

**REPORT TO:** Education & Children's Services Committee

**MEETING DATE:** 10 June 2025

**BY:** Executive Director - Education and Children's Services

**SUBJECT:** National Thematic Inspection

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## **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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# National Thematic Inspection: Local authority approaches to supporting school improvement

## Summarised Findings

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>East Lothian Council</b>
<b>Lead inspector</b>	<b>Robyn McIlroy</b>

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

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

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?*

- *To what extent do officers carry out regular and rigorous evaluation of the quality of school provision? How is this work quality assured?*
- *How does the local authority evaluate the quality of learning, teaching and assessment?*
- *How clear and effective is the advice and support for schools on approaches to self-evaluation and their quality assurance? How effectively does the local authority moderate this at strategic and school levels?*
- *How does the local authority identify and share effective practice through quality assurance? Is this making a difference across the authority?*

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,

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.

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.

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

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

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.



# Local authority approaches to supporting school improvement

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

12 March 2025

## Contents

Foreword.....	3
Overview.....	5
Methodology .....	6
Main findings and summary messages.....	8
Recommendations.....	10
Supporting effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting.....	11
Supporting improvement through self-evaluation and quality assurance.....	15
Supporting schools to improve the quality of education through professional learning.....	20
Delivering universal support and challenge for all schools, and/or targeted support for specific schools to improve the quality of education .....	26
Conclusion .....	32
Appendix: Questionnaire analysis.....	34

## 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.

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

## 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
<b>Total</b>	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.

## Methodology key facts graphic

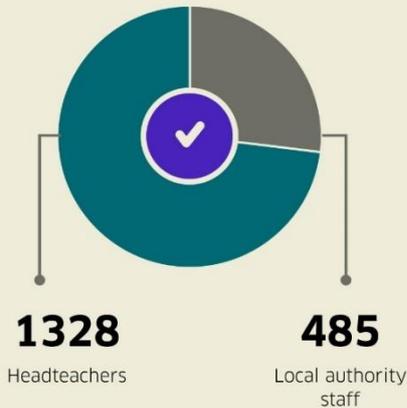
# Visits to all 32\* local authorities

### Focus groups

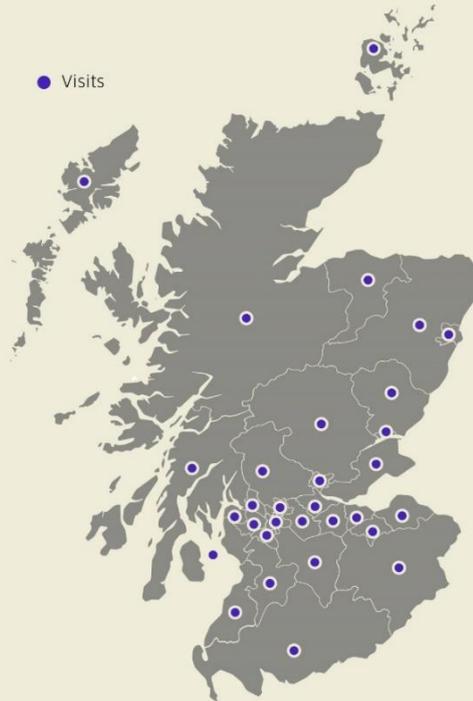
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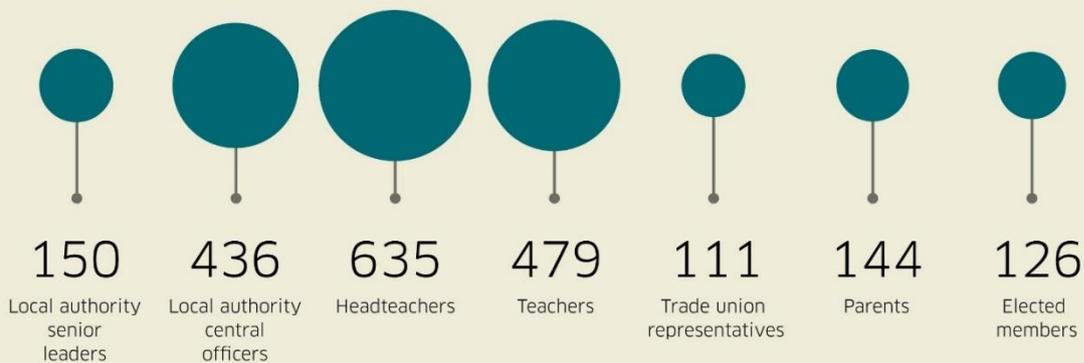
### Questionnaire responses



● Visits



### Who we spoke to



\* 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.

## **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.

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

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.

- 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

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.

## **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.

## 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.

“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.

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.

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.

### 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**

# 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.

## **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

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

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

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

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.

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.

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'

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 it's increasingly difficult to say 'Yes' right way to these opportunities, as the capacity within our own schools is reduced."

### **Headteacher**

## 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

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

## 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%

**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%

**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%

**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%

**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%

## 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%

**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%

**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%

**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%

**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%