge for all schools, and targeted support for specific schools to improve the quality of education.

Terms of quantity

The following standard terms of quantity are used:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Methodology

Visits to local authorities took place between September and November 2024.

During the visits, inspection teams met with senior officers and central teams in local authorities to hear about local priorities and approaches to quality assurance and school improvement. HM Inspectors also met with focus groups of headteachers and school leaders, teachers, representatives of professional associations, elected members and chairs of Parent Councils.

At the planning stages of these inspections, HM Inspectors recognised the need for flexibility in our approach to meetings so that we could engage with a range of stakeholders who might not be able to travel to a central venue due to location and/or other commitments. We therefore held some meetings and focus groups using a hybrid approach, with some participants joining online and some in person.

Who we spoke to

As part of our approaches to gathering a range of evidence, we captured the views of headteachers and local authority staff who support improvement through a pre-inspection online questionnaire.

	Local authority senior leaders	Local authority officers	Headteachers	Teachers	Trade union representatives	Parents	Elected members
Total	150	436	635	479	111	144	126

Questionnaire responses

We received responses from:

- 1,328 headteachers
- 485 local authority staff

The responses to these questionnaires can be found in the appendix.

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Methodology key facts graphic

Visits to all 32* local authorities

Focus groups

337

Questionnaire responses

1328
Headteachers

485
Local authority staff

- Visits

Who we spoke to

150	436	635	479	111	144	126
Local authority senior leaders	Local authority central officers	Headteachers	Teachers	Trade union representatives	Parents	Elected members
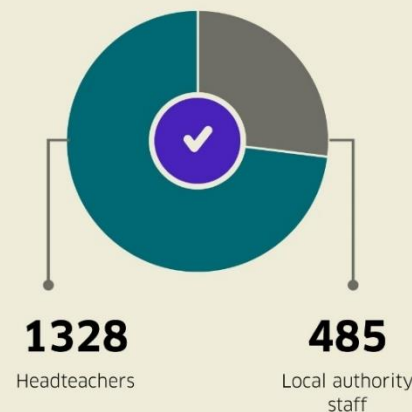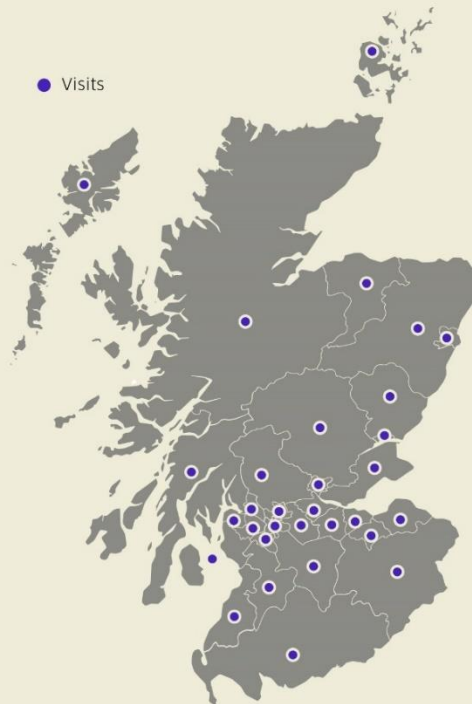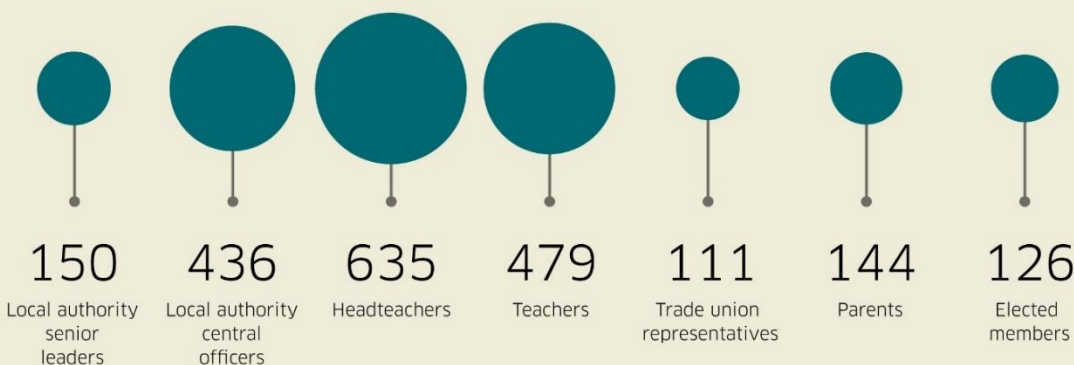
★ Aberdeen City; Aberdeenshire; Angus; Argyll and Bute; City of Edinburgh; Clackmannanshire; Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; Dumfries and Galloway; Dundee City; East Ayrshire; East Dunbartonshire; East Lothian; East Renfrewshire; Falkirk; Fife; Glasgow City; Highlands; Inverclyde; Midlothian; Moray; North Ayrshire; North Lanarkshire; Orkney Islands; Perth and Kinross; Renfrewshire; Scottish Borders; Shetland Islands; South Ayrshire; South Lanarkshire; Stirling; West Dunbartonshire; West Lothian.

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Main findings and summary messages

This summary highlights the overarching strengths and areas for further improvement. More detail is contained in the subsequent sections of the report.

Supporting effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting

All local authorities provide guidance for self-evaluation, improvement planning, and standards and quality reporting, often using standard templates, exemplars, and timelines. This is most effective when local authorities' strategic frameworks align school improvement approaches with broader visions for quality improvement in education.

In a few local authorities, more work is needed to ensure rigorous evaluation and alignment between local authority and school priorities. Most authorities equip headteachers with a range of useful data (e.g. on attendance and attainment) for self-evaluation and benchmarking. A majority of local authorities should moderate the work of central teams to ensure consistent quality. Some school leaders perceive inequity in the support levels they receive.

In most authorities, headteachers are engaged in worthwhile processes to collaborate and share practice, often within clusters. They help to improve quality assurance and self-evaluation approaches. For many authorities, a next step is to fully evaluate the impact of cluster improvement initiatives.

Most authorities analyse school self-evaluation and improvement planning processes to inform local priorities, professional learning needs, and to identify targeted support for individual schools. Across authorities, school leaders, including middle leaders, need more support with evaluative writing and evidence-based self-evaluation. For a minority of authorities, challenges exist in demonstrating how self-evaluation informs broader strategic decisions.

In a few authorities, collaborative governance structures help some headteachers shape local policies and enhance partnerships. This is practice worthy of sharing more widely.

Most authorities actively involve their key stakeholders in aspects of improving policy and planning. Hybrid engagement methods developed during the pandemic continue in many areas, while some forums are being reinstated.

Budget cuts and fiscal challenges are a shared concern among all local authorities and school leaders.

Supporting schools to improve the quality of education through self-evaluation and quality assurance

Most local authorities have well established and well understood systems in place to evaluate and monitor the performance and quality of education in schools, but they are not always effective. The majority of authorities should continue to develop robust ways to evaluate the effectiveness of their school improvement strategies. A minority of local authorities need to moderate more closely the input of central teams to ensure consistency of approach.

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A few local authorities have identified the need to strengthen their systems and approaches to evaluating school performance. This is important to ensure that local authority leaders and officers have an accurate overview of the strengths and areas for improvement across their schools. This will help to ensure there is equitable, targeted support for those schools that need to improve, and that effective practice can be shared more widely.

In a minority of local authorities, strategic approaches are demonstrably improving attainment and standards in learning, teaching, and assessment in primary schools, but much less so in secondary schools. In most authorities, there is a need to revisit the principles of self-evaluation for improvement, so that this is well understood by school leaders and staff at all levels, particularly in secondary schools.

A few local authorities have developed an effective system leadership approach across their schools. Many more local authorities are working towards this. Where this approach is effective, school leaders and their staff teams provide robust challenge and support to one another. They collaborate and share practice and feel empowered to lead and drive educational change. Building capacity within school teams in using robust, data-driven self-evaluation, strengthened by peer moderation, can help all local authorities to continue to raise standards and produce better outcomes for all children and young people, despite diminishing budgets and numbers of officers in central teams.

Supporting schools to improve the quality of education through professional learning

All local authorities provide a programme of universally accessible professional learning opportunities for leaders and staff in schools. In a few local authorities, the variability in uptake and engagement in professional learning across schools should be addressed.

Most local authorities have well-established or improving professional learning strategies in place. These professional learning programmes are comprehensive and well-informed by national policy, and school and local priorities. Central teams use the expertise available from national organisations and a range of partners to enhance their professional learning offer. This includes, in a few authorities, the strong contribution being made by Educational Psychological Services teams.

Almost all local authorities actively encourage and promote the sharing of effective practice among schools and build opportunities for this into meetings and networks. Collaborative working, based on positive relationships and mutual trust, is central to developing the skills and knowledge of staff at all levels. Staff engagement in network groups is customary practice in almost all local authorities.

Most local authorities provide well established leadership learning programmes for current and aspiring school leaders. This includes national leadership programmes and locally developed offers. Local authority leaders use this strategy increasingly effectively to improve their ability to recruit and retain school leaders from within their own workforce. Across Scotland, there is a need to continue to develop high-quality leadership learning approaches, focused on self-evaluation, for middle leaders.

A quarter of local authorities need to develop more rigorous and consistent approaches to evaluating the impact of their professional learning strategies. This should include monitoring the effectiveness of professional learning on improving the quality of learning and teaching and raising attainment, particularly in the secondary sector.

In rural local authorities, geographical context and financial pressures make staff engagement in a broad range of professional learning activities challenging. Central teams

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and staff in schools welcome and devise creative digital solutions to address these barriers. Teachers of Gàidhlig contribute significantly to the work of central teams in a few local authorities. They often have enhanced roles for Gàidhlig Medium Education, beyond their own school.

Delivering universal support and challenge for all schools, and/or targeted support for specific schools to improve the quality of education

All local authorities have a framework in place to support improvement in their schools. In most local authorities, these frameworks are clear, well-established, and embedded in practice.

A few local authorities have recently reviewed their frameworks to make improvements or are in the process of doing so.

Almost all local authorities have effective systems and processes in place to identify and organise appropriate levels of support and challenge to individual schools. Most local authorities provide clear advice and strong support to all schools to help them make improvements. In a few local authorities, these processes lack the rigour and consistency to secure improvement.

Local authority officers play a key role in the monitoring of school performance, identifying risk and supporting change and improvement.

Most local authorities have an accurate understanding of the individual performance of all schools.

Almost all local authorities use an evidence-based approach to identify schools that require targeted support. In the majority of local authorities, these approaches are well-established and effective. A few local authorities recognise the need to increase the robustness of the procedures they use to identify schools requiring targeted support.

In around half of local authorities, schools receiving targeted or intensive support have clear action plans against which progress can be robustly measured. This is a common area for further development across local authorities.

Local authorities with a high number of rural, remote and island schools face significant challenges in maintaining regular, in-person contact between all schools and central officers.

Recommendations

- Ensure that all schools receive high-quality, consistent support through robust universal provision. This should reduce variability within and across local authorities and secure equitable outcomes for learners.

- For schools requiring targeted support, implement robust action planning, monitoring and accountability. This is essential to ensure that necessary improvements for learners are secured at pace.

- Prioritise leadership development for middle leaders, particularly in secondary schools, where improvement outcomes are less consistent, with a focus on the principles of self-evaluation for self-improvement.

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- Establish a national professional learning programme for local authority central officers. This will help to build capacity and professional knowledge in school improvement and effective support and challenge practices.

- Develop flexible models of support that address the specific needs of rural, remote, and island schools.

- Embed local authority collaborative approaches to foster collective accountability for school improvement, ensuring these are consistently grounded in robust self-evaluation, and lead to accurate understanding of individual and collective improvement priorities.

- Improve the strategic use of data at both local authority and school levels. This includes developing staff capacity to interpret data effectively and use data-driven insights to inform self-evaluation, improvement planning, and resource allocation.

Supporting effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting

All local authorities provide schools with guidance on self-evaluation, improvement planning and standards and quality reporting. This usually includes standardised templates for school leaders to use, exemplars of good practice and timescales for completion. Most local authorities provide comprehensive guidance and advice that is embedded in a strategic quality improvement framework, which sets out a wider vision for school improvement. In these authorities, central officers know their schools very well and have a clear understanding of each school's strengths, challenges, and improvement needs. In improvement plans, headteachers are required to highlight how they will address local priorities as well as their own school's needs.

In most local authorities, officers provide headteachers with a range of data and performance information to inform their self-evaluation processes. This includes data on attendance, attainment and positive destinations at local authority, cluster, and school levels and for virtual comparators. Headteachers report that this data helps them to evaluate and benchmark their own school's performance and to identify appropriate improvement priorities for their school.

In a minority of local authorities, officers recognise that school leaders would benefit from further support in evaluating school performance more rigorously against national standards and local frameworks. At school level, improvement planning processes do not always lead to better outcomes quickly enough. School staff are not always clear about how local authority priorities align with individual school priorities.

Education officers provide all headteachers with evaluative written feedback on draft school improvement plans and standards and quality reports in most local authorities. Where practice is most effective, central teams moderate the quality of this feedback to ensure consistency in the approach they are taking. This is a next step for a minority of local authorities. Some school leaders do not always feel that there is equity and the same level of rigour across central teams.

A few local authorities take a digital approach to reporting to stakeholders on standards and quality. All the schools in these local authorities produce standards and quality reports as interactive, digital publications, rather than paper-based documents. Headteachers report that parents, staff, and learners have welcomed this more dynamic and inclusive reporting

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style. Teachers and learners contribute to the standards and quality report through videos, podcasts, and photographs. As a result, wider school communities are now actively engaged in school improvement planning processes. They are involved in identifying and celebrating successes and in highlighting next steps. Headteachers and staff report that this consistent approach is helping to develop a clear cycle of improvement planning and reporting on standards across school teams.

Involvement of school leaders

Almost all local authorities involve headteachers in reviewing and refreshing approaches to improvement planning and standards and quality reporting. This includes through surveys, working groups and through regular headteacher meetings.

Almost all local authorities support their headteachers to work collaboratively in clusters, trios, or quads to lead common areas of improvement. Local authorities share attainment and other data across cluster schools. Headteachers use this data to make comparisons and reflect on their own school's performance. In a minority of authorities, work has still to be done to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach on individual school improvement.

In most local authorities, school leaders are encouraged to be involved in improvement activities beyond their own establishments. These opportunities include being members of validated self-evaluation teams and school reviews and engaging in peer moderation of school improvement plans and standards and quality reports. In a very few authorities, they also include school leaders working across the primary and secondary sectors.

Using data from school improvement plans and standards and quality reports to inform strategic decision-making and local authority support

In the majority of local authorities, officers collate information from individual school improvement plans and standards and quality reports to identify common areas of good practice, priority and need. They use this information very effectively to inform strategic decisions about local authority priorities, requirements for professional learning and targeted support for schools. This is helping leaders and officers in these authorities to maintain existing high standards, and to secure further improvement in the quality of school education for children and young people.

For the minority of local authorities, central staff should consider ways to share with school leaders how school improvement planning and the accuracy of their self-evaluation contributes directly to the wider service improvement plan. There is scope for local authorities to make this process more explicit for school leaders.

Most local authorities have identified the need to work with school leaders to support them in the use of evaluative writing. They are also challenging headteachers more about the evidence they use to support their own evaluations of the quality of education.

In a few authorities, school leaders are core members of governance boards and provide advice and guidance on the effectiveness of local authority policy and practice, including school improvement approaches. These types of collaborative approaches help to build the capacity of headteachers to evaluate the impact of planned outcomes on school improvement. This contributes to a sense of genuine partnership working and mutual respect between local authority senior leaders and school leaders.

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Stakeholder involvement

The majority of local authorities have well embedded approaches to involving parents, learners, Elected Members and professional associations in informing policy and the work of central teams. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the ways that all local authorities engaged with stakeholder groups, and many forums were paused. In more recent years, some authorities have opted to maintain hybrid ways of engagement that were established during periods of lockdown. A few local authorities plan to now reinstate some forums and stakeholder groups.

In almost all local authorities, Central Officers and Elected Members reported to have productive and positive working relationships. Elected Members value the timely information and professional advice they receive from senior leaders. In a few local authorities, officers provide training sessions for Elected Members, for example on interpreting attainment data and on Gàidhlig. Elected Members appreciate this approach, and they feel better informed about school performance and statutory duties. During our visits to local authorities, Elected Members in all local authorities raised their concerns about the very challenging fiscal landscape and the resulting cuts to education budgets and some services. Central teams and school leaders across Scotland share these concerns.

Where practice is effective, local authority leaders hold regular meetings with the chairs of Parent Councils. Together, they discuss information about educational priorities and strategies to increase parental engagement in decision-making. In other examples, parental engagement officers work with Parent Councils to promote sharing practice across schools. In a few local authorities, parents are invited to help to shape policy and practice, for example for reviewing approaches to inclusion and equity.

In a minority of local authorities, there is an embedded approach to stakeholder engagement. Local authority senior leaders make time to listen to the views of learners. Education officers gather the views of children and young people through their quality assurance activities, including during school visits and thematic reviews. Engagement with learners is sometimes promoted through community learning and development (CLD) and third sector partners. In a few local authorities, children and young people's views have informed the implementation of council-wide priorities, such as tackling poverty and The Promise.

Practice examples

East Renfrewshire

The local authority promotes the collaboration of all stakeholders, especially learners, as essential to self-evaluation. The Director of Education engages regularly with children and young people from all schools to seek their views on a range of themes. The local authority gathers information from surveys completed by children and young people in schools. Through the Young Leaders of Learning approach, children and young people are developing an understanding of how to evaluate aspects of their own and other schools. Pupil and parent-friendly versions of school improvement plans are available in all schools. This is supporting children, young people, and parents to have a better understanding about school improvement. Parents welcome these school improvement plans and standards and quality reports that avoid educational jargon.

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Inverclyde Council

Education Service senior leaders meet regularly with focus groups of learners from across the local authority. As a result, there are clear examples of improvements to learners' experiences that are informed and driven by children and young people. These include learners' roles in shaping approaches to building racial literacy in schools. Local authority leaders also have a strong working relationship with teachers' professional associations.

Professional associations worked with the authority to improve incident recording and reporting. These improvements mean that more effective actions can be taken to monitor and deal with incidents. These constructive relationships are supporting the local authority and its schools to move forward with change and improvements effectively

Renfrewshire Council

As part of the local authority's target to build on inclusive approaches, parents of children with additional support needs (ASN) are invited to volunteer as Parent Ambassadors. Renfrewshire's Parent Ambassadors play a significant role in advising education officers during the creation or review of local authority policy and practices in relation to inclusion and ASN. They meet four times per year to discuss emerging issues and to consider local authority initiatives. An example of this consultation and collaboration is the development of the local authority's policy for transitions. Parent Ambassadors feel that they have a genuine voice in representing the families of children with ASN, and in informing the bespoke arrangements and approaches that are frequently required.

The City of Edinburgh Council

The Director and Heads of Education work very closely with Elected Members. They have established positive, constructive relationships. Education officers deliver a series of workshops for Elected Members, to support them in understanding school improvement systems and policy. For example, education officers have held sessions for Elected Members on interpreting data on Insight (the professional benchmarking tool for analysing attainment data in the senior phase), on Gàidhlig Medium Education, and the local authority's statutory plan for Gàidhlig. Elected Members speak very highly of this support in helping them make informed decisions to further improve outcomes for children and young people.

West Dunbartonshire Council

Officers have collaborated with school leaders to develop the West Dunbartonshire Council Improvement Framework. The framework sets out successfully the local authority's expectations for self-evaluation, quality assurance and improvement. The Excellence and Equity Board, which includes officers in central teams and school leaders, provides important governance to headteachers, central education leaders and elected members. School leaders agree that the framework and governance approach has been valuable in helping them maintain a focus on improvement within the context of their school community.

The strong partnership between officers and schools, combined with the work of the Excellence and Equity Board, helps school leaders meet the standards and expectations outlined in the framework.

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"Headteachers are fortunate to work with a great team of senior managers, who know their schools. There is a constant drive for improvement, Collaboration is encouraged, and good practice is shared."

Headteacher

"A key strength is the extent to which we know our schools and we work in partnership to support improvement. The balance of support and challenge is not formulaic. We meet schools 'where they are' and support is tailored to individual schools' needs."

Education manager

"Being a member of the Excellence and Equity Improvement Board has given me real insight into the local authority's improvement strategies. Their drive to have headteacher colleagues representing each local learning community is having a positive impact, enabling school leaders to work together on improvement initiatives thereby building collective efficacy."

Headteacher

Supporting improvement through self-evaluation and quality assurance

Methods to evaluate school performance and review the quality of education

Most local authorities have well established systems in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of education provision in their schools, but the effectiveness of these systems varies. Common features of effective and embedded practice include:

- programmes of formal visits by officers to every school across the year
- regular discussions between officers and school leaders about attainment and other data
- school reviews, often including peer school leaders

We found practice to be highly effective in just over half of local authorities. In these authorities, local authority officers know their schools very well and have a clear understanding of each school's strengths, challenges and improvement needs.

School leaders feel well supported as well as challenged robustly by local authority officers. Their involvement in quality assurance reviews in other schools is helping to build professional capacity and contribute to the creation of a shared understanding of national standards across local authority and school teams.

Overall, the majority of local authorities should continue to develop comprehensive approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of their quality improvement strategies. This includes implementing more robust approaches to moderate the work of central teams, such as how accurately officers evaluate school performance, and the quality of feedback they provide to headteachers. This is necessary to ensure better consistency, a shared understanding, and equity of approach across central teams.

In a few authorities, a minority of headteachers feel that the quality of support and challenge they received from central officers is inconsistent or not sufficiently robust or frequent enough to help them to improve.

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A few local authorities have identified the need to strengthen their systems for evaluating and reviewing school performance. In these authorities, there are some early signs of positive new approaches being implemented. For example, refreshed frameworks for improvement provide clearer guidance and expectations, including clarity on the roles and responsibilities of central officers and school leaders. These approaches have the potential to support a more effective cycle of continuous improvement.

Evaluating and improving the quality of learning, teaching, and assessment

A minority of local authorities can demonstrate through robust data that their quality assurance strategy is directly supporting schools to improve the quality of learning, teaching, and assessment. Many more local authorities are developing and improving their systems to achieve this.

Where practice is well established, embedded and leading to positive impact, there is a shared understanding between central officers and school leaders that the quality of learning, teaching and assessment is directly linked to outcomes for learners. There is a clear focus on improving the quality of learning, teaching, and assessment in the work of central officers. For example, during quality assurance visits to schools, outwith cyclical programmes of 'deep dive' school review, officers will routinely:

- observe learning and teaching
- speak with focus groups of children and young people
- meet with groups of staff to discuss improvements in pedagogy
- importantly, share messages about their findings with school teams.

In a minority of local authorities, there are clear and embedded approaches on using robust and reliable data to inform decision-making, policy, and practice. Many other local authorities are developing and improving their processes in this area. In local authorities where this is working particularly well, central teams prioritise developing school leader and staff capacity to use data effectively to improve outcomes for children and young people. For example, 'data leads' or 'data champions' in each school are trained and supported to interpret and use data and to disseminate practice.

Officers in central teams meet school leaders regularly across the school year to discuss a range of attainment, attendance, and exclusion data to determine school performance and how well the school is improving. In a minority of local authorities, headteachers have access to and use data for their locality and authority, as well as their own school. This is helping to support an ethos of collective efficacy and shared self-evaluation for improvement. A minority of local authorities have identified the need to continue to develop the use of data across their central and school teams.

In a minority of local authorities, evidence demonstrates that strategic approaches are improving standards in learning, teaching, and assessment in primary schools, but less so in secondary schools. There is a need to ensure that practice in effective and robust self-evaluation for improvement is shared across, and between, primary and secondary schools. Professional learning for school leaders, including middle leaders in secondary schools, will help to achieve this.

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Local authorities that have higher proportions of speakers and learners of Gàidhlig have substantial, bespoke support for schools that offer Gàidhlig Medium Education. In the most effective practice, central teams give schools feedback on the distinctive features of Gàidhlig Medium Education and on pedagogy. They use a range of evaluative strategies, such as visiting classes, analysing learners' work and assessing learners' progress through focus groups.

System leadership

A few local authorities have undertaken significant work over recent years to develop system leadership approaches. In these authorities, positive and effective relationships underpin the work of all staff. This arises from strong, strategic leadership, driving forward a well-understood, shared vision for collective improvement. Local authority senior leaders, officers and headteachers feel strongly that a culture of trust, respect and empowerment is central to effective system leadership. Reasons for local authorities adopting this approach include developing a vision for shared commitment for raising standards. However, they also include the fact that financial constraints mean that the numbers of staff in central teams, in almost all geographical areas, are diminishing. Therefore, building capacity within school teams in using robust, data driven self-evaluation, strengthened by peer collaboration, is helping these local authorities to continue to raise standards and produce better outcomes for children and young people.

Key principles for the successful implementation of collective endeavours like these to improve all schools include ensuring that there is a shared understanding across all schools on the purpose and rationale for collaborative improvement and collective accountability. Building on this shared understanding, school leaders need to be skilled in robust and accurate self-evaluation, based on sound judgements and reliable data. Relationships need to be strong enough for school leaders to be able to benefit from providing, receiving, and acting on constructive feedback from their peers. Most local authorities are undertaking positive work towards achieving these aims.

Practice examples

East Lothian Council

The local authority's Self-improving Schools (SIS) model is creating a culture where school leaders feel empowered to drive their own school's improvement journey and play a key role in supporting the improvement of others. This approach is having a positive impact on developing a strong culture of professional collaboration. Headteachers welcome the opportunities to work in partnership with staff in other schools, and with their link quality improvement officer, to support improvement. Whilst the SIS model represents significant time investment, headteachers value this approach and the difference it is making to outcomes for children and young people.

Falkirk Council

The development of 'quality associates' enhances the local authority's universal and targeted support for schools. Headteachers who take on the role as 'quality associates' use their skills, experience, and professional knowledge to provide support and challenge to peer school leaders. Within a challenging financial climate, this approach is helping to increase the capacity across the local authority, with a particular focus on effective self-evaluation for school improvement.

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Fife Council

The local authority's 'Self-Improving Networked Learning System' promotes continuous self-evaluation for improvement. All headteachers benefit from a comprehensive network of support and challenge at local authority, locality, cluster, and school levels. This systematic framework builds on a culture of ongoing improvement in the quality of education. The system aims to use the wealth of skills and expertise that exist at all levels of the local authority, supporting the empowerment of school leaders through strong partnership working and outcomes-focused collaboration. Local authority officers participate within targeted groups and networks to provide universal support and challenge.

Renfrewshire Council

The local authority has a clear and highly effective data strategy that underpins the work of all. The strategy is successful in ensuring that robust data is accessible for practitioners, teachers, school leaders and education officers alike. A data dashboard for each school provides a wealth of data that can be interrogated in different ways. The data strategy provides a comprehensive programme of skills development for practitioners, teachers, school leaders and education officers. As a result, the use of data is firmly embedded in the work of all. Decisions, refinement to practice and interventions at school and local authority levels are based on robust data evidence. This is leading to strong educational outcomes for children and young people.

South Ayrshire Council

Local authority officers work effectively with a range of colleagues including headteachers and teachers to co-design approaches to evaluate the quality of learning, teaching, and assessment in schools. This is helping to bring about improvement in this area across schools. In the secondary sector, the local authority has strengthened subject networks for subject leaders and teachers. These are regular, planned forums for subject leaders and teachers to share good practice and develop consistency around approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment. The recent development of well-planned subject department quality assurance visits is helping to generate a culture of sharing effective practice across schools and maintain a shared understanding about expected high standards.

West Dunbartonshire Council

Enhanced Scrutiny, Collaborative Action (ESCA) visits are an important feature of the local authority's quality assurance framework and complement a wide programme of school review. ESCA visits are 'deep dives' into one area of a school's work. School leaders identify an area for focused attention. A team of education officers and senior leaders from other schools visit the school for one day. They provide an objective view and constructive feedback on the school's self-evaluation. School leaders often choose an area of practice that they feel needs further development. They report that participating in the supportive and robust dialogue is extremely helpful in deciding next steps for improvement. Examples of areas of practice that school leaders have chosen for an ESCA visit include:

- safeguarding

- ASN provision

- moderation of Curriculum for Excellence levels

- use of data to inform improvement

- the quality of learning environments

- the use of Pupil Equity Funding to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

West Lothian Council

The local authority's evaluation and review of ASN across its schools led to a strategic approach to supporting learning, teaching, and assessment in classrooms. Additional support needs are prioritised as a quality improvement driver in all schools. There is a clear focus on embedding the principles of inclusion and equity within mainstream classrooms across West Lothian schools. An 'inclusion ambassador' network connects teachers with an interest and skills in ASN pedagogy across the local authority. Courses, training events and coaching and mentoring sessions, run by the central ASN team, help to upskill school staff's knowledge in five priority areas: autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, behaviour as communication, inclusive classrooms, and sensory needs. These professional learning opportunities, which are linked to the local authority's clear strategic lead, are having a positive impact on the learning experiences of children and young people with ASN.

"There has been a notable shift in how we work with the central team. Schools have clear objectives identified through service level agreements. This means we are clear on our objectives and how we will measure and report back on progress."

Headteacher

"Our authority has a very strong quality improvement framework which has been developed and improved in recent years. We are empowering schools to grow as a self-sustaining network."

Quality improvement officer

"There appears to be an inconsistency in the standard of improvement plans and quality reports across the authority. Some schools appear to have more scrutiny or expectation placed on them than others. The level of support and challenge is very much dependent on who your Quality Improvement Officer is."

Headteacher

"Sometimes it can feel that data is all that matters, rather than discussion about how it helps children's learning move forwards."

Headteacher

"The introduction of self-evaluation trios has allowed school leaders to become part of the central quality assurance offer and provides leadership opportunities for staff in schools."

Head of Education

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Supporting schools to improve the quality of education through professional learning

Professional learning strategy to drive school improvement

The majority of local authorities have in place established and effective professional learning strategies, with the remainder taking steps to strengthen their professional learning provision. In a few local authorities, this is at a very early stage of development. All local authorities believe that professional learning plays a critical part in improvement and embed the importance of this role within their quality improvement frameworks. Increasingly, professional learning strategies are tailored to align closely with the local authorities' learning, teaching, and assessment strategies. However, the rationale for the professional learning offer and the decision-making process that informs it are not yet fully understood by school leaders and staff in a few local authorities.

Most professional learning strategies are well-informed by national policy and the needs of service and school improvement priorities. This is most effective when central officers undertake regular, robust data analysis, using a wide range of local data and intelligence, including external inspection outcomes. They ensure that this supports career-long professional development, reflecting the needs of staff at all levels. A few local authorities could use their professional review and development process more effectively to inform their professional learning programme.

Most local authorities' strategies are based on the national model of professional learning. This supports staff to identify, participate in and reflect on the impact of professional learning on themselves as learners, and importantly on the children, young people. They provide a balance of self-directed, online professional learning and opportunities for collaborative learning. The range of learning opportunities is generally comprehensive and wide ranging. Geographical and budgetary constraints make the provision of in-person professional learning opportunities much more challenging for some. Increasingly, creative approaches are employed to mitigate these barriers.

All local authorities provide professional learning that is available universally, in addition to more targeted approaches. Nationally, improving the quality of learning and teaching to raise attainment, data-literacy, inclusion, equality and building positive relationships are common priority areas for development. Bespoke training is delivered in individual schools, learning communities, localities or across sectors, as appropriate to local context.

In the few local authorities where professional learning is very well-embedded, their approach to targeted support is responsive, varied, and agile. This enables them to adapt the delivery of professional learning programmes to meet the specific needs of individual schools or staff groups. As a result, professional learning is highly effective in improving staff skills and knowledge and, crucially, improving outcomes for children and young people.

More rigorous, consistent evaluation of the impact of professional learning is required in almost a quarter of local authorities. Officers should use the increasing rigour of quality assurance activities to inform the design and delivery of their professional learning offer. These local authorities should give greater consideration to how they can meet the needs of both local and school improvement plans, and the professional development needs of staff identified through annual professional review and development meetings.

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Collaborative practice

All local authorities support staff to work collaboratively in a range of ways, for a range of purposes. Often, this is informed by strategic priorities and data analysis. Increasingly, local authorities use collaboration to build capacity to support the development of a self-supporting school system. Most local authorities use a wide range of collaborative approaches. These include the creation of networks, working parties, think-tank groups and the development of online hubs.

A few local authorities have a highly developed culture of effective collaborative working. They view collaboration as the main universal support for improvement. In these authorities, the vision for and promotion of this collaborative culture is strongly led by directors and senior leaders. In these local authorities, collaboration is creating the conditions through which supportive and empowered approaches to system-wide professional learning is being delivered. The strong culture of collaboration between school leaders and central officers is based on mutual trust and respect.

In almost all local authorities, the effective use of dedicated networks to support professional learning is common practice. In only a very few local authorities, headteachers identified a need for more opportunities to work together. Formal networks provide forums for practitioners to discuss priorities, share practice and engage in collaborative improvement activity. They are designed to provide tailored support and development relevant to specific job roles, reflecting a commitment to career-long professional development.

Typical networks include provision for newly qualified teachers, newly appointed teachers and aspiring middle leaders through to school leaders. A few local authorities are expanding network provision further to meet the needs of support staff and newly appointed or acting headteachers.

In addition to role-specific networks, a range of more subject-specific and cross-sectoral approaches are also used, for example for staff working in Gàidhlig Medium Education or with a specific focus on additional support needs. Secondary subject networks involve curriculum leaders and teachers in development work centred on subject specific professional learning and moderation. These provide opportunities to share more specific approaches to school improvement and learn about effective practice from peers. Where well-established, this encourages effective cross-cluster collaboration and is making a positive difference to the practice of those who attend. A minority of authorities have identified the need to re-establish or strengthen further secondary subject specific networks.

Smaller local authorities find collaborative working with other local authorities particularly beneficial. It allows staff to work with a wider range of partners, to share expertise and practice and develop resources together. They cite Regional Improvement Collaborative partnerships as having been instrumental in facilitating connections and partnerships with other local authorities.

Actively involving school leaders in working beyond their own school contributes positively to their own learning and development. Most local authorities operate a well-established cluster, trio, or quad approach, where school leaders work with cluster colleagues or are matched with schools with similar contexts and profiles. These groups have important roles in supporting accurate, rigorous, and robust peer self-evaluation. School leaders consider participation in school reviews, such as validated self-evaluation, to be highly effective forms of professional learning. Headteachers grouped across learning communities gain a broader perspective of school standards and performance across the local authority.

The ability to recruit school leaders with the necessary skills and expertise is particularly challenging in some parts of the country. Increasingly, local authorities are strengthening their approaches to leadership development to enable them to recruit to promoted posts from within their existing workforce. Aspiring leadership programmes are successful in encouraging participants to apply for promoted posts and undertake accredited learning.

Local authorities value the contribution of staff participation in more formal national leadership development programmes, such as Into Headship and Excellence in Headship, working in partnership with Education Scotland and universities. Most local authorities provide opportunities for staff to develop leadership skills through specific roles, such as curriculum champion, data lead or quality assurance and support officer.

Teachers appreciate these opportunities to work collaboratively and share their expertise in their own schools, and more widely across the authority. A few local authorities recognise the need to monitor more closely the impact that participation in professional learning has on the quality of leadership in their schools.

The use of coaching and mentoring to support leadership development is common practice across all local authorities, particularly to support newly appointed or acting headteachers. Where practice is strongest, mentors feel well-equipped to carry out this responsibility due to the provision of training in advance of taking up the role. Those in receipt of mentoring speak highly of this approach and the high-quality coaching conversations on which the mentoring is based. Headteachers comment positively on its impact on their confidence and practice.

The ongoing need to ensure that all school leaders undertake robust quality assurance and accurate self-evaluation remains a priority across the country. Professional learning is increasing school leaders' confidence in using qualitative and quantitative data, evaluative writing, and improvement planning. A few local authorities are seeing increasing alignment with school self-evaluation, local authority evaluation of schools and outcomes from school inspection as a result.

Impact of professional learning

High-quality professional learning builds the capacity and increases the confidence of staff, impacting positively on their practice. The number of staff participating in professional learning programmes impacts positively on staff expertise and pedagogical practice. A few local authorities are aware of the variability of uptake in professional learning across their schools and are taking steps to address this. Staff engagement is particularly challenging for island-based and predominantly rural authorities, where travel and budgets are significant barriers to participation. As a result, some teachers have not participated in subject-specific professional development for a considerable period.

Restricted access to central digital professional learning platforms, although intended for general use, can also make accessibility difficult. A lack of permanency of employment for newly qualified teachers is also a challenge. This is leading to some inconsistencies in the level of teacher skills.

There is a need to strengthen approaches to systematically evaluating the quality and impact of professional learning in a minority of local authorities. In a few authorities, this is particularly the case in relation to determining improvement in the quality of learning and teaching in secondary schools. Robust self-evaluation shows that high-quality professional learning is contributing positively to improving outcomes for children and young people in a minority of local authorities. In these authorities, officers gather data to monitor the impact of

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professional learning on staff's ability to adapt to the changing needs of education. This in turn is improving outcomes for children and young people.

A few local authorities have successfully overcome barriers of limited contractual hours, to enable support for learning assistants to engage in dedicated professional learning programmes. The provision of additional paid hours enables support for learning assistants to work more collaboratively within and across schools. In some instances, this has led to them gaining advanced qualifications. As a result, children and young people benefit from an improved level of support.

Almost all local authorities have a range of effective induction programmes in place for new staff. In almost all cases, these are targeted to meet the specific needs of identified groups of staff, such as newly qualified teachers, middle leaders, senior leaders and headteachers. These induction programmes support staff to feel increasingly confident in their role.

Most local authorities are strengthening their focus on improving the quality of learning, teaching, and raising attainment. Those local authorities that are in the process of introducing new learning and teaching frameworks are doing this effectively through a comprehensive programme of professional learning, guidance, and support. This is having a positive impact on learning and teaching approaches, improving the curriculum, and developing data literacy skills. A few local authorities are committed to ensuring that all teachers across a specific sector, or at specific stages, engage with high-quality professional learning over a sustained period. These authorities report this leading to consistently better learning and teaching, particularly in primary schools.

An increasing culture of professional enquiry is supporting staff to use quality improvement methodology to improve outcomes for children and young people. Most local authorities provide a universal offer with a clear focus on raising attainment in literacy and numeracy. Nationally, an increased focus on the teaching of writing in primary schools is increasing teacher confidence in teaching and assessing writing. This is having a positive impact on levels of attainment.

Partnership working

Across the country, local authority officers engage partners and national organisations who can contribute to the provision and quality of their professional learning programme. Frequent use is made of the professional learning offers from organisations such as Education Scotland and universities. Increased collaboration and looking outwards are creating a more consistent approach to developing highly effective practice in line with national standards.

The positive impact of the professional learning provided by educational psychological services is evident in a few local authorities. They offer bespoke professional learning inputs, for example, in relation to understanding anxiety and cognitive behavioural approaches. This supports improved wellbeing for children and young people and the development of more inclusive practices across schools.

All local authorities have senior leaders or central officers who work in partnership with HM Inspectors as Associate Assessors (AAs). Local authorities and AAs themselves value highly the quality of professional learning that inspection experience provides.

All local authorities use the skills and experience of AAs to enhance their understanding of national standards and expectations, but to varying degrees. AAs work in partnership with local authority officers and headteachers to build capacity and support improvement. This

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includes providing support for Gàidhlig. A few local authorities have sought to increase the number of AAs across their service to enable them to utilise their skills more strategically. In almost all local authorities, AAs are becoming integral to the improvement work of central teams, in evaluating and validating the quality of education provided in schools. They support the development of increased confidence in applying national standards to self-evaluative professional activity.

Practice examples

Falkirk Council

The Leadership Development Pathway is successfully increasing leadership capacity across the authority. School leaders are confident to support improvements beyond their own establishments. The Leadership Empowerment Strategy enables school leaders to take greater responsibility and accountability for leadership in their own school and across the authority. School leaders are viewed by the director and heads of education as part of the collective leadership of the local authority. School leaders collaborate successfully across sectors and establishments to support continuous improvement. This includes participation in thematic reviews and involvement in strategic decision making. School leaders influence strategic direction and contribute to a shared understanding of standards.

Fife Council

The secondary headteacher collaborative is a well-established network of headteachers and central officers that meets regularly to discuss self-evaluation and quality assurance approaches. Quality improvement packs provided by the central team support secondary school leaders to develop and embed quality improvement and self-evaluation processes and expectations across their individual schools and across the sector. This professional learning approach supports secondary school leaders in benchmarking performance, planning next steps, and linking evidence directly to school improvement planning and standards and quality reporting. Secondary school leaders are very positive about this collaborative. They feel that it is an integral part of ensuring a shared understanding of expectations across secondary schools. It supports them to evaluate robustly their schools' strengths, identify areas for improvement and to access good practice examples within the authority.

Glasgow City Council

The Executive Director has a clear vision to develop Glasgow City Council as a 'networked learning city.' He has placed collaborative working at the centre of developments. Staff share this drive to work together across the city to identify priorities, find solutions and improve outcomes for all children and young people. This vision is articulated by staff at all levels. Headteachers report an increase in autonomy and feel empowered to work with others to lead and manage change and improvement. All staff acknowledge and value the role of professional learning and networking in improving the quality of education.

North Ayrshire Council

North Ayrshire Council has a very well-established and embedded Professional Learning Academy (PLA) that focuses on supporting improvement. The PLA, which is comprised of a team of seconded teachers, offers a range of supports to staff and

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schools within North Ayrshire. This includes a programme of courses, targeted visits, and in-residence programmes. The PLA in-residence programme is an important lever for success in the local authority's quality improvement framework. The approach involves a PLA teacher joining a school team for nine weeks, working alongside teachers in classes to team teach, observe and plan learning experiences and create resources. The role of the PLA and aims of the programme are planned by headteachers, working with senior local authority managers. A contract is drawn up that sets out the agreed nature of the support to be delivered, its aims and how success and impact will be evaluated. Local authority staff and school leaders carry out reviews of the PLA in-residence programme to evaluate the impact and sustainability of the work.

Renfrewshire Council

Approaches such as a 'train the trainer' model, supports professional learning within schools and across clusters. This promotes an ethos of strong collaboration and is helping to build capacity for leading improvement at authority level, beyond the central team. Collaboration through subject networks is working very well across the secondary sector to support this work. Development officers provide universal professional learning and targeted, practical support to class teachers and support staff through modelling and coaching practice. The local authority is developing the role of 'modelling and coaching' officers within school staff teams in a consistent and universal ways through the development of a 'grow your own' approach. This approach supports the local authority's aim to embed practitioner inquiry in professional learning.

Stirling Council

The local authority has a motivating way of recognising and capitalising on the skills, expertise and professional knowledge of staff in schools. It provides secondment opportunities for school staff to join the central team, to take forward priorities that support equity and excellence in education. This is contributing very successfully to the local authority's approach to developing leadership capacity. Senior leaders' sharing of their practice through creative conversations and at learning festivals supports the local authority's mission for high-quality learning, teaching, and attainment across its schools.

The City of Edinburgh Council

The Edinburgh Learns for Life strategy is based on strong collaboration across schools, partners, and other stakeholders, with high accountability and support as required. The Professional Learning Charters for all teachers and practitioners are drivers for success. They highlight the local authority's commitment to expanding and improving the workforce. The suite of professional learning opportunities sets out clearly an offer to teaching staff. The highly effective model for delivery of professional learning clearly aligns with identified priorities within the service strategic plans, as well as being responsive to emerging themes at local and national levels. Education officers ensure that they monitor the impact of professional learning effectively using a variety of methods. These robust evaluation approaches are supporting education officers to review, adapt, and improve professional learning on an ongoing basis. This helps to ensure that the professional learning offer continues to align with the progressive local authority strategic improvement plan.

"We have invested in a Pedagogy Team to build capacity in schools in order to help raise achievement. This involves providing both targeted and universal professional learning and support to schools across the local authority."

Education manager

"Headteacher collaborative sessions are not tokenistic information sharing sessions. They are meaningful opportunities to work with colleagues, finding solutions to the real challenges we face."

Headteacher

"Professional learning programmes could be shaped more with headteachers. It can often feel delivered to us. There is not a lot of consultation on what would be helpful to us."

Headteacher

"As a new Acting Headteacher, I have greatly appreciated the unwavering support from my local authority. Their guidance has not only been readily available but has also instilled in me the confidence to make informed decisions and to lead with purpose."

Acting headteacher

Delivering universal support and challenge for all schools, and/or targeted support for specific schools to improve the quality of education

Frameworks to support and challenge all schools

All local authorities have a framework in place to support improvement in schools. In most local authorities, improvement frameworks are clear, well-established, and embedded in practice. All local authorities provide a tiered approach to support and challenge, recognising the need for universal, targeted, and intensive categories of support for schools, as necessary. The set of criteria used by central officers to determine the level of support for each school is generally well defined in almost all local authorities and is reviewed annually.

A few local authorities have reviewed and refreshed their improvement frameworks recently or are rightly in the process of doing so. Authority staff have initiated these reviews due to a range of factors, including changes to the leadership and structure of central teams; quality assurance and self-evaluation evidence, including external inspections; and the impact of budget cuts. Almost all local authorities ensure that their improvement frameworks are founded on principles of self-evaluation, taking appropriate account of local and national priorities.

Improvement frameworks are effective in securing continuous improvement in most local authorities. In these authorities, approaches are developed and refined collaboratively by local authority officers and school leaders.

In most local authorities, there is an established culture of collaborative working. Positive, trusting relationships between school leaders and local authority officers are evident. These relationships are important in facilitating the effective development, implementation, and

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review of local authorities' improvement frameworks. This supports central officers to ensure that improvement processes are clearly understood, transparent and responsive to need. School leaders value the visibility of local authority officers in their schools and welcome the feedback and challenge they provide.

It is very important to recognise that maintaining in-person relationships is a significant extra challenge for those local authorities with a high number of rural, remote and island schools. This can restrict the full implementation of improvement frameworks that require a balance of in-person and online activity. Barriers include significant journeys for central officers to remote schools, transport difficulties and challenges in the recruitment and retention of central officers and school leaders. In a few rural authorities, hybrid approaches to engagement between officers and schools are often hindered due to poor broadband or digital infrastructure.

Processes to identify support and challenge for all schools

Most local authorities have effective processes in place to identify and organise appropriate levels of support and challenge for all schools. In a few local authorities, these processes lack consistency and rigour and are less effective. Senior leaders in these authorities recognise the need for a more strategic approach to developing the capacity of their central teams. This has the potential to support an increased pace of change in schools where improvement is required. Senior leaders should ensure that they have clear oversight of which schools are receiving universal, targeted, or intensive support. This will enable them to monitor more effectively the impact of support delivered by central teams.

Across all local authorities, link officers play a key role in gathering intelligence and data about school performance. In a few local authorities, this role is also undertaken by a cluster lead or an experienced school leader who has been seconded for this purpose. The implementation of an agreed calendar of engagement between individual school leaders and their link officer is common practice across all local authorities. The frequency, nature and impact of this engagement is more variable across the country. There is a need to ensure a more consistent approach across teams, with a clear focus on improvement.

In a minority of local authorities, officers could strengthen further the quality of their feedback to school leaders, for example on improvement plans and standards and quality reports.

Most local authorities have an accurate understanding of the performance, capacity, and context of each of their schools. In these authorities, officers ensure that their understanding of school performance is accurately informed by a wide range of qualitative and quantitative evidence. This enables them to monitor and maintain a strong understanding of each school's capacity for improvement and areas of risk. Officers interrogate attainment, attendance, and exclusion data regularly, looking for patterns or dips in performance. They review the impact of the school's use of Pupil Equity Fund on attainment.

Staff absence, recruitment challenges and recent appointments, particularly of headteachers, is also monitored carefully. In addition, they review the number of complaints received and consider the views of parents following local authority-wide surveys. Where practice is most effective, they use regular discussions with school leaders to triangulate data to ensure its accuracy and rigour, making comparison against local and national benchmarks where appropriate. In the minority of local authorities where practice is particularly strong, it is this breadth of understanding that most accurately informs the local authority's identification of schools requiring enhanced or intensive support.

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A few local authorities offer headteachers a higher level of support. Headteachers recognise and value the enhanced level of guidance and resource associated with this and are keen to secure this for their school. As a result, these authorities are giving an increasing proportion of schools enhanced support. However, this can lead to an over-reliance on enhanced and targeted support in some schools, and an imbalance in resource provision overall. To redress this, local authorities should consider the effectiveness of their universal support provision. In authorities where universal provision is working very well, there is a more proportionate and targeted balance of central support across the schools.

All authorities make effective use of the outcomes of school inspections within their own authority. They use these to benchmark the accuracy of their schools' self-evaluation activity. Occasionally, in a few authorities, the emphasis on engagement and quality assurance is placed most often on preparing for inspection. This can be at the expense of other effective, ongoing quality assurance activity that would be based on a range of measures.

Provision of advice and support

Most local authorities have effective systems in place to provide advice and support to schools. They use data in increasingly strategic ways to inform and determine the approaches to be used. This includes support to address both performance and pastoral needs. Headteachers value highly the pastoral support provided by link officers, reflecting that relationships are built on trust and respect. A few local authorities find the provision of advice and support more challenging. This can be due to school-based staff's lack of awareness of improvement frameworks, the cycle of self-evaluation for self-improvement, or the support provision available to schools. In a few local authorities, the central team do not have capacity to support high numbers of schools requiring targeted or intensive support. Increasingly, peer headteachers are being given a more prominent role in quality assurance activities, working in partnership with other schools to help address this.

Almost all local authorities make increasing use of a range of networks to provide support and challenge to schools. This includes peer and multi-agency support. A few local authorities take a 'team around the school' approach to strengthen and inform multi-agency planning. Informed by their careful monitoring and tracking of school performance, they identify common themes. Guidance, such as improving attendance, is then issued to all schools, making best use of time and resource.

Headteacher meetings and cluster improvement approaches are being used increasingly to provide universal support. A few local authorities have redesigned their headteacher meetings to incorporate regular evaluative activity. There is now a much stronger emphasis on strategic improvement in these authorities. They actively promote collaboration among headteachers, encouraging them to engage in open and honest dialogue. The sharing of effective practice is encouraged and facilitated.

Most local authorities share effective practice to support learning in a variety of ways. Local authority officers direct staff at all levels to identified areas of strong practice across schools. Authority-led conferences, seminars and headteacher-led forums provide beneficial opportunities to develop knowledge and share effective practice. Staff value these opportunities to hear about the implementation and impact of new initiatives and effective and embedded practice.

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A few local authorities have a relatively high number of newly appointed headteachers. They understand the importance of providing enhanced support to build the capacity of new school leaders.

Experienced headteachers are often paired with a new colleague to provide mentor support. In almost all authorities, officers and headteachers have engaged in coaching and mentoring training that has strengthened their skills in delivering this support. This approach to leadership development contributes to the success of improvement frameworks.

All local authorities recognise the importance of having reliable and robust data for effective self-evaluation and quality assurance activity. Most local authorities provide advice and support about the use of data to build staff capacity and improve the accuracy of schools' self-evaluation. This includes the provision of comprehensive data packs for each of their schools. A few local authorities implement effective support that links well with the national Pupil Equity Fund guidance. They use the expertise of their link attainment advisor to increase staff skills in using data to demonstrate impact.

Identifying schools requiring targeted support

The majority of local authorities have well-established systems and processes in place to identify schools requiring targeted support. They ensure that performance data for each school is maintained and updated regularly on a central database. This provides local authority officers and leaders with access to current performance information and intelligence. A minority of local authorities need to use data and intelligence more strategically. Doing so would help them to develop and maintain a clearer profile of risk, set within a structured risk matrix. This will enable them to provide a more equitable response to support provision, prioritising finite resources to where this is most needed.

A few local authorities use data very well to provide targeted support to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy, including closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Their use of a central database enables officers to share information with support providers such as a central pedagogy team, enabling them to prioritise bespoke support accordingly for individual or groups of schools.

Action planning, monitoring, and reviewing progress

Around half of local authorities that have identified schools requiring targeted or intensive support ensure that a clear action plan is in place to support improvement. The quality and effectiveness of these actions plans varies across the country. Local authorities find action plans to be most effective when priorities and the nature of the support to be provided are agreed in partnership with the headteacher. These set out clear goals, responsibilities, time limits and measures for success.

Around half of local authorities monitor the impact of action plans closely. A minority of local authorities need to strengthen further their approach to ensuring that targeted support leads to desired improvement. Where monitoring supports improvement most effectively, officers review progress in partnership with headteachers regularly and provide valuable feedback. Together, they agree next steps to ensure continuing improvement. The establishment of baseline measures by the staff involved help inform the rate of progress. Headteachers value this intensive support and challenge. Link officers take time to review data about their link schools and with each other. Working within an environment of professional trust, they feel able to challenge the quality and effectiveness of improvement actions and learn from each other. This provides opportunities for them to moderate the quality of their work.

A few local authorities need to develop further the skills of the central team to ensure a consistent approach in developing, implementing, and monitoring the progress of school improvement. Officers need to be more precise about what will make the biggest difference to secure school performance. They need to ensure that headteachers act on the feedback and guidance provided more effectively.

Practice examples

Falkirk Council

Education officers provide targeted support and challenge for schools in areas of high deprivation. They are reducing the attainment gap for children and young people living in the most deprived areas of the local authority. Central officers work with school leaders and staff to support those children and young people who are not on track to achieve expected Curriculum for Excellence levels. They moderate teachers' professional judgements and analyse children and young people's progress. Education officers have clear evidence that children and young people living in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile one make significant progress because of successful, planned interventions by staff and partners. The local authority has a well-established 'team around the school' approach to provide enhanced support and challenge when necessary. This is helping to address challenges in identified schools, particularly around strengthening leadership and improving outcomes for children and young children. This approach provides a sustained focus for schools to improve and involves a range of officers from the authority's central team. The progress that schools make is very carefully tracked, monitored, and evaluated by the 'team around the school.'

The City of Edinburgh Council

The local authority has very effective systems and processes in place to address any concerns about school provision. It takes swift action to ensure that improvements are made and that outcomes for children and young people are not diminished. In addition to universal quality assurance visits to all schools, identified schools benefit from a range of bespoke support and challenge approaches, whenever necessary. These can include meetings with a Head of Education to agree targets for an action plan. The authority takes a 'team around the school' approach, with relevant partners and specialist officers supporting individual schools to improve. This includes bespoke professional learning packages delivered by the 'Edinburgh Learns' team and coaching in context approaches to bring about improvement. Headteachers are very positive about the proportionate model of support and challenge taken by officers. They feel it is transparent, fair, and well understood by all.

South Ayrshire Council

The local authority's very effective three-tiered approach to quality improvement visits is ensuring that support and challenge is targeted to promoting improvement. The model and criteria at each level was co-designed with school leaders and LA Officers and is shared with school staff. Schools in tiers two and three receive enhanced or targeted support. Targeted support for specific schools arises because of a range of potential circumstances. This may include a drop in attainment, a high frequency of parental complaints or staff absences. Each school's agreed allocation to a tier is flexible. Schools may move between tiers during a session as circumstances, needs, and staffing change. School self-evaluation evidence and local authority officers'

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professional judgement is discussed with the headteacher and is pivotal when determining a school's current 'live' tier. Targeted offers of support are determined collaboratively between headteachers and local authority officers. This approach helps to ensure that proportionate support is provided where most needed, within the scope of finite resourcing.

"We have high ambitions for our schools. Our focus is both about support and challenge, but ultimately, it's about improving outcomes for learners. Effective local knowledge means that support and challenge can be tailored to specific needs and/or context, ensuring the support and strategies we adopt are relevant and have impact."

Head of Education

"Central staffing levels in the local authority have greatly reduced recently, making direct personal support for all schools more difficult. This does, though, empower schools to be self-evaluative and to problem solve effectively without over-reliance on officer input."

Quality Improvement Officer

"Before an inspection, there is an increase in involvement from the local authority. It would be more helpful for central staff to have an ongoing and updated sense of what is happening in my school to inform their engagement with us."

Headteacher

"The central team has been hugely reduced in number, so their ability to support schools has been greatly reduced. There are increased efforts to improve opportunities for headteachers to work collaboratively as a Learning Community and to reduce duplication and workload."

Headteacher

"As a relatively new headteacher, I have found the support from the authority integral to receiving a positive school inspection. The collaborative nature of quality improvement processes, and the approachability of the Senior Leaders within the authority, have made all the difference. I felt confident and supported going into the inspection, due to the robust nature of quality improvement visits and discussions."

Headteacher

"The quality improvement framework has changed from being largely universal in approach, to moving to more targeted and bespoke approaches over the last couple of years, to meet the needs of individual schools."

Education manager

"Our capacity to engage in supporting wider school improvement, such as taking part in peer reviews, is greatly restricted by staffing challenges, including a recent reduction in teacher numbers. We are wholly committed to collaborative improvement, but its increasingly difficult to say 'Yes' right way to these opportunities, as the capacity within our own schools is reduced."

Headteacher

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Conclusion

Local authorities in Scotland play a crucial role in supporting schools to deliver high-quality education, ensuring that all children and young people can achieve their potential. This thematic inspection has highlighted both the strengths and challenges in how local authorities fulfil this role, particularly through self-evaluation, improvement planning, quality assurance, and professional learning.

Across the country, most local authorities have established clear frameworks and processes embedded within strategic quality improvement plans. These frameworks are often underpinned by strong leadership, robust data use, and a commitment to continuous improvement. While most authorities have established frameworks and processes to support schools, there remains room for improvement in areas such as the consistency of support across schools, the effectiveness of school performance monitoring, and the evaluation of professional learning programmes.

Collaborative practices are a notable strength, with positive relationships between central officers and school leaders fostering a culture of mutual trust, professional learning, and shared accountability. Innovative approaches, such as digital reporting and hybrid stakeholder engagement, have also expanded the reach and effectiveness of local improvement efforts.

Given the often-limited resources available to local authorities, it is critical that support is prioritised for those schools with the greatest need. This requires a careful balance - ensuring strong, universal provision for all schools while also directing targeted support where it will have the most impact.

Leadership development remains a key area for focus. While many local authorities offer well-structured leadership programmes, there is a need to strengthen pathways for middle leaders, particularly in secondary schools. Central officers play a crucial role in driving improvement, and their professional development should reflect this responsibility, to ensure consistency in the quality of support and challenge provided to schools.

Fiscal constraints and the geographical challenges faced by rural and island authorities present significant barriers to the consistent delivery of support. Financial pressures affect not only the capacity of central teams but also the ability to provide in-person support to more remote schools. These challenges highlight the need for flexible, innovative solutions that ensure equity of access to high-quality support for all schools.

Variability persists in the consistency and quality of universal support provided to schools, both within and across local authorities. This extends to the effectiveness of self-evaluation processes, particularly in the secondary sector, where strategic improvements in learning, teaching, and attainment are less evident compared to the primary sector. A recurring theme throughout this inspection is the importance of self-evaluation as a driver for improvement. Where self-evaluation is rigorous and embedded in practice, it leads to a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development, informing targeted action that improves outcomes for learners. The use of data to inform decision-making is inconsistent, with some authorities demonstrating strong practices while others require further development to ensure data-driven improvement planning.

Despite the challenges, local authorities remain committed to improving the quality of education for all learners. By building on existing strengths, addressing areas for improvement, and fostering a culture of continuous reflection, strong leadership, and

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collaborative practice, local authorities can help schools to overcome challenges and ensure that all children and young people access to high-quality education.

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Appendix: Questionnaire analysis

Local authority central staff

460 responses

The questionnaire results presented reflect the aggregated views of responding local authority staff members. These findings should not be interpreted as fully representative of all local authority staff across Scotland.

Percentages have been rounded and may not add to 100.

Question 1

The education authority's strategic plan for education is clearly focused on raising attainment and achievement for all learners.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	344	75%
Agree	108	24%
Disagree	4	1%
Strongly disagree	0	0
Don't know	3	1%

Question 2

The education authority's stretch aims to measure its progress in raising attainment and towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap, were developed in collaboration with headteachers.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	205	45%
Agree	187	41%
Disagree	25	6%
Strongly disagree	1	0%
Don't know	40	9%

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Question 3: The education authority's stretch aims have been made clear to senior leaders.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	270	59%
Agree	161	35%
Disagree	4	1%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Don't know	24	5%

Question 4: The education authority's leadership structure is clear.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	282	62%
Agree	144	31%
Disagree	26	6%
Strongly disagree	3	1%
Don't know	3	1%

Question 5: The education authority provides opportunities for children and young people to be involved and influence decision-making within the education authority.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	124	27%
Agree	263	58%
Disagree	37	8%
Strongly disagree	5	1%
Don't know	28	6%

Question 6: The education authority provides opportunities for parents and carers to be involved and influence decision-making within the education authority.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	124	27%
Agree	278	60%
Disagree	26	6%
Strongly disagree	3	1%
Don't know	29	6%

Question 7: The education authority's arrangements and advice on self-evaluation is used effectively to help headteachers when planning for school improvement.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	254	55%
Agree	181	40%
Disagree	3	1%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Don't know	21	5%

Question 8: The education authority's guidance and advice on reporting on education standards and quality is used effectively by schools when writing their school standards and quality report.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	189	41%
Agree	230	50%
Disagree	12	3%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Don't know	29	6%

Question 9: The education authority's guidance and advice on planning for improvement is used effectively by schools when writing school improvement plans.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	184	40%
Agree	242	53%
Disagree	8	2%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Don't know	26	6%

Question 10: The education authority provides constructive feedback to every headteacher on the quality of their improvement plan and standards and quality report.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	200	44%
Agree	190	41%
Disagree	27	6%
Strongly disagree	1	0%
Don't know	42	9%

Question 11: Between education authority staff and headteachers, there is a shared understanding of the purpose of its quality assurance activities.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	245	53%
Agree	195	43%
Disagree	9	2%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Don't know	10	2%

Question 12: The education authority adopts a systematic approach to its quality assurance activities.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	245	53%
Agree	186	40%
Disagree	8	2%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	19	4%

Question 13: The education authority invests in capacity building activities for its central education team to ensure that all schools experience a consistent application of the education authority's program for quality improvement.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	190	42%
Agree	200	44%
Disagree	27	6%
Strongly disagree	7	2%
Don't know	34	7%

Question 14: The education authority's quality assurance activities are making a positive difference to improving the quality of education in all its schools.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	182	40%
Agree	230	51%
Disagree	11	2%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	35	8%

Question 15: The education authority promotes and supports schools' effective use of data to evaluate impact and outcomes on children and young people.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	309	67%
Agree	140	30%
Disagree	7	2%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Don't know	4	1%

Question 16: The education authority uses data effectively to demonstrate its progress in raising attainment and achievement for all children and young people in its schools.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	282	62%
Agree	159	35%
Disagree	6	1%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	8	2%

Question 17: The education authority uses data effectively to demonstrate its progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	261	57%
Agree	172	38%
Disagree	11	2%
Strongly disagree	1	0%
Don't know	14	3%

Question 18: The education authority communicates its rationale for the professional learning activities that are offered to headteachers and their staff.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	209	45%
Agree	212	46%
Disagree	23	5%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	14	3%

Question 19: The education authority offers professional learning opportunities that develop the capacity and capability of headteachers to lead their schools.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	233	51%
Agree	193	42%
Disagree	9	2%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	23	5%

Question 20: The education authority's strategy for raising attainment in literacy is clearly embedded in its programme of professional learning for teachers.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	277	49%
Agree	193	42%
Disagree	17	4%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	21	5%

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Question 21: The education authority's strategy for raising attainment in numeracy is clearly embedded in its programme of professional learning for teachers.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	213	46%
Agree	197	43%
Disagree	24	5%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	24	5%

Question 22: The education authority's professional learning strategy draws on support from national organisations.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	216	47%
Agree	207	45%
Disagree	4	1%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	29	6%

Question 23: The education authority's professional learning strategy provides opportunities to work with other education authorities to achieve common goals.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	140	30%
Agree	257	56%
Disagree	27	6%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	34	7%

41

Question 24: The education authority invests in capacity building activities for its central education team to ensure that the competences and knowledge to lead school improvement activities are developed.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	165	36%
Agree	212	46%
Disagree	35	8%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	46	10%

Question 25: There is a well-developed culture of support and challenge across the education authority.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	241	52%
Agree	191	42%
Disagree	20	4%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	6	1%

Question 26: The education authority knows its schools well.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	305	67%
Agree	133	29%
Disagree	12	3%
Strongly disagree	1	0%
Don't know	4	1%

Question 27: The education authority ensures that there is a named officer who is linked to each school.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	396	86%
Agree	59	13%
Disagree	1	0%
Strongly disagree	1	0%
Don't know	3	1%

Question 28: The local authority routinely discusses the performance of schools with headteachers to help identify strengths and areas of development.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	293	64%
Agree	149	33%
Disagree	2	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Don't know	15	3%

Question 29: The education authority recognises the successes of its schools.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	262	57%
Agree	174	38%
Disagree	14	3%
Strongly disagree	1	0%
Don't know	9	2%

43

Question 30: The education authority provides constructive feedback on schools' self-evaluation processes.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	204	45%
Agree	203	45%
Disagree	15	3%
Strongly disagree	1	0%
Don't know	33	7%

Question 31: The education authority supports headteachers to lead effectively.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	227	49%
Agree	207	45%
Disagree	12	3%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Don't know	14	3%

Question 32: Headteachers have opportunities to work collaboratively with other school leaders within the education authority.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	300	66%
Agree	143	31%
Disagree	7	2%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Don't know	7	2%

Question 33: Headteachers are supported to exercise their autonomy to make key decisions relating to school improvement and education quality.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	252	55%
Agree	188	41%
Disagree	5	1%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	13	3%

45

Headteachers

1,328 responses

The questionnaire results presented reflect the aggregated views of responding headteachers. These findings should not be interpreted as fully representative of all headteachers across Scotland.

Percentages have been rounded and may not add to 100.

Question 1: I have a good understanding of how decisions about education are made by the education authority.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	455	34%
Agree	748	56%
Disagree	82	6%
Strongly disagree	19	1%
Don't know	21	2%

Question 2: The education authority's strategic [improvement] plan for education is clearly focused on raising attainment and achievement for all learners.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	795	60%
Agree	488	37%
Disagree	29	2%
Strongly disagree	4	0%
Don't know	11	1%

Question 3: The education authority's stretch aims to measure its progress in raising attainment and towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap have been made clear to me.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	696	52%
Agree	534	40%
Disagree	55	4%
Strongly disagree	14	1%
Don't know	27	2%

Question 4: The education authority's leadership structure is clear to me.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	716	54%
Agree	504	38%
Disagree	72	5%
Strongly disagree	23	2%
Don't know	12	1%

Question 5: I have opportunities to be involved in and influence decision-making within the education authority.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	396	30%
Agree	723	54%
Disagree	144	11%
Strongly disagree	29	2%
Don't know	35	3%

Question 6: The education authority's arrangements and advice on self-evaluation help me when planning for my school's improvement.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	571	43%
Agree	665	50%
Disagree	55	4%
Strongly disagree	11	1%
Don't know	23	2%

47

Question 7: The education authority's guidance and advice on reporting on education standards and quality is useful to me when writing my school's standards and quality report.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	582	44%
Agree	645	49%
Disagree	59	4%
Strongly disagree	12	1%
Don't know	28	2%

Question 8: The education authority's guidance and advice on planning for improvement is useful to me when writing my school's improvement plan.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	580	44%
Agree	647	49%
Disagree	61	5%
Strongly disagree	12	1%
Don't know	24	2%

Question 9: The education authority provides constructive feedback to me on the quality of my school's school improvement plan and standards and quality report.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	453	34%
Agree	602	44%
Disagree	178	13%
Strongly disagree	49	4%
Don't know	42	3%

48

Question 10: Between education authority staff and headteachers, there is a shared understanding of the purpose of its quality assurance activities.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	558	42%
Agree	642	48%
Disagree	74	6%
Strongly disagree	12	1%
Don't know	38	3%

Question 11: The education authority adopts a systematic approach to its quality assurance activities.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	465	35%
Agree	639	48%
Disagree	113	9%
Strongly disagree	22	2%
Don't know	84	6%

Question 12: The education authority's quality assurance activities are making a positive difference to improving the quality of education in my school.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	371	28%
Agree	690	52%
Disagree	139	10%
Strongly disagree	32	2%
Don't know	92	7%

49

Question 13: The education authority has supported me to develop a systematic approach to self-evaluation in my school.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	377	28%
Agree	719	54%
Disagree	158	12%
Strongly disagree	17	1%
Don't know	51	4%

Question 14: The education authority promotes and supports effective use of data to evaluate impact and outcomes on children and young people.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	711	54%
Agree	568	43%
Disagree	28	2%
Strongly disagree	7	1%
Don't know	11	1%

Question 15: The education authority uses data effectively to demonstrate my school's progress in raising attainment and achievement.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	567	43%
Agree	617	47%
Disagree	85	6%
Strongly disagree	12	1%
Don't know	38	3%

Question 16: The education authority uses data effectively to demonstrate its progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	528	40%
Agree	623	47%
Disagree	70	5%
Strongly disagree	10	1%
Don't know	93	7%

Question 17: I regularly participate in professional learning that develops my capacity and capability to lead my school.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	690	52%
Agree	595	45%
Disagree	35	3%
Strongly disagree	1	1%
Don't know	2	2%

Question 18: The education authority's rationale for the professional learning activities it offers to headteachers is clear to me.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	347	26%
Agree	688	52%
Disagree	165	12%
Strongly disagree	32	2%
Don't know	93	7%

51

Question 19: The education authority's strategy for raising attainment in literacy is clearly embedded in its programme of professional learning for teachers.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	445	34%
Agree	701	53%
Disagree	97	7%
Strongly disagree	12	1%
Don't know	67	5%

Question 20: The education authority's strategy for raising attainment in numeracy is clearly embedded in its programme of professional learning for teachers.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	407	31%
Agree	711	54%
Disagree	106	8%
Strongly disagree	13	1%
Don't know	80	6%

Question 21: The education authority's professional learning strategy draws on support from national organisations.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	397	30%
Agree	727	55%
Disagree	35	3%
Strongly disagree	7	1%
Don't know	157	12%

Question 22: The education authority's professional learning strategy provides opportunities to work with other education authorities to achieve common goals.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	264	20%
Agree	644	49%

Disagree	183	14%
Strongly disagree	29	2%
Don't know	199	15%

Question 23: There is a well-developed culture of support and challenge in the education authority.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	425	32%
Agree	661	50%
Disagree	158	12%
Strongly disagree	35	3%
Don't know	45	3%

Question 24: The education authority knows my school well.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	454	34%
Agree	620	47%
Disagree	134	10%
Strongly disagree	33	2%
Don't know	83	6%

Question 25: When I need advice or support, I am able to contact a named education authority officer who is linked to my school.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	867	65%
Agree	432	33%
Disagree	16	1%
Strongly disagree	5	0%
Don't know	5	0%

Question 26: The education authority routinely discusses the performance of my school with me, to help identify strengths and areas of development.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	523	39%
Agree	632	48%
Disagree	138	10%
Strongly disagree	20	2%
Don't know	13	1%

Question 27: The education authority recognises my school's successes.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	422	32%
Agree	634	48%
Disagree	151	11%
Strongly disagree	26	2%
Don't know	7	7%

Question 28: The education authority provides constructive feedback on my school's self-evaluation processes.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	367	28%
Agree	670	51%
Disagree	190	14%
Strongly disagree	27	2%
Don't know	66	5%

Question 29: The education authority supports me to lead effectively.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	415	31%
Agree	734	56%
Disagree	110	8%
Strongly disagree	21	2%
Don't know	41	3%

Question 30: I have opportunities to work collaboratively with other school leaders within my local authority.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	746	56%
Agree	549	42%
Disagree	19	1%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	5	0%

Question 31: I feel I can exercise my autonomy to make key decisions relating to school improvement and education quality.

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses
Strongly agree	607	46%
Agree	632	48%
Disagree	54	4%
Strongly disagree	12	1%
Don't know	16	1%

REPORT TO: Education & Children's Services Committee

MEETING DATE: 10 June 2025

BY: Executive Director – Education & Children's Services

SUBJECT: Raising Attainment Update

1   PURPOSE

1.1   To update the Committee on progress towards raising attainment for all learners and closing the gap for the most disadvantaged children and young people.

2   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   The Committee is asked to note the progress and next steps identified towards raising attainment for all learners and closing the poverty related attainment gap and the data summary of key measures provided in Appendix 1.

3   BACKGROUND

3.1   Consistent with the National Improvement Framework (NIF), East Lothian Council prioritises improving attainment for all, particularly in literacy and numeracy and closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.

3.2   To provide strategic direction and measurable outcomes and in line with Scottish Government expectations, stretch aims have been set as detailed in Excellence & Equity: Raising Attainment for All – Strategy 2023/24 – 2025-26.

3.3   The posts of Principal Teachers of Equity were created in session 2023-2024 and are now in year two across secondaries, with the appointment of a Principal Teacher of Equity at Rosehill High School planned for June 2025 to support the increasing senior phase. Through a data-informed approach, these postholders track, monitor and identify interventions for young people impacted by poverty who are at risk of under-attaining.

3.4   Our approaches to tracking and monitoring learners are rigorous. Across primary and secondary sectors progress in literacy and numeracy data is captured within two tracking periods and central team officers work with schools individually and as Associated School Groups to monitor cohort progress.

3.5   Schools are also provided with monthly Equity Tracker data sets which focus on core and core plus measures. These data sets are used by schools, led by the Principal Teachers of Equity, to direct time and resource to supporting identified learners in the senior phase.

3.6   Data support has been extended with all schools now provided with a comprehensive in-year BGE and Senior Phase Attainment tracking tool. This tool has been designed for use by middle leaders and senior leadership teams to monitor learner progress and identify where interventions are required to improve learner outcomes. The support and challenge of officers in the central team also underpins this work.

3.7   MONITORING AND REVIEW

3.7.1   Data provided in relation to stretch aim measures in Appendix 1 highlight progress in overall attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap (Q1 – Q5) in the following measures:

3.7.2   Curriculum for Excellence literacy and numeracy attainment measure P1- P4-P7 (combined) in quintile 1 has increased by 4.4 percentage points and 7.4 percentage points respectively. The poverty-related attainment gap between quintile 1 and quintile 5 in literacy and numeracy has closed further and   now stands at 14.7 percentage points in both measures, whilst attainment in quintile 5 has continued to increase also.

3.7.3   At Level 5 or above, school leaver overall literacy levels decreased by 1.5 percentage points with a decrease across quintiles 1 to 4 and an increase in quintile 5 only. The poverty-related attainment gap also widened by 9.2 percentage points representing a return to slightly above that of 2021/2022.

3.7.4   At Level 5 or above, school leaver numeracy levels in quintile 1 increased by 7.4 percentage points. The poverty-related attainment gap also narrowed by 1.3 percentage points.

3.7.5   The overall percentage of school leavers with 5 or more awards at level 1 or above remained unchanged. The percentage of learners in quintile 1 leaving with 5 qualifications decreased by 1.7 percentage points representing a slight decline and the poverty-related gap closed by 0.1 percentage points.

3.7.6   For learners leaving school with 1 or more awards at level 6 (A-C) or above, there was a slight increase in the overall figures. For learners in quintile 1 there was an increase of 9.9 percentage points. This has led to a further narrowing of the poverty -elated attainment gap by 8.6 percentage points.

3.7.7 There are specific measures for leavers with care experience. The percentage of care-experienced school leavers to obtain 5 or more awards at level 1 or above fell back by 30.2 percentage points on the previous year and the gap for learners with care experience increased by 31 percentage points. This percentage rate change represents a cohort of 25 care experienced learners in 2023-2024 with 14 learners obtaining 5 or more awards at level 1 or above, against a cohort of 29 care-experienced learners in 2022-2023 of whom 25 achieved the measure.

3.7.8 It should be noted that due to the comparatively small number of care experienced leavers, this measure is prone to year-on-year fluctuations. However, the tracking and monitoring of care experienced learners is a key measure within East Lothian's Equity Trackers and PT Equities are working closely with staff in schools to ensure care experienced learners receive support. This work is also supported by the Depute Head Teacher of Equity and Inclusion. Within the Raising Attainment Strategy East Lothian has set the target of reducing the care experienced attainment gap to 21% in session 2024-2025.

3.7.9 East Lothian Council reports on its progress towards stretch aims through the Education Progress and Improvement Plan. This is published annually and submitted to the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and for approval at East Lothian Council Education & Children's Services Committee.

4   POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1   There are no policy implications in this report.

5   EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1   The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6   RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1   Financial - none

6.2   Personnel - none

6.3   Other - none

7   BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1   Raising Attainment Data (Appendix 1).

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Date	27 May 2025

Appendix 1

P1, 4 & 7 Literacy (Combined)			
Cohort Quintile	% Achieving in 2021-22	% Achieving in 2022-23	% Achieving in 2023-24
All	62.8	66.3	69.8
Q1	42.6	50.3	54.7
Q2	50.9	56	62.5
Q3	67.7	68.5	68.6
Q4	68.9	74.2	76.8
Q5	72.7	73.5	77.2
Q1-Q5 Gap	30.1	23.2	22.5
Q2-Q5 Gap	21.8	17.5	14.7

P1, 4 & 7 Numeracy (Combined)			
Cohort Quintile	% Achieving in 2021-22	% Achieving in 2022-23	% Achieving in 2023-24
All	72.4	73.8	75.3
Q1	56.1	56.3	63.7
Q2	65.4	64.8	68.8
Q3	75.3	77	75.9
Q4	76.8	80.6	79.2
Q5	78.3	79.9	83.5
Q1-Q5 Gap	22.1	23.6	19.8
Q2-Q5 Gap	12.9	15.1	14.7

School Leavers, Level 5 Literacy (Or Above)			
Cohort Quintile	% Achieving in 2021-22	% Achieving in 2022-23	% Achieving in 2023-24
All	78.3	78.5	77
Q1	53.6	60.3	52.7
Q2	65.1	68.2	66.8
Q3	81.7	77.3	72.7
Q4	85	87.8	84.9
Q5	90	87.9	89.6
Q1-Q5 Gap	36.4	27.7	36.9
Q2-Q5 Gap	24.9	19.7	22.8

School Leavers, Level 5 Numeracy (Or Above)			
Cohort Quintile	% Achieving in 2021-22	% Achieving in 2022-23	% Achieving in 2023-24
All	66	65.8	67.3
Q1	41.1	39.7	41.82
Q2	52.7	54.3	52.6
Q3	66.8	65.7	67.7
Q4	71.0	72.9	75.4
Q5	83.1	81	81.7
Q1-Q5 Gap	42	41.3	40
Q2-Q5 Gap	30.4	26.7	29.26

School Leavers, 5 or more Awards at Level 1 (Or Above)			
Cohort Quintile	% Achieving in 2021-22	% Achieving in 2022-23	% Achieving in 2023-24
All	89.4	87	87
Q1	67.9	78.1	76.4
Q2	86.6	82.7	82.4
Q3	89.9	83.3	85.1
Q4	91.5	91.6	90.8
Q5	95.4	94	92.2
Q1-Q5 Gap	27.6	15.9	15.8
Q2-Q5 Gap	8.9	11.2	9.8

School Leavers, 1 or more Awards at Level 6 (A-C)			
Cohort Quintile	% Achieving in 2021-22	% Achieving in 2022-23	% Achieving in 2023-24
All	58.8	60.7	61.4
Q1	21.4	24.7	34.6
Q2	39.6	45.1	43.4
Q3	62.1	59.8	55.7
Q4	69	74	75.4
Q5	77.2	78	79.3
Q1-Q5 Gap	55.8	53.3	44.7
Q2-Q5 Gap	37.6	32.9	35.9

Care Experienced School Leavers, 5 or more Awards at Level 1 (Or Above)			
Cohort	% Achieving in 2021-22	% Achieving in 2022-23	% Achieving in 2023-24
Care Experienced	65.2	86.2	56
No Care Experience	89.4	87	87
Gap	24.7	0.8	31

East Lothian
Council

REPORT TO: Education & Children's Services Committee

MEETING DATE: 10 June 2025

BY: Executive Director – Education & Children's Services

SUBJECT: Positive School Leaver Destinations 2023/2024

5

1   PURPOSE

1.1   To update the Committee on the current School Leaver Destination Return report (SLDR) and Participation Measure, including an overview of the interventions implemented to sustain and improve East Lothian Council (ELC) positive destinations.

2   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   The Committee is asked to note the significant proactive work currently underway to support improved outcomes for learners leading to positive destinations.

3   BACKGROUND

3.1   A glossary has been created to explain the acronyms contained within this committee report (Appendix 1).

3.2   The initial destination of school leavers' data (SLDR) is used by schools and Education Authorities across Scotland to monitor progress in improving the proportion of school leavers into positive and sustained destinations.

3.3   The data for initial post school destinations (SLDR) referred to in this report is taken from the February 2025 release of the senior phase benchmarking tool, Insight. The data provides information on the outcomes for young people as recorded in October 2024, approximately three to ten months after leaving school.

3.4   The data on initial post-school destinations for 2023/24 was reported nationally and published by the Scottish Government on 25th February

2025:

3.5   This report compares East Lothian initial school leaver destinations (SLDR) with the Virtual Comparator and the National Establishment (i.e. national average). Figures are provided in most cases for both the national average and the Virtual Comparator, however, the Virtual Comparator is seen as the key benchmark for helping schools and authorities understand their strengths and areas for improvement. The Virtual Comparator takes the characteristics of each pupil in East Lothian and matches them to 10 similar pupils from schools in other local authorities across Scotland.

3.6   This report will explore how the Education Authority has performed over the three-year period since 2021/22 to 2023/24, in relation to the national average and the Virtual Comparator. The main highlights for East Lothian in 2023/24 are provided below -

Summary of Results for East Lothian 2023-2024:

- Our initial Positive Destinations Report (SLDR) for the 2023/24 cohort was 94.5% (a reduction of 1.8% on 2022/23) against a national picture of 95.7%. Initial positive destinations in East Lothian for 2022/23 was 96.3% (National 95.9%), 2021/22 was 95.6% (National 95.7%). An analysis of the recent statistics shows 3.1% of the young people in this leaver cohort are 'unemployed not seeking', which includes those unavailable due to ill health and those who are economically inactive. This is the largest percentage ever recorded for East Lothian in this category. Changes elsewhere are minimal and include 0.3% increase in Higher Education, 2% increase in Training, 2.6% reduction in Further Education and 0.7% reduction in Employment. Despite the slight reduction in employment, East Lothian continues to maintain a much higher trend of young people moving into employment (6% higher) versus that of the national picture.

- Staff within East Lothian Works (ELW), in partnership with colleagues within Skills Development Scotland (SDS) have followed up with all leavers from the 2023/24 cohort. Publication of the follow up statistics is expected during June 2025. This relates to sustained destinations at a point 6 months beyond leaving school. Analysis has taken place to understand the story behind the SLDR reduction, the most significant change has been the 'unemployed not seeking' cohort which has been attributed to the negative impact of Covid. All young people have been offered a range of supports from ELW and SDS in order to support them into a positive destination.

- Our current Annual Participation Measure (APM) measures the proportion of 16-19 year olds participating in education, training or employment. Currently the APM recorded in August 2024 is 94.6% a decrease of 0.3% (94.9%) on the 2023 statistic. Whilst East Lothian remains above the national rate, which was 92.7%, the stretch aim for 2025/26 is 96.6%. The

interactive SDS Annual Participation Measure report can be found here
https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/publications-statistics/statistics/annual-participation-measure

- East Lothian is higher than the national average for all age ranges; Age 16: ELC 99.2% National 99.1%; Age 17: ELC 97.0% National 95.5%; Age 18: ELC 92.6% National 90.4%; Age 19: 88.8% National 85.3%.

3.7 East Lothian Works continues to work in collaboration with all ELC secondary schools to deliver a range of certificated qualifications to senior phase young people, ranging from SQA Level 4 - Level 6 and across several vocational areas.

3.8 Our Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) programme in session 2023/24 included Accountancy, Business, IT Software, Scientific Technologies and Social Services Children and Young People. These work-based pathways, delivered in partnership with schools, college, training providers and employers continued to be offered across ELC for both 1 and 2 academic year durations. By offering multiple delivery durations, these can be selected by young people across the entirety of the senior phase. Pupil numbers remain high from 2023/24, presenting around 140 young people across the various vocational areas, coupled with a further 120 students for session 2024/2025-26. The FA qualification offers certification at SCQF Level 6, the equivalent to a Higher.

3.9 During academic session 2023/24, 43 young people achieved an SCQF Level 4/5 award in Construction Crafts delivered by our partners The Ridge, alongside 7 young people obtaining SCQF Level 4 in Rural Skills. Additionally, our newly established placed based partnership with Edinburgh College delivering certificated courses from our Regional Construction Skills Academy within The Wallyford Learning Campus offered 12 young people an opportunity to achieve a full SCQF Level 4 in Construction Crafts. For young people transitioning post-school, Edinburgh College delivered an Edinburgh College certificated 'Introduction to Construction Course' for 16 young people. This provided young people with the opportunity to try out multiple trade areas, including blockwork, painting and decorating, roofing, and joinery. All young people successfully completed this course and were guaranteed a progression pathway into Edinburgh College to a full-time course.

3.10 East Lothian Works staff supported 18 young people to undertake the 'QMU Creates' programme during 2023/24, a collaboration with East Lothian Council's arts service and Queen Margaret University giving young people an experience in film making, music and the arts. A further 10 young people achieved a National Progression Award (NPA) Level 5 in Long Hair and Make Up, offering a full award and immersive insight into the Hair and Beauty industry.

3.11 Our ongoing delivery of Employability+, an employability programme for senior phase pupils with ASN who were approaching their school leaving

date was extended to 52 pupils. Staff supported young people with skills identification and development, alongside exploration of post-school destinations. This programme was also complemented by delivering 14 SCQF Level 6 qualifications in Emergency First Aid at Work, and 14 SCQF Level 4 awards for First Aid for Mental Health Awareness. Both qualifications are delivered in partnership with St Andrew First Aid and are industry recognised.

3.12   In partnership with Edinburgh College, over 180 East Lothian senior phase pupils attained qualifications from the School to College Partnership (SCP) offer during 2023/24. Attending courses on a Tuesday and Thursday afternoon within Edinburgh College campuses, East Lothian students successfully engaged in a variety of certified courses, including, Automotive, Professional Cookery, Criminology, Early Learning and Childcare, Health and Social Care, Film, Media and Sound Production and Games Development Design. To support a sustained college destination post-school, ELW delivered a college transition support package to 18 East Lothian young people during session 2023/24.

3.13   In response to pupil demand, Edinburgh College has expanded their placed-based delivery within The Wallyford Learning Campus. During session 2024/25, we have introduced a senior phase SCQF Level 4 course comprising of Automotive and Mechanical and Electrical Engineering. 'Future Skills' will use these disciplines, alongside renewables, culminating in pupils building a green powered car. For post-school young people, Edinburgh College have delivered a Pre-Apprenticeship Fabrication and Welding course, informed by labour market intelligence and industry insight in response to the skills gaps. Furthermore, a pilot SCQF Level 5 Construction Crafts has commenced for 16 young people as a direct progression pathway for those completing 'Intro to Construction' or SCP Level 4.

3.14   ELW has also allocated funding to employers through:

- UKSPF ERI (Employer Recruitment Incentive) £110,666.63 was allocated in 2024/25, which created 28 opportunities. For 2025/26 £100,000 is available to create new job opportunities.

- Parental ERI (Employer Recruitment Incentive) created 7 opportunities in 2024/25 totalling £39,000. For 2025/26 £60,000 is available to create new job opportunities.

3.15   The Parental Employability (PES) Team supported 51 parents to undertake Paid Work Experience placements in the following roles: Administration, Classroom Assistant, Early Years, Facilities Management and Waste Management. Parents working with staff gained 86 accredited qualifications to further their skills and employment prospects. Throughout 24/25 there were 43 job outcomes from parents engaging with the PES Team.

3.16 During 24/25, the Income Maximisation service for East Lothian Works received 110 referrals, a 4% increase from last year, 70 of whom were parents. 52 parents benefited from financial gains totalling £183,536.79 which is a 56% increase on last year's total. A significant part of this has been parents supported to access both Adult and Child disability benefits. This increase in household income, helps make part-time work a sustainable option for those with increased caring responsibilities.

Next Steps

3.17 Plans for session 2025/26 are underway with confirmation from Edinburgh College to sustain all courses delivered in 2024/25. This is in addition to introducing a National Certificate (NC) Built Environment to young people in the senior phase who wish to achieve qualification within this sector, equivalent to a Higher. Direct progression is guaranteed by Edinburgh College into a full time HNC course within Architectural Technician, Civil Engineering or Professional Construction Management. This course will also act as a solid foundation for those wishing to progress into a traditional trades pathway. Also, for session 2025/26 a Skills for Work Energy SCQF Level 5 will be offered to senior phase young people. Acknowledging the expansion of green skills and the renewables sectors, this will provide an introductory course to school age pupils.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct policy implications associated with this report.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial – All school-age activities are predicated upon the continuation of existing core funding being allocated to East Lothian Works. Any reduction in funding will lead to a decrease in capacity and therefore a drop in the service's ability to continue with existing activities and interventions. All post-school activity is reliant upon external grant funding and therefore parameters of activity are dictated by strict grant conditions. External funding fluctuates on an annual basis.

6.2 Personnel - Is reliant upon maintenance of existing budget allocations, both core and external.

6.3   Other - None

7   BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – Glossary

Appendix 2 – School Leaver Destinations 2023/24

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Appendix 1

Glossary:

School Leaver Destination Return (SLDR) – Published by Scottish Government, information collated by SDS which relates to school leavers (S4-S6) and their initial destination upon leaving school.

Annual Participation Measure (APM) – Report published by SDS focuses on the education and employment activity of 16-19 year olds over one calendar year, April – March.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) – Is the national skills agency for Scotland, supporting people and businesses of Scotland to develop and apply their skills.

Education Scotland – Is a Scottish Government executive agency responsible for supporting quality and improvement in Scottish Education.

Curriculum for Excellence (CFE) – Developed over the course of several years to improve and transform Scotland's Education systems, by a more flexible and coherent curriculum from 3-18 years.

Broad General Education (BGE) – Begins in early learning and childcare until the end of S3 (the third year of secondary school).

Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) - Foundation Apprenticeships at SCQF Level 6 provide work-based learning opportunities for learners in their senior phase of secondary education (S4 – S6). The delivery of the qualification is a mixture of classroom and work based learning with employer and forms part of the pupil's timetable alongside their other qualifications such as National 5 and Highers.

No One Left Behind (NOLB) – Is Scottish Government's Employability Strategy to transform employment support in Scotland.

Modern Apprenticeships (MA's) - Is a job which lets people earn a wage and gain an industry-recognised qualification.

Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF) – forming part of the NOLB strategy, this fund is collaboratively managed by Scottish and Local Government, providing dedicated support for low-income families. Taking a holistic Key Worker approach parents are supported to upskill and/or re-train, increasing family income, lifting themselves and their families out of poverty. For 2024/25 this activity will form part of the No One Left Behind employability funding for local authorities.

Appendix 2
School Leaver Destinations 2023/24

School 2023/24	% Employed	% Further Education	% Higher Education	% Voluntary Work	% Personal Skills Development	% Training		% Unemployed Not Seeking	% Unemployed Seeking	% Unknown
Dunbar Grammar School	29.13	16.02	41.75	0.97	0.49	3.88		4.37	2.91	0.49
Virtual Comparator for Dunbar Grammar School	21.94	21.46	47.77	0.73	0.97	3.25		1.99	1.65	0.24
Knox Academy	31.54	19.46	37.58	0.67	2.01	2.68		4.7	1.34	
Virtual Comparator for Knox Academy	24.77	24.03	41.54	0.4	1.28	3.49		1.81	2.35	0.34
Musselburgh Grammar School	30.43	25.3	30.04	0.79	2.77	5.93		2.77	1.98	
Virtual Comparator for Musselburgh Grammar School	24.51	30	35.22	0.47	0.87	3.75		2.41	2.53	0.24
North Berwick High School	18.99	7.82	67.04		0.56	1.68		1.68	2.23	
Virtual Comparator for North Berwick High School	18.21	13.52	64.75	0.61	0.28	1.23		0.5	0.67	0.22
Preston Lodge High School	33.71	19.1	31.46		1.69	5.62		4.49	3.93	
Virtual Comparator for Preston Lodge High School	19.38	26.85	37.58	0.45	1.24	7.58		3.03	3.65	0.22
Ross High School	33.74	21.54	32.11		3.66	5.69		1.22	2.03	
Virtual Comparator for Ross High School	24.92	27.97	35.08	0.73	1.06	4.35		2.72	3.01	0.16

East Lothian Council

REPORT TO: Education & Children's Services Committee

MEETING DATE: 10 June 2025

BY: Executive Director - Education and Children's Services

SUBJECT: Sustainable Hourly Rate for Funded Providers delivering Early Learning and Childcare in East Lothian for 2025/26

6

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To note the sustainable hourly rate paid by East Lothian Council to Early Learning and Childcare (EL&CC) funded providers in the private and third sector, to deliver funded early learning and childcare for 2025/26.

1.2 To agree to delegate authority to the Head of Education to review and approve future sustainable hourly rate changes.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

  i. Note the increase in the sustainable hourly rate paid by East Lothian Council to Early Learning and Childcare (EL&CC) funded providers in the private and third sector, to deliver funded early learning and childcare, from 1 April 2025 as per section 2.5 of this report.

  ii. Note a further local review of the sustainable rate paid by East Lothian Council to Early Learning and Childcare (EL&CC) funded providers in the private and third sector, to deliver funded early learning and childcare, by August 2025 as per section 3.6 of this report.

  iii. Agree to delegate authority to the Head of Education to review and approve future hourly rate changes (increase or decrease) up to a value of 10% in consultation with the Convener of Education and Children's Services Committee and the Head of Finance and in line with Scottish Government and COSLA guidance. The Members Library will be updated accordingly going forward.

  iv. Note the funding commitment from Scottish Government to allow local authorities to uplift their 2024/25 rates by a minimum of 3.75% to support the financial sustainability of Early Learning and Childcare and fulfil the shared commitment to delivering Fair Work policies.

v.   East Lothian Council increased the hourly rate by 3.75% as follows from 1 April 2025.

	Hourly Rate 2024/25 (excluding meal allowance of 35p per hour)	Hourly Rate from 1 April 2025 (excluding meal allowance of 35p per hour)
Eligible 2-year-olds	£8.12 per hour	£8.42 per hour
3–5-year-olds	£6.65 per hour	£6.90 per hour

3   BACKGROUND

3.1   Under section 47(1) of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, education authorities must ensure that the statutory amount of funded Early Learning and Childcare entitlement is made available for each eligible child.

3.2   The Scottish Government Funding Follows the Child model enables a provider neutral approach, were parents and carers can access funded Early Learning and Childcare within private nurseries, childminders and third sector groups who meet the National Standards and work in partnership with the local authority.

3.3   East Lothian currently has a variety of funded Early Learning and Childcare providers.

- 11 Private Nurseries

- 29 Childminders

- 2 Third Sector Providers

3.4   The Scottish Government provided local authorities with an additional £9.7 million in 2025-26 to fund the estimated additional costs associated with enabling funded ELC workers in private and third sector services to be paid the new real Living Wage rate of £12.60 per hour from April 2025.

3.5   The Scottish Government and COSLA Guidance sets out the approach for local authorities to set 2025-26 sustainable rates for the delivery of Early Learning and Childcare:

- A minimum 3.75% uplift will be applied to all 2024-25 rates to reflect the estimated increase in the average staff cost element of the sustainable rate required to meet the new real Living Wage uplift from April 2025. This reflects staffing costs accounting for, on average, 75% of the sustainable rate.

- The minimum 3.75% uplift will also be applied to the sustainable rates paid to all childminders delivering funded ELC.

- The remainder of the sustainable rate, covering non-staffing costs (estimated to account for, on average, 25% of the sustainable rate), is set in-line with the requirements of this guidance.

3.6 East Lothian Council is proposing that the remainder of the sustainable rate (25%) is reviewed in line the [Scottish Government and COSLA Guidance](#) using a cost data collection exercise, developed with Finance, gathering information from our current funded providers.

The proposed local hourly rate review will also take account of the following:

- The current rates charged by private nursery providers in the local area.
- Benchmarking against neighbouring authorities.

The hourly rate must be affordable and sustainable to the Council in terms of the budget available whilst enabling funded providers to be sustainable, pay employees the real living wage, reinvest in their service and provide high quality EL&CC in line with the National Standards and East Lothian Council's contractual conditions.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no policy implications to this report.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial – The 3.75% increase will be met from Scottish Government funding of £213,000. There is no additional funding available for the non-staffing element (25% of the rate). Any increase in costs will need to be met from the Early Years budget for 2025/2026.

6.2 Personnel - None

6.3 Other - None

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.

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REPORT TO: Education & Children's Services Committee

MEETING DATE: 10 June 2025

BY: Executive Director – Education & Children's Services

SUBJECT: Prevent in East Lothian

7

1   PURPOSE

1.1   To provide information and assurance to Committee about our local processes around Prevent.

2   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   The Committee is asked to:

(i)   Note the content of the report.

(ii)   Note the confidence in our multi-agency processes to support people who may be susceptible to radicalisation.

3   BACKGROUND

CONTEST and Prevent

3.1   The overall aim of the national counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, is to reduce the risk from terrorism to the UK, its citizens and interests overseas, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence. Prevent remains one of the key pillars of CONTEST.

- Prevent: To stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

- Pursue: To stop terrorist attacks.

- Protect: To strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack.

- Prepare: To mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack.

3.2   The aim of Prevent is to stop people from being drawn into supporting terrorism or becoming terrorists. Prevent also extends to supporting the rehabilitation and disengagement of those already involved in terrorism.

Objectives of Prevent

3.3   The objectives of Prevent are to:

- Tackle the ideological causes of terrorism.

- Intervene early to support people susceptible to radicalisation.

- Enable people who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate.

Local processes

3.4   East Lothian adheres to the Prevent duty guidance for Scotland (2024) which identifies a range of practical actions to enable Local Authorities to work with partners to meet their statutory duties in responding to Prevent concerns.

3.5   The Chief Social Work Officer is the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for Prevent and provides local leadership and co-ordination of activity related to Prevent. They are the key contact for staff to discuss their concerns about an individual who is considered susceptible or potentially susceptible, to being drawn into terrorism. NHS Lothian's Director of Public Protection is the Prevent SPOC for health staff. East Lothian Council and NHS Lothian also have a deputy SPOC who can be contacted in the absence of the SPOC.

3.6   When a concern is identified, this is discussed with the SPOC or deputy SPOC in the first instance. Staff out with East Lothian Council or NHS Lothian can also contact the SPOC as required.

3.7   The SPOC works in close collaboration with the Prevent Delivery Unit East (PDUE), a specialist team of officers dedicated to the delivery of Prevent functions for Police Scotland. On receipt of a concern, the SPOC will speak with the PDUE to jointly agree whether the information warrants a Prevent referral. The SPOC will arrange for the person with concerns to complete a National Referral Form and ensure this is submitted to a specialist Police Scotland Prevent referral portal and Police begin initial intelligence gathering.

3.8   If the situation remains suitable for Prevent it is then allocated to the PDUE who will begin an assessment. If appropriate, the PDUE will issue a formal notification to the Local Authority via the SPOC. This notification is the gateway to convene a Prevent Multi-agency Panel (PMAP) which is arranged and chaired by the Local Authority.

3.9   East Lothian's Service Manager for Justice and Mental Health is the dedicated PMAP chair, and they become involved once the formal notification is received from the PDUE.

3.10 If a situation does not proceed to a PMAP, the individual can still be supported by relevant agencies in a suitable alternative framework. This could include other measures of protection. Individuals can be re-referred to the SPOC at any time if there is new information to be considered.

Prevent Multi-agency Panel (PMAP)

3.11 It is East Lothian Council's responsibility to convene, chair and provide administrative support to the PMAP process. Membership of the PMAP must include people with suitable decision-making authority to direct identified support, resources and interventions as required. Core membership includes the PMAP chair, The Local Authority SPOC, Police Scotland (PDUE) and the NHS Lothian SPOC. Additional attendees will be invited depending on the age and circumstances of the individual being discussed. Members and invitees have a duty to attend each PMAP and must send a representative should they be unable to attend.

3.12 The PDUE completes a Prevent Assessment Framework (PAF) which outlines a number of areas and factors to be considered in assessing the risk of susceptibility. Prior to the PMAP, attendees receive the referral, the PAF, the agenda and the confidentiality statement.

3.13 The first task of the PMAP when all information is shared, is to agree whether or not an individual should be adopted into Prevent. If a person is adopted into Prevent, the PMAP will agree who will seek suitable consent from the person and their parents (if appropriate) as it is a voluntary process. This consent must be granted before any support is offered and people under the age of 18 can be offered support if their parent provides consent.

3.14 PMAP attendees have a responsibility to work collaboratively with the chair, SPOCS and each other to support the mitigation of risk. Additionally, they must ensure that their agency is aware of their statutory responsibility to adhere to Prevent guidance.

3.15 For individuals who are adopted under Prevent and who provide consent, the PMAP will agree what actions are required to support the reduction of risk and to support the person to move away from activity that may increase their susceptibility to radicalisation. The PMAP will review the circumstances and progress of the actions on a four-weekly basis until the risks have been addressed and the case can be closed. Once a case is closed there is a further review at six and 12 months to ensure that concerns have not returned. Situations can be re-referred at any point in the process.

3.16 The experience locally is that PMAP members are solution focussed and work well together to identify and address presenting risk. Members use their skills and knowledge and take ownership of the actions required in the support plan as required. Members are confident about the local process and will seek advice form the Home Office advisors for Scotland as appropriate. Members regularly seek to expand their own knowledge around counter-terrorism, ideology and radicalisation with regular attendance at national development sessions and conferences. The Home Office Prevent Advisor for Scotland has observed an East Lothian PMAP and provided positive feedback about the local processes.

Training and awareness raising

3.17 It is mandatory to complete the Prevent E-learning module for all East Lothian staff. It is important that all staff feel confident in identifying

concerns that may indicate a susceptibility to radicalisation and that they know to contact the SPOC for initial discussion. While some staff will require a deeper understanding of radicalisation, the most important thing people can do is share any identified concerns with the SPOC who will direct future action required.

3.18   The experience locally is that staff are increasingly alert to the Prevent agenda and the SPOC will continue to issue communications to ensure staff in all settings are aware of who to contact.

3.19   The Prevent working group will continue to implement the Prevent duty guidance for Scotland, identifying areas for development and ensuring there is tight leadership and oversight as the national landscape for Prevent progresses at pace.

3.20   The success of existing processes and effective working relationships between statutory partners places East Lothian in a strong position and ready to respond when anticipated additional national guidance is introduced.

4   POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1   There are no policy implications to this report.

5   INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1   The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6   RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1   Financial – None

6.2   Personnel **–** With the profile of Prevent increasing, all statutory partners are exploring how to build resilience and capacity in this area.

6.3   Other – None

7   BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1   None

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