NL/BAK

28 October 2026

Comhairle Aonghais

CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Kathryn Lindsay

Dr James Johnston
Clerk to the Education and Gaelic Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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By email: EducationAndGaelic.committee@Parliament.Scot

Dear Dr Johnston

Local Authority Approaches to School Education

Thank you for your letter of 7 October 2026 seeking an update on Angus Council's response to the recommendations arising from HMIE's thematic inspection of local authority approaches to supporting school improvement, and on our approach to supporting children and young people experiencing persistent absence.

Our approach is set within the Angus Education Plan and the shared improvement priorities of Angus Cares, Angus Learns and Angus Improves. It is supported by the Angus Education Improvement Service and our Framework for Improvement, which provides a coherent authority-wide approach to self-evaluation, quality assurance, professional learning and proportionate support and challenge.

Local Authority Approaches to Supporting School Improvement

Separately from the national thematic inspection referred to in the Committee's letter, Angus Council participated voluntarily in a trial local authority inspection undertaken by HMIE from 31 August to 4 September 2026. The trial inspection considered how effectively the authority strengthens self-evaluation and collaborative leadership, provides universal, targeted and intensive support, and builds leadership capacity across schools and early learning and childcare settings. The trial inspection also re-visited key areas for improvement from the national thematic inspection.

The trial inspection found that the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning and senior officers have built a clear and well-understood shared vision for improvement. It recognised that the Framework for Improvement is strengthening consistency in self-evaluation, support and challenge, and that central officers have a detailed understanding of establishment strengths, areas for development and priorities for support. HM Inspectors concluded that Angus Council has the capacity to continue to improve, identified highly effective practice to share more widely and confirmed that no further visits would be required as a result of the inspection.

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We recognise the national concern about variability in the consistency and quality of support to schools. Our own self-evaluation has been open about variation in practice and outcomes, particularly across the secondary sector. In response, our Framework for Improvement uses attainment, attendance, exclusion, inspection and self-evaluation evidence, alongside local intelligence and professional dialogue, to determine the appropriate level of universal, targeted or intensive support for each establishment. School visits, Progress in Learning meetings, link officer engagement and Support and Challenge Reviews provide a common structure through which priorities and next steps are agreed and monitored.

The trial inspection confirmed that these arrangements are improving consistency and leaders' confidence in evaluating performance and planning improvement. The impact is strongest in early learning and childcare and primary schools, while secondary schools are benefiting from more consistent attainment analysis, evidence-informed planning and professional dialogue. We remain clear that senior phase attainment is variable and requires further improvement. Our response is therefore to maintain a relentless focus on raising attainment, strengthen the quality and consistency of learning, teaching and assessment, and deepen the use of data at school, faculty and subject level.

Leadership, Professional Learning and Sharing Effective Practice

Leadership development is central to our improvement approach. HMIE found that Angus Council's well-considered professional learning offer is having a significant positive impact on teacher confidence, leadership capacity and career development. Our Leaders of Learning strategy supports more consistent classroom practice through sustained professional learning, school-based application and the sharing of agreed approaches. Bespoke leadership development and coaching are building the confidence of central officers, Head Teachers, Depute Head Teachers and middle leaders to lead change, evaluate impact and provide constructive challenge.

We have also expanded the primary Cluster Lead model. Experienced Head Teachers are seconded for part of the week to provide universal support, quality assurance, mentoring and coordination within localities. This creates additional central capacity for targeted and intensive work, while providing meaningful leadership opportunities for both Cluster Leads and acting Head Teachers. This was an agreed action taken forward following the national thematic inspection.

Effective practice is shared through weekly secondary senior leadership meetings, leadership conferences, Curriculum Advisory Groups, Subject Network Groups, cluster arrangements, Young Leaders of Learning and participation by school leaders in Support and Challenge Reviews. The adoption of a common pupil tracking system across sectors demonstrates how effective practice identified in one setting can be developed authority-wide to create a shared language of attainment and more consistent analysis of learners' progress.

Angus also works with neighbouring authorities across Tayside, participates in ADES collaborative activity and develops links with fellow local authorities through joint improvement work. We recognise that time, distance and capacity can limit sustained collaboration, and that sharing an example is not sufficient on its own. Our focus is therefore on identifying practice supported by evidence of impact, understanding the conditions in which it is successful and supporting its adaptation to different contexts. HMIE's commitment to work with Angus to share identified highly effective practice provides further external validation of this approach.

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Support for Pupils with Persistent Absence

Improving attendance remains a key priority within Angus Cares and Angus Improves. Our Attendance Policy and Procedures were updated in November 2025 and refined following publication of the revised national guidance in March 2026. The policy provides a staged, person-centred approach based on prevention, early identification, professional judgement and coordinated support. Schools are expected to analyse the frequency, pattern and context of absence, rather than relying on a single numerical threshold, and to work with the child or young person and their family to understand and reduce barriers to attendance.

Attendance is monitored through a combination of school-level tracking, central data analysis, Progress in Learning meetings and professional dialogue. Particular attention is given to children and young people whose circumstances may increase the risk or impact of absence, including those who are care experienced, require additional support, experience anxiety or other health and wellbeing barriers, or are following an adapted timetable. Part-time timetables must be time-limited, agreed with the child or young person and their parents or carers, supported by an appropriate learning offer and reviewed at least every six weeks with clear actions towards increased attendance, participation and engagement.

The 2025-26 Angus Education Plan progress report records average attendance of 93.2% in primary schools and 88.8% in secondary schools. These figures, although in line with the national averages, remained below our stretch aims and demonstrate that further improvement is required, particularly in the secondary sector. There were, however, positive outcomes for targeted groups. The proportion of children and young people who were cared for at home or had previous care experience and attended for more than 85% of the time increased from 62% to 64.8%.

Our Engagement Officers provide tailored early intervention with children, young people and families, working with schools, social work and third-sector partners to address practical, relational and wellbeing barriers. In 2025-26, officers worked individually with 79 children and young people whose principal focus was attendance; 78% improved or maintained their attendance. The wider team also supported group work, transition to secondary school and holiday provision. Feedback from parents and carers was strongly positive, with almost all respondents reporting stronger links with school.

Where persistent absence reflects complex need, support is coordinated through GIRFEC planning and may involve education, health, social work, youth services and third-sector partners. Schools record interventions and review progress so that support can be adjusted in response to evidence. Central monitoring of attendance, part-time timetables and targeted interventions helps identify common barriers, schools requiring additional support and approaches that may be shared more widely.

Conclusion

Angus Council welcomes the Committee's focus on the consistency and quality of local authority support for school improvement and on the continuing national challenge of persistent absence. Our September 2026 trial inspection provides comprehensive assurance that our vision, Framework for Improvement, professional learning and proportionate support arrangements are providing a sound basis for improvement.

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We are equally clear about the work still required. Our key priorities are to raise secondary attainment; strengthen consistency in learning, teaching and assessment; sharpen the use of data and evaluation of interventions; and improve attendance, particularly for groups facing the greatest barriers. These priorities are reflected in the Angus Education Plan and will continue to be monitored through our Framework for Improvement and public reporting arrangements.

Our approach is to build on effective practice, share it with appropriate evidence of impact and ensure that support remains responsive to the context of each school and the needs of individual children, young people and families.

We welcome the Committee's continued interest in these important areas.

Yours sincerely



Neil Lowden
Director of Education & Lifelong Learning