East Renfrewshire Council, Education Department: Response to Education and Gaelic Committee

Local authority approaches to supporting school improvement

East Renfrewshire welcomes the national thematic inspection report and recognises the importance of continuous improvement across the education system. The national findings relate to variability across Scotland's 32 local authorities. They do not describe the specific findings from HM Inspectors' detailed engagement with East Renfrewshire in September 2024.

HM Inspectors found very strong approaches to self-evaluation, school improvement and quality assurance; a comprehensive approach that provides rich intelligence on school performance and practice; relevant and proportionate support and challenge from officers who know their schools well; positive relationships across the system; and strong leadership and professional learning at all levels. They also identified East Renfrewshire's professional learning as practice worthy of national sharing.

Inspection evidence over time reinforces this assessment. Between August 2016 and October 2026, HM Inspectors inspected 69% of East Renfrewshire schools, with all inspections resulting in extremely positive outcomes. These consistently positive outcomes provide strong external assurance of the quality of practice in inspected schools and support a positive judgement of the authority's approach to support, challenge and improvement.

This strong inspection evidence is complemented by exceptionally high attainment and attendance. In 2026, 86% of S4 pupils attained five or more passes at National 5 or better, and 52% of S5 pupils attained five or more passes at Higher—both the Council's best ever results. Primary school attendance in 2025/26 was 94.8%. Separately, national attendance statistics for 2024/25 show that East Renfrewshire had the highest overall school attendance rate of any Scottish local authority. These outcomes provide further evidence of the strength of the local education system, alongside the continuing focus on equity and improvement for every learner.

The Education Department has used the national report, local inspection findings and the January 2025 and January 2026 How Good Is Our Education Authority self-evaluations to review and strengthen its work. The response is set out under the three requested themes. A copy of these can be found as an appendix of this report.

1. Consistency and quality of support provided to schools, within and across local authorities

The local thematic inspection did not find variable or inconsistent support within East Renfrewshire. It found that link Quality Improvement Officers know their schools very well and provide support and challenge that reflects each school's context. This is supported by a clear Quality Improvement Calendar, regular contact with officers, Collaborative Improvement Visits, thematic reviews, Excellence through Equity visits, stakeholder surveys and targeted support based on need.

- The supported, guided and independent model used in East Renfrewshire provides evidence about performance, improvement capacity and learners' experiences to match assistance to need. Internal and external evidence shows that targeted support

is improving experiences and outcomes in supported schools, while preserving headteacher autonomy.
- A more structured moderation cycle involving officers and school leaders is strengthening consistency in improvement plans, Standards and Quality Reports and Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) planning against agreed features of highly effective practice.
- HMIE Associate Assessors and centrally based principal teachers act as critical friends, contribute to Collaborative Improvement Visits and professional learning, and strengthen shared understanding of high-quality learning, teaching and self-evaluation.
- Cluster working, headteacher spotlights, case studies, curriculum and subject networks, practitioner forums and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment platform make effective practice more visible and accessible. The ASN workstreams also have a strong collaborative improvement focus, bringing schools, central teams and partners together to review practice, share learning and take forward agreed improvements in inclusion and support for learners. Pupil and parent friendly improvement plans also strengthen shared ownership of improvement.

East Renfrewshire also works with other authorities through its ADES Quad with Aberdeen City, Edinburgh and Shetland, the West Partnership and the national ADES Framework for Improvement. This includes shared moderation, peer review, joint quality improvement work, use of data, sharing professional learning materials and comparing how evidence is used to target support. A senior leader from another Quad has also been invited to provide further external challenge.

The authority recognises that collaboration can be affected by limited capacity, geography, competing priorities, different systems and the time needed to build trust and agree common standards. Quad, regional and national arrangements help to address these barriers by providing planned opportunities for joint work, professional challenge and evaluation of impact.

2. Rigour of self-evaluation in maximising children's and young people's progress

HM Inspectors found a well-established culture of self-evaluation and a comprehensive approach to quality assurance in East Renfrewshire. There is a clear link between schools' self-evaluation and external inspection outcomes. The authority's January 2025 and January 2026 Quad self-evaluations further demonstrate how this work has become more systematic, more analytical and increasingly focused on impact.

- Improvement decisions draw on attainment, attendance, inclusion and wellbeing data; standardised assessments; inspection and review evidence; classroom observation; documentation; and the views of pupils, staff, parents and partners. Self-evaluation increasingly draws directly on children's and young people's experiences and views, ensuring that learner voice informs improvement priorities and that children and young people can see how their participation has influenced change.
- Officers systematically analyse school improvement plans, PEF submissions, pupil outcomes and learners' experiences to identify patterns, trends and priorities. The 'Fact, Story, Action' approach, tracking and Business Intelligence tools are increasing schools' confidence and self-sufficiency in moving from evidence to intervention to improvement.
- During the summer period, the Quality Improvement Team gather and quality assure School Improvement Plans and Standards and Quality Reports. In response to feedback from the thematic review, officers now moderate a sample of plans and

reports across all sectors against agreed features of effective improvement planning. An agreed format and updated guidance support schools in preparing their plans and reports.

- Findings from ERC Collaborative Improvement Visits and thematic reviews have directly informed authority priorities and resources. The 2022 ADES Collaborative Improvement Visit resulted in a refreshed Numeracy and Mathematics strategy; subsequent attainment evidence shows sustained high performance and impact of the strategy.
- The authority's approach recognises that improvement is evidenced not only through attainment, but through children's and young people's attendance, engagement, inclusion, wellbeing, sense of belonging and experience of school. The approach is associated with consistently high attainment, a narrowing poverty-related gap in literacy and numeracy, high attendance, low exclusion rates and 97.7% of 2024/25 school leavers entering a positive destination. Evidence is also used to target support for key equity groups and to evaluate Pupil Equity Fund and Strategic Equity Fund activity.
- Regular reporting to Education Committee, elected member spotlight sessions, Parent Council Chairs meetings and accessible improvement information strengthen scrutiny and help children, young people and families understand and influence priorities.

Although HM Inspectors found East Renfrewshire's self-evaluation and quality assurance arrangements to be very strong, the authority recognises the need to keep checking the consistency, quality and impact of its evidence. The next phase will complete the structured moderation cycle, make more systematic use of the quality assurance database to identify authority wide patterns, strengthen qualitative evidence and ensure evaluation shows measurable changes in practice, learner experience and outcomes, rather than only activity or staff confidence. The revised HGIOEA framework, ADES/HMIE action plan and ADES PIN Network provide common standards, benchmarking, professional learning, opportunities for collaboration and further external challenge.

3. Leadership development at all levels and capacity for continuous improvement

The HMIE inspection in ERC found strong leadership and professional learning opportunities at all levels. Staff spoke positively about opportunities to develop their skills and contribute to improvement across the authority. The January 2025 and January 2026 ADES *How Good is Our Education Authority?* evaluations provide further evidence of a clear leadership pathway and a strong sense of shared responsibility.

- Probationer induction, professional inquiry, Masters-level learning, Aspiring Leaders, the Headteacher Induction Programme, coaching, mentoring, secondments and system leadership opportunities provide progression from early career to senior leadership.
- Evaluation evidence shows that 99% of probationers considered establishment professional learning to be developing their skills; all participants in the first two Aspiring Leaders cohorts reported increased leadership knowledge, ability and confidence; and all newly appointed headteachers responding said the induction programme supported more authentic and confident leadership.
- In the January 2026 evidence, 78% of staff reported opportunities to lead improvement priorities and 81% collaborated regularly to improve learning experiences. Staff lead

working groups, moderation, curriculum design, research hubs, Collaborative Improvement Visits and professional learning.
- West Partnership programmes, Quad professional learning, ADES / HMIE central officer learning extend leadership learning across organisational boundaries.

The authority's self-evaluation also identifies areas for further development. Evidence linking leadership development and professional learning to learner outcomes needs to be more consistent. The refreshed Career Long Professional Learning Framework will include clear success criteria and measurable indicators, strengthen links between professional learning, improvement planning and quality assurance, and provide better evidence of changes in staff practice and learner outcomes.

Support for Pupils with Persistent Absence

Implementation of Guidance

East Renfrewshire Council has taken a strategic, authority wide approach to implementing Scottish Government attendance guidance. This has been supported by the development of an Improving Attendance in ERC Settings and Schools Action Plan, revised local attendance policy and guidance, and improved arrangements for analysing and reporting attendance data.

Our revised Standard Circular 5: Attendance at School was updated in November 2025 and reflects the principles of *Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1*, GIRFEC and children's rights. It places positive relationships, prevention, early identification and partnership with families at the centre of the authority's approach. It also provides clearer guidance on recording attendance and absence, including the use of SEEMiS codes, adapted timetables, alternative learning provision and support for children unable to attend because of ill health.

Implementation has included:

- a review of local attendance data and practice;
- professional learning on SEEMiS coding to promote greater consistency;
- development of Power BI reporting and tracking;
- clearer procedures for adapted and flexible timetables;
- professional learning for staff;
- strengthened family engagement;
- mentoring and alternative learning pathways; and
- planned opportunities for schools to examine data and share effective practice.

This local approach is consistent with the more recent national evidence provided in Improving Attendance in Scotland 2024-26, which highlights the importance of live monitoring, accurate data, targeted support, professional learning, multi-agency collaboration, curricular flexibility and relational engagement with families.

Impact

Primary Attendance

- Primary attendance has increased 0.4% from 94.4% in 2022/23 to 94.8% in 2025/26.
- The percentage of pupils with 10% or more absence in primary schools has reduced from 15.2% in 2022/23 to 13.1% in 2025/26.
- The gap between SIMD Quintile 1 and 5 has reduced from 5.2 percentage points in 22/23 to 4.4 in 25/26.

Secondary Attendance

- Secondary attendance has increase by 1.1% from 91.1% in 2022/23 to 92.2% in 2025/26.
- The percentage of pupils with 10% or more absence in secondary schools has reduced from 28% in 2022/23 to 24.3% in 2025/26.
- The gap between SIMD Quintile 1 and 5 has reduced from 7.2 percentage points in 22/23 to 4.0 in 25/26.

Identification of and Multi-Agency Response to Persistent Absence

East Renfrewshire applies the Scottish Government definition of persistent absence as absence of 10% or more of available half-day sessions, equivalent to attendance below 90%. Schools are expected to identify concerns before absence becomes entrenched and not to wait for a learner to cross a single numerical threshold before taking action.

Schools use SEEMiS and Power BI information to examine:

- individual attendance levels and attendance bands;
- patterns by day, term and stage;
- changes over time;
- lateness and unexplained absence;
- reasons and codes for absence;
- adapted or reduced timetables;
- links with wellbeing, attainment and engagement; and
- patterns affecting equality and equity groups.

The authority collects and analyses attendance information quarterly. The analysis has a particular focus on care experienced learners, learners living in SIMD deciles 1 and 2, learners entitled to free school meals and learners with additional support needs. Schools are expected to use the Power BI dashboard to identify establishment level trends and individual children and young people requiring intervention.

Where a concerning pattern is identified, schools are required to investigate, maintain accurate pastoral notes and chronologies, and engage supportively with the learner and family to understand the reasons for absence. Responses to absence concerns are based on the assessed needs and circumstances of the child and may include:

- an identified key adult;
- wellbeing assessment and planning;
- pastoral or nurture support;
- direct work with parents and carers;
- home visits and flexible family meetings;
- mentoring;
- support for anxiety or emotionally based school absence;
- curriculum adaptation or alternative learning;
- a planned, time-limited phased return;
- an adapted timetable;
- support through the Learn Well Service; and
- coordinated multi-agency planning.

We have developed a multi-agency service in East Renfrewshire called the Learn Well Service which provides a targeted pathway for children and young people who have withdrawn from school or are at significant risk of doing so due to emotionally based absence factors. It offers educational and wellbeing support, individual and whole family sessions, groups, home based or online engagement, and advice to schools and families. Schools and the service are expected to liaise weekly to review attendance, engagement and the effectiveness of agreed support.

In addition to this, we have linked with MCR Pathways to provide mentoring for care-experienced and other vulnerable young people in secondary schools, with nominated school leads and arrangements to track attendance, achievement and attainment.

Sharing Effective Practice

East Renfrewshire uses a range of mechanisms to share and embed effective attendance practice across the education system. These include:

- Headteacher and senior leadership forums;
- Quality Improvement Officer support and challenge;
- Local Authority and School Standards and Quality reporting;
- Excellence through Equity visits;
- Termly authority attendance reports;
- Authority-wide professional learning;
- Power BI training for senior and middle leaders;
- Workshops using school level data and examples of effective interventions;
- Sharing practice through a HT Seminar launching the attendance policy and associated professional learning; and,
- Participation in national networks and Education Scotland improvement activity.

Conclusion

East Renfrewshire has made substantial progress in translating Scottish Government attendance guidance into clearer local policy, improved data systems and more consistent expectations for schools. There is evidence of recovery in secondary attendance and improvements for some priority groups, alongside stronger arrangements for early identification, staged intervention, adapted provision and multi-agency support.

Our local data also demonstrates that attendance has not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels, persistent absence continues to affect a number of learners, and whilst the gap is reducing, inequalities remain for children and young people affected by poverty, additional support needs and care experience. The Council will therefore continue to prioritise attendance as an inclusion, wellbeing, safeguarding and attainment issue, using data and the voices of learners and families to evaluate impact and direct support to the areas of greatest need.