Local Authority Approaches to School Education: East Ayrshire Council

Directorate of Education and Skills

East Ayrshire Attendance Update

East Ayrshire Council has embedded the principles of Included, Engaged and Involved (IEI) Part 1 through the comprehensive refresh of Standard Circular 5: The Promotion and Management of Attendance in August 2026. The revised policy aligns fully with national guidance and establishes a consistent authority-wide framework for promoting attendance through rights-based, relational and inclusive approaches.

To promote and encourage engagement and attendance of pupils, a dedicated Quality Improvement Manager (Attendance, Engagement and Participation) has been appointed to lead the implementation and roll out of the revised Standard Circular, and provide strategic leadership, challenge and support to schools. In addition, a significant programme of professional learning for senior leaders, pastoral staff and administrative teams to undertake, ensures consistent application of attendance policy, coding and procedures.

The implementation of the refreshed policy and associated professional learning has led to measurable improvements in local authority and school-level practice, in the following areas:

Early Intervention

· Schools proactively identify learners whose attendance is reducing before persistent absence becomes established, enabling earlier intervention and support.

· The revised standard circular and professional learning, provides significant enhancements on the assessment process, early intervention, learner voice, family engagement, flexible learning and reduced learning hours.

Data Informed Decisions and Impact

· Authority-wide attendance tracking and monitoring processes are aligned to Scottish Government reporting cycles.

· Effective data analysis, strengthens our quality assurance arrangements, including regular school reviews and structured attendance improvement discussions around improving outcomes and impact.

· Attendance data is reviewed at least every four weeks, with schools analysing patterns at individual, cohort and whole-school level. Particular focus is given to pupils whose attendance falls below 93% and those approaching or below the persistent absence threshold of 90%. Enhanced monitoring is also undertaken for vulnerable groups, including young people with additional support needs, care experienced learners and those affected by poverty to ensure interventions are targeted and inequity does not widen.

Coordinated Support and Shared Practices

· Multi-agency working is a significant strength within the local authority's approach to attendance improvement. Schools work within GIRFEC principles and utilise established Child's Planning arrangements where attendance concerns are complex, long term or linked to wider wellbeing factors. Attendance concerns are increasingly viewed through a wellbeing and inclusion lens ensuring children and young people are included in decisions involving them.

· Where attendance falls into more significant concern categories, schools increasingly use Team with the Family approaches to coordinate support, remove barriers and ensure families receive timely assistance. Collaborative working with parents and carers is viewed as essential to sustaining improvements in attendance, and feedback from schools indicates this remains one of the strongest aspects of local practice.

· The authority's ongoing review of young people in S1-S3 with attendance below 60% is providing a deeper understanding of system-wide barriers and informing the development of enhanced partnership approaches and targeted supports for learners with the most complex attendance challenges.

· Effective practice identified through attendance quality improvement reviews is captured and disseminated through authority-wide leadership networks, professional learning sessions and the Attendance Toolkit. This has enabled successful approaches to be adapted and implemented across sectors.

Summary

Overall, East Ayrshire Council can evidence strong progress in implementing Included, Engaged and Involved through updated policy, enhanced professional learning, improved attendance systems and tracking, strengthened early intervention, effective partnership working and robust quality assurance arrangements. The authority's approach is increasingly preventative, data-informed and centred on understanding and addressing individual barriers to attendance through inclusion, participation and collaboration with children, young people and families.

Whilst significant progress has been made in establishing greater consistency and earlier intervention, the authority recognises that further work is required to improve outcomes for a relatively small cohort of children and young people experiencing severe and sustained absence. Findings from the current review of learners with attendance below 60% will inform the next phase of targeted improvement activity.

Response to Recommendations of the HMIE thematic report

Theme 1: Variability in the consistency and quality of support provided to schools, both within and across local authorities

- Clear strategic vision through the Education Service Improvement Plan (2024–27) ensuring all establishments work towards shared priorities and common improvement goals.
- Embedded Quality Improvement and Preparing for Inspection Frameworks provide a consistent approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement (ADES QUAD priority)
- Learning Visits, Quality Assurance Visit and ECC Audits alongside link officer engagement provide consistent challenge, support and professional dialogue across all establishments.
- Education Groups and collaborative networks ensure establishments do not work in isolation and promote sharing of effective practice across the system.
- Strategic guidance for Planning, Learning, Teaching and Assessment (PLTA) supports consistent professional judgement, moderation and assessment practices across establishments.
- A well-established culture of data-informed improvement, underpinned by ACEL, Insight, Stretch Aims and local authority tracking systems, ensures schools receive consistent challenge and support based on evidence.
- The deployment of Quality Improvement Team and central team link officers ensures consistent support, challenge and monitoring of school improvement priorities.
- Collaborative improvement activity with Education Scotland, including attendance, and improvement science, strengthens shared approaches across the system.
- Robust governance structures, including Cabinet, Governance and Scrutiny Committee and ASF scrutiny arrangements, ensure consistent oversight, accountability and evaluation of improvement activity.
- Tiered support and challenge model (Universal, Targeted and Intensive) ensures engagement with all establishments is both proportionate and rigorous as required.

- Sharing of school improvement plans, standards and quality reports and quality assurance calendars, creating a culture of collaborative learning and collective accountability.

Theme 2: Self-evaluation processes are not always rigorous enough to maximise the progress of children and young people;

- Engagement in thorough self-evaluation underpinned by the recently published ADES HGIOLA framework. Completion of this self-evaluation activity ensures alignment with local and national expectations of our directorate. This work is ongoing within QUAD (4A).
- Learning Visits, Quality Assurance Visit and ECC Audits provide consistent support and challenge, promoting shared standards, effective self-evaluation and continuous improvement across schools and centres. Reference should be made to the inclusion of leadership team peers in visiting teams, strengthening the consistency of messages, expectations and improvement priorities across the directorate.
- Education Groups meetings provide structured opportunities for collaboration, professional dialogue and sharing of effective practice.
- Robust tracking, monitoring and attainment review arrangements ensure all schools receive consistent scrutiny, support and challenge informed by data.
- Comprehensive school data profiles and education data compendium support professional dialogue and evidence-informed decision making.

Theme 3: Leadership development at all levels remains uneven and this is essential for building capacity for continuous improvement.

- Engagement in QUAD training events focused on central team leadership.
- Engagement with HMIE colleagues to support high-quality evaluative writing.
- Quality Improvement Team engagement with heads of establishment across school improvement planning and production of standards and quality reports ensures consistency of expectations and practice.

- Establishment senior leader involvement in Learning Visits provide opportunities for leadership development through benchmarking activity and reflection.
- Education Groups and collaborative networks promote shared responsibility and facilitate the spread of effective leadership practice.
- A comprehensive professional learning and leadership development offer builds leadership capacity and supports consistent approaches to improvement. This includes those on ES pathways such as into headship.
- The Leaders of Learning programme, which has developed pedagogical leadership capacity across all primary schools.
- Effective deployment and development of Associate Assessors to strengthen evaluative capability and professional leadership across the authority.

Summary

We have developed and embedded a strong quality improvement framework. Our systematic approach to quality assurance, commitment to validated self-evaluation and investment in leadership at all levels are contributing to reduced variability, stronger professional accountability and enhanced collaborative practice. We continue to strengthen improvement across our establishments, which can be seen in our recent set of HMIE engagements.