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Education and Gaelic Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

By email: EducationAndGaelic.committee@parliament.scot

Dear Sirs

LOCAL AUTHORITY APPROACHES TO SCHOOL EDUCATION
East Dunbartonshire Council (EDC) Education Service Response

1. **There is notable variability in the consistency and quality of support provided to schools, both within and across local authorities**

East Dunbartonshire Council (EDC) Education Service recognises the importance of continually reviewing and strengthening its approaches to quality assurance in response to the identified challenge that there is *"notable variability in the consistency and quality of support provided to schools, both within and across local authorities"*. However, the provision of a consistent, high-quality system to support and challenge schools is a strength of EDC Education Service. This is driven through a clear and robust Self Evaluation and Quality Improvement Policy which ensures equitable support across its three localities: Bearsden & Milngavie, Bishopbriggs & Lenzie, and Kirkintilloch & The Villages.

The policy sets out the Education Service's vision and framework for Self-Evaluation and Quality Improvement. It aligns with the National Improvement Framework (NIF), Education Business Improvement Plan (BIP) and Education Service Plan (ESP) 2025-2028. The policy reflects the Council's ambition to provide the highest quality education for all children and young people, focusing on learning, achievements and outcomes. The policy reflects partnership and collaboration at all levels, underpinned by positive, supportive relationships and collegiate working.

Led by the Chief Education Officer, the Education Leadership Team (ELT) oversees a multi-tiered framework, allocating every school a consistent core team made up of a Quality Improvement Manager (QIM), a link Quality Improvement Officer, (QIO) an Additional Support Needs QIO, an Inclusion Officer, and an Educational Psychologist.

All schools are offered high-quality feedback on their School Improvement Plans and Standards and Quality Reports, supporting school leaders to reflect critically on their practice, identify priorities for improvement and evaluate the impact of their improvement actions. QIOs visit schools throughout the academic year to quality assure attainment, review progress against improvement priorities and support schools to identify and address areas for further development.

To further strengthen the consistency and effectiveness of our approach, EDC has introduced Quality Assurance Groups (QAGs). These provide a structured, collaborative space for Head Teachers to engage in professional dialogue, reflection and shared self-evaluation. The QAGs are intended to strengthen the consistency of quality assurance practices across schools, support the sharing of effective practice and enhance the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. Through this collaborative approach, Head Teachers are supported to develop a shared understanding of quality and standards, identify improvement priorities and contribute to securing improved outcomes for all children and young people.

In addition to our work within EDC, we are actively engaging in collaborative improvement activity across local authorities to strengthen practice, share expertise and develop leadership capacity.

To tackle cross-authority disparities, EDC leads the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) QUAD 1b partnership alongside Perth & Kinross, Aberdeenshire, and Orkney, benchmarking frameworks and sharing practice. Additionally, local Head Teachers collaborate through dedicated Quality Assurance Groups to share effective practices and align quality assurance standards.

Through this work, EDC participates in a Quality Improvement and Self-Evaluation Strategy Group, which aims to build leadership capacity across central teams through shared quality improvement processes. The group is developing opportunities to share existing approaches across local authorities, including policies and procedures, School Improvement Planning, Standards and Quality Reporting, and approaches to inspection and review. This includes preparation for HMIe visits, quality reviews, validated self-evaluation, thematic reviews and collaborative improvement. The group also intends to facilitate joint working between quality assurance teams and create opportunities for senior staff to participate in inter-authority quality review activity. This work will support greater consistency, promote professional challenge and enable local authorities to learn from one another's approaches to quality improvement.

Furthermore, EDC has a QIO and a Head Teacher participating in the West Partnership Cross-Local Authority Quality Improvement Pilot. This initiative will provide opportunities to share professional expertise and experience in quality assuring high-quality learning and teaching, including through visits between local authorities. Although this work is at an early stage, it represents a positive step towards strengthening collaborative quality assurance, developing a shared understanding of effective practice and supporting improvement across local authority boundaries.

2. **Self-evaluation processes are not always rigorous enough to maximise the progress of children and young people**

EDC Education Service has an integrated evaluation model designed to directly inform classroom practice. The Quality Improvement Team leads formal reviews replicating His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) methodology, combining central officers, Depute Head Teachers, peer Head Teachers and HMIE Associate Assessors.

Quality Improvement Reviews provide Senior Leaders and schools with an opportunity to work with children and young people, staff, parents, partners, peers and officers to look at their school through different lenses across the HGIOS framework. The review process looks closely at the school's own self-evaluation, to determine how well the school is performing; to measure the impact of improvement; to focus on outcomes for learners; and to reflect on the school's capacity for continuous improvement.

To drive forward continuous improvement, the Education Leadership Team consulted with central officers and headteachers to design a new improvement strategy (IMAGINE). Building on existing strengths, this improvement strategy is providing a structured framework to streamline approaches, ensure ongoing developments within education and outcomes from continuous self-evaluation are effectively integrated into establishments across the authority. This comprehensive strategy spans Early Years and Childcare (EYC), Primary and Secondary Education, including Skills for Learning, Life and Work. It is supported by seven key strategic groups: leadership, learning and teaching, tracking and monitoring, curriculum, partnerships, wellbeing and inclusion and skills for life, learning and work. All Headteachers from all sectors are involved in these strategic groups which ensures commitment to collaboration, continuity and rigorous approach with a focus on maximising the progress of children and young people.

Staff build evaluative literacy by analysing published inspection findings through the IMAGINE Learning and Teaching Strategy, creating an authority-wide evaluative vocabulary. Secondary senior leaders use central tracking systems to disaggregate data by subject, stage, and demographic group, feeding directly into mandatory annual attainment reviews. Furthermore, curriculum improvement is driven by trials of Learning and Teaching Toolkits covering adaptive teaching, metacognition, and questioning, supported by extensive practitioner training.

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

East Dunbartonshire Council is deeply committed to driving equity and excellence in education by fostering strong, effective leadership at every level. To achieve this, the Education Service has established a structured Education Leadership Framework which aligns with national policies and offers robust professional learning pathways, providing essential guidance for both aspiring and established leaders as they build their skills, knowledge, and confidence. This strategic framework spans Early Years, Primary, Secondary, and Additional Support Needs sectors, embracing the understanding that leadership extends far beyond formal titles to include leading learning, influencing positive change, and contributing meaningfully to school and early years improvement.

Designed to support everyone including Provisionally Registered Teachers (PRTs), experienced Head Teachers, Early Years Heads of Centres and Modern Apprentices, the framework serves as a clear roadmap for leadership growth and career progression. It ensures sustainable improvement through collaborative, high-quality system leadership, deep operational and strategic insight, and a commitment to building capacity across the entire education workforce. To support this vision, two distinct progressive pathways have been created: one tailored for GTCS-registered teachers across all sectors, and another dedicated to practitioners within the Early Years sector, ensuring every professional is supported through each stage of their journey.

The IMAGINE Leadership Strategy governs career progression to ensure leadership development is systematic across Early Years, Primary, Secondary, and Additional Support Needs sectors. Middle leadership capacity grows through Principal Teacher Professional Development Groups and structured programs like 'Middle Leaders Leading Change' and the West Partnership's 'Improving Our Departments and Faculties' initiative.

Secondary Depute Head Teachers take direct responsibility for compiling School Improvement Plans and Standards and Quality Reports, backed by a dedicated professional learning network. New Head Teachers receive structured induction paired with experienced mentors, while senior leaders participate in national pathways such as 'Into Headship' and 'Excellence in Headship'. Staff also shape authority policy by serving on strategic steering

groups, and Additional Support Needs leadership is strengthened through targeted annual seminars and professional learning sessions.

Furthermore, through the ADES QUAD, East Dunbartonshire Council actively participates in the Leadership Strategy Group, collaborating with partners to share, review, and refine leadership strategies and professional learning opportunities. The council also places a strong emphasis on strengthening leadership capacity within Additional Support Needs through targeted strategic direction and collaborative improvement.

A dedicated programme of ASN leadership sessions including two annual seminars, creates vital spaces for professional dialogue, the sharing of effective practice, and the development of a shared understanding of inclusive approaches and statutory responsibilities. Ultimately, this collaborative ethos empowers leaders to reflect critically, strengthen self-evaluation, and champion collective responsibility for inclusion, ensuring sustained improvements in outcomes for all children and young people.

4. Support for pupils with persistent absence

EDC tackles persistent absence through structured multi-agency intervention and objective tracking indicators. Attendance tracking acts as a primary data trigger within the framework, allowing central officers and school leaders to spot attendance dips promptly. Locality-based inclusion officers work closely with schools, educational psychologists, and families to address the root causes of absence, ensuring coordinated, multi-agency support is applied consistently across all establishments to improve engagement and outcomes.

All eight secondary schools across EDC have designated attendance as a primary school improvement objective, actively addressing post-pandemic attendance patterns through operational data tracking, policy standardisation, and targeted multi-agency support.

To drive this forward, the local authority established an Attendance Network Group led collaboratively by two Educational Psychologists and the central Attainment Advisor, which produced an Attendance Self-Evaluation Toolkit requiring secondary senior teams to audit their attendance policies and pastoral interventions against national research and local data.

Complementing this, a comprehensive audit of SEEMIS attendance and absence coding was completed across all schools, with specific guidance and standard operating procedures reissued to school offices and pastoral care teams to ensure uniform absence categorisation, prevent masked persistent absence, and provide precise intelligence regarding the root drivers of non-attendance.

Addressing attendance through an early-intervention, whole-family approach via the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund has also substantially reduced escalation to formal panels, with the deployment of seven third-sector projects, Youth Development Workers, and Local Area Coordinators tackling neurodiversity, emotional distress, and school avoidance, resulting in a remarkable 56 percent reduction in statutory Locality Liaison Group referrals in the Kirkintilloch and Lenzie locality.

Building on this foundational support, robust targeted interventions address Emotionally Based School Avoidance and vulnerable engagement, including the Care Experienced Children and Young People grant which funds nine Youth Development Workers and a dedicated Care Experienced Teacher to sustain positive engagement for 180 young people while establishing the new EDC Virtual Service for pupils unable to attend mainstream classes due to extreme anxiety.

Furthermore, the MCR Pathways mentoring programme operates across seven secondary schools and the Secondary Wellbeing Support Service, deploying mentors and coordinators to provide one-to-one relationship-based support for 307 vulnerable pupils, while the Positive Achievements programme delivers alternative, community-based vocational qualifications and personal development awards for secondary pupils disengaging from the formal curriculum, achieving an accredited qualification success rate that transitioned 86 awards into positive post-school destinations.

Additional targeted outdoor education programmes funded via the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund successfully engaged 102 secondary learners struggling with attendance in intensive personal development and confidence building to directly support their phased reintegration into full-time education.

Through this carefully considered approach, EDC proudly maintains an overall authority attendance rate of 92.7 percent which is well above the 90.2 percent national average whilst achieving a 98.1 percent sustained positive school-leaver destination rate.

Yours faithfully

Gregor Bremner

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CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

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