Your Ref:

Our Ref: DR/DA

23 October 2026

Chief Executive's Office
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Council Offices
English Street
Dumfries DG1 2DD

Dr James Johnston
Clerk to Education and Gaelic Committee

By email to EducationAndGaelic.committee@Parliament.Scot

Any enquiries please contact:
Dawn Roberts
Direct Dial: 01387 260142
Email: chief.executive@dumgal.gov.uk

Dear Dr Johnston

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

I am pleased to provide the following response.

Response to the HMIE Thematic Inspection
Dumfries and Galloway Council has carefully considered the findings and recommendations arising from HMIE's thematic inspection of local authority approaches to supporting school improvement. The team recognise the report's finding that there is variability in the consistency and quality of support provided to schools, both within and across local authorities, and agree that continual attention must be given to ensuring that support is equitable, evidence-informed and focused on improving outcomes for children and young people.

Our response has been underpinned by a sustained focus on strengthening self-evaluation, leadership capacity and collaborative improvement activity. Through the implementation of *How Good is Our Education Authority?* (HGIOEA), we have continued to develop a more systematic and evidence-based approach to self-evaluation, using a broad range of qualitative and quantitative evidence to identify strengths, areas for improvement and strategic priorities. This work has been subject to ongoing professional challenge and support through engagement with Headteachers, HM Inspectors and other partners, helping to ensure that self-evaluation remains rigorous and directly informs improvement planning and resource allocation. Feedback received through engagement with HMIE has also informed the refinement of local approaches to standards and quality reporting and school

improvement planning, with a strengthened emphasis on measurable outcomes, sustainability and the clear articulation of impact.

Collaboration and Sharing Effective Practice
We recognise that reducing variation requires both robust local systems and effective collaboration beyond individual authorities. A significant aspect of our response has therefore been active participation in the ADES QUADS. As you may be aware, these groups of councils have been established from the Local Government Benchmarking Framework family groups; this ensures a level of consistency of comparator data across council functions.

Dumfries and Galloway is a member of ADES QUAD 3B alongside Fife, South Lanarkshire and West Lothian. We have engaged in a programme of strategic self-evaluation using HGIOEA and have undertaken a structured process of sharing evidence, strengths, challenges and improvement priorities across the four authorities. The intention was to support greater consistency in approach whilst retaining appropriate responsiveness to local circumstances.

The use of the QUAD provides a mechanism through which good practice is shared across local authorities. Through regular collaborative sessions, authorities undertake peer challenge, discuss emerging evidence and compare approaches to supporting school improvement. This process has enabled authorities to identify common themes, learn from one another's practice and consider how successful approaches might be adapted for implementation in different contexts. The work has extended beyond professional dialogue into joint improvement activity, with cross-authority working groups established to address shared priorities including improving school attendance, strengthening the strategic use of data to support self-evaluation and improvement, and enhancing capacity across schools to meet the needs of all children and young people. Officers from each authority contribute to these groups, creating opportunities to develop shared solutions, test approaches collaboratively and disseminate effective practice more widely across the system.

Dumfries and Galloway Council has engaged proactively with national improvement activity through the Link HMI model and through participation in stakeholder engagement supporting the development of the new Local Authority Inspection Framework. These activities have involved Headteachers, Quality Improvement Officers and senior leaders in structured discussions with HM Inspectors, allowing local practice to be informed by national thinking while also ensuring that local perspectives contribute to the ongoing development of inspection methodology. Such engagement has strengthened professional learning, increased opportunities for reciprocal challenge and supported the wider dissemination of effective practice.

It is our view that variability across local authorities is best addressed through a combination of rigorous self-evaluation, transparent use of evidence, collaborative leadership and systematic opportunities to share effective practice. ADES and HMIE,

together with the QUAD, play an important role in facilitating this exchange of learning. Creating opportunities to identify and share effective approaches but also to collectively address challenges that are common across authorities.

There remain barriers to the sharing of effective practice. These include increasing capacity pressures within both education services and schools, workforce and recruitment challenges, competing operational priorities and the time required for meaningful collaborative engagement. There are also differences in local context, geography, demographics and levels of resource which may affect the extent to which particular approaches can be transferred directly from one authority to another. Factors can present challenges but we consider that the collaborative arrangements established, alongside ongoing engagement with HMIE and national networks, have significantly strengthened opportunities for shared learning and are making a valuable contribution to improving consistency in the quality of support provided to schools.

Overall, the HMIE recommendations have reinforced the importance of evidence-based self-evaluation, leadership development, collaborative improvement and professional learning. These principles continue to shape our approach to supporting schools and improving outcomes for all children and young people across Dumfries and Galloway.

Support for Pupils Experiencing Persistent Absence
We welcome the increased national focus on improving attendance and the emphasis within revised national guidance on person-centred approaches, early intervention, effective use of data and coordinated support involving schools, families and partner services, as highlighted in the Committee's letter.

Dumfries and Galloway Council has strengthened its approach to attendance through a combination of robust monitoring systems, early intervention, and multi-agency collaboration. Schools routinely analyse attendance data to identify emerging patterns of absence and use a staged intervention approach to ensure support is targeted proportionately and at the earliest opportunity.

A key feature of this work is the termly multi-agency exercise directed by the Dumfries and Galloway Public Protection Chief Officers Group. This work focusses on ‘unseen pupils’, bringing together officers from Education, Social Work, Health and Police Scotland to review children and young people whose attendance, engagement or visibility raises concerns. This process enables agencies to share information, identify barriers to attendance, coordinate support and ensure that no child becomes disconnected from services. The impact of this approach is evidenced through strengthened safeguarding assurance and improved oversight of vulnerable children and young people. For example, the Term 4 2025-26 attendance review identified approximately 95 pupils requiring additional scrutiny and welfare assurance activity. Through co-ordinated multi-agency follow-up involving Education, Health,

Social Work, Attendance Officers and Police Scotland, welfare assurance was secured for all but one pupil before the start of the new school session, with a Missing in Education process initiated where appropriate. Analysis of the cohort also demonstrated that the vast majority of identified pupils were already known to services and receiving support through Child's Plans, Child Protection processes, Social Work involvement, CAMHS, Attendance Team intervention or other targeted supports, highlighting the effectiveness of partnership working in identifying risk and coordinating intervention. The process has strengthened information sharing between agencies, improved understanding of children's visibility across services and provided greater assurance that vulnerable children are seen, supported and appropriately escalated where concerns remain. Importantly, the exercise has moved the focus beyond attendance percentages alone to a broader consideration of wellbeing, safety and engagement, aligning with GIRFEC principles and ensuring that professional judgement remains central to safeguarding decision making.

To promote consistency across all schools, Dumfries and Galloway has developed an Attendance Toolkit which provides practitioners with clear guidance on attendance monitoring, intervention thresholds, family engagement and multi-agency responses. Alongside this, significant work has been undertaken to improve the consistency of SEEMiS attendance coding, ensuring that absence data is reliable, comparable and supports effective decision-making across the authority.

In addition, Dumfries and Galloway has worked collaboratively with its QUAD partner authorities to strengthen attendance practice and share learning across local authorities. This collaborative work has enabled the development of an effective Attendance School Tracker, providing schools with improved tools to monitor attendance across a range of timescales and cohorts. The tracker allows schools to analyse attendance over time, identify emerging patterns of concern, compare trends and target interventions more effectively. The shared development approach has supported greater consistency in attendance monitoring and has provided opportunities for authorities to learn from one another's approaches to improving attendance and reducing persistent absence.

Learning from this collaboration has directly informed local practice, complementing the Attendance Toolkit and wider attendance improvement work. It has strengthened schools' ability to use attendance data proactively, identify pupils requiring additional support at an earlier stage and evaluate the impact of interventions over time. This reflects the growing emphasis nationally on the effective use of attendance data to support early intervention and continuous improvement.

Recognising the crucial role families play in supporting attendance, the authority has also developed a dedicated Support Your Child's Attendance website for parents and carers. This is available here: Support your Child's Attendance in Dumfries and Galloway – Website for parents and carers in Dumfries and Galloway to support attendance and late coming. This resource has been shared widely, including with

multi-agency partners, to support consistent messaging and practice when working with families. The aim is to ensure that all professionals reinforce the importance of attendance while helping families access support where challenges arise.

Alongside this work, Dumfries and Galloway Council is undertaking a comprehensive review and update of its Missing in Education procedures to strengthen safeguarding arrangements and improve assurance that all children and young people remain visible to services. The revised approach has been developed collaboratively with Education, Social Work, Health and Police Scotland and introduces clearer reporting timescales, enhanced risk assessment processes and more robust escalation pathways where a child's wellbeing cannot be confirmed. The updated model shifts the focus from attendance monitoring alone to broader safeguarding assurance, recognising that attendance percentages do not always provide sufficient information about a child's wellbeing.

Effectiveness of Multi-Agency Working
Multi-agency working is central to the authority's attendance improvement strategy. Schools work closely with Educational Psychology, Social Work, Health services, Family Support services, Skills Development Scotland, Third Sector partners and Community Learning colleagues to identify and address the underlying causes of absence.

The authority recognises that attendance concerns are rarely solely an education issue. Many barriers relate to wellbeing, family circumstances, poverty, mental health, unmet additional support needs or adverse childhood experiences. As a result, Dumfries and Galloway has increasingly adopted a ‘Team Around the Family’ approach, ensuring support plans are co-ordinated, strengths-based and informed by the voice of the child and family.

This collaborative approach is reflected in recent partnership work with Lifelong Learning Services, piloting targeted support for targeted families through the Triple P (Positive Parenting Programme). The pilot seeks to strengthen parental confidence, improve family relationships and support sustained engagement with school. Early feedback suggests that working alongside families, rather than focusing solely on attendance outcomes, provides a more sustainable route to improvement.

Sharing Effective Practice Across the System
Knowledge sharing occurs through attendance networks, professional learning opportunities, strategic attendance meetings and regular engagement between schools and central education services. Effective practice identified through attendance reviews, case studies and school improvement activity is disseminated across the authority to support continuous improvement.

The Attendance Toolkit provides a shared framework for practice, while attendance data and emerging themes are reviewed collectively to identify successful

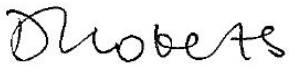
approaches and areas requiring further support. Multi-agency partners are included in these discussions to promote consistency of response and a shared understanding of attendance expectations and support pathways.

The authority's approach aligns closely with recent national learning from Education Scotland's Improving Attendance in Scotland work, which identified that successful improvement is characterised by strong relationships, shared responsibility, effective use of attendance data, early intervention and partnership working with families and community services. Education Scotland highlights that attendance improvement is most effective where children and young people experience a strong sense of belonging, where barriers are understood rather than simply managed, and where schools and partners work together to provide tailored support.

National inspection findings have also emphasised the importance of improving the consistency of attendance coding, strengthening family engagement and embedding multi-agency approaches to support children experiencing persistent absence. These priorities are reflected in Dumfries and Galloway's focus on SEEMiS coding consistency, the Attendance Toolkit, the unseen pupils' process, and collaborative family-centred practice.

I offer this information in support of the Education and Gaelic Committee business in considering local authority approaches to supporting school improvement, and in supporting children and young people experiencing persistent absence. I trust it is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Dawn Roberts
Chief Executive