Response to Scottish Government Education and Gaelic Committee on Local Authority Approaches to School Education

The Committee would welcome an update on how your Local Authority has responded to the recommendations of the HMIE thematic report on inspection of local authority approaches to supporting school improvement. This includes how your Local Authority views the "notable variability in the consistency and quality of support provided to schools, both within and across local authorities." For example, the Committee is interested in how good practice is shared across local authorities and the barriers which may exist to this occurring.

In September 2024, HMIE visited The City of Edinburgh Council as part of the national thematic review. Our effective practice in our approaches to professional learning across our system was highlighted as practice worthy of sharing, alongside our approach to working with our elected members to support their work in improving outcomes for young people. The report recognised that CEC has very effective systems in place to address any weaknesses in school provision and that our Headteachers are positive about the proportionate support we provide.

We ensure consistency in our approaches to support school improvement through a shared understanding and effective implementation of our *Improving Quality in Learning* (IQIL) Framework, which clearly sets out expectations on the universal, targeted, and intensive support schools can expect from CEC officers. Roles and responsibilities in supporting school improvement are outlined clearly and are well understood across our system.

We have an IQIL board, with representation from across the system, who steer the effective implementation and continuous review of our approaches, and the board gathers and evaluates evidence of the impact of our approaches to ensure we continue to improve.

Our staged approach to school improvement is well developed and we gather performance data in several areas to inform our Capacity and Risk Register (CARR) which is effectively used to determine the level of support schools and settings require. The CARR is dynamic and ensures our schools receive the right support at the right time. We determine schools who are 'priority schools' using the CARR and deploy the agreed targeted and intensive support as set out in our IQIL.

Since session 2023-2024, we have worked effectively with our QUAD local authority partners (Aberdeen City Council, Shetland Islands Council, and East Renfrewshire Council) to share good practice and to support our self-evaluation processes. This work is supported by the ADES HGIOEA self-evaluation framework. We have identified several areas to collaborate on shared challenges, and to learn from each other's strong practice in particular areas. As an example of strong practice, we have recently shared our self-evaluation systems and processes within the QUAD and learned about QUAD partners' work in this area, which has strengthened our work.

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The Committee would welcome an update from your Local Authority on how the guidance is being implemented in practice and whether it is leading to improvements in local approaches. The Committee is also interested in how schools within your Local Authority identify and respond to persistent absence, how effective multi-agency working is in supporting individual pupils and their families, and how knowledge of effective practice is shared across the education system.

- **How schools and councils are implementing guidance**

The City of Edinburgh Council's Maximising School Attendance policy sits within a suite of policies and procedures which all promote a positive ethos of inclusion. The policy is our approach to ensure schools promote and achieve high levels of school attendance for all children and young people focussing on collaboration at all levels and the utilisation of resources within and between establishments and strengthening partnerships across the city.

The key principles which we promote as effective whole school approaches to ensuring good attendance have been made explicit. Attendance at school is a key driver to raising attainment and achievement. Every Day Counts has been adopted as a key driver by the City of Edinburgh Council to press the importance of school attendance and to provide clear messaging regarding the impact of school days missed on pupil learning due to absences. Other principles include schools demonstrating a strong attendance ethos by being welcoming and prioritising positive and nurturing relationships underpinned by high expectations. Our schools' have core values that create safe environments for children and young people to develop, they also take a rights-based approach which takes account of the UNCRC and encourages children and young people's participation in their learning. Promoting attendance is part of regular conversations with parents, children and young people.

- **Whether it is leading to improvements**

To effectively promote and maximise attendance, schools have in place a staged intervention model whereby universal measures are in place for all children and young people, with targeted and intensive interventions being available when there are concerns about a child or young person's school attendance. Staff, parents and children and young people are clear about attendance procedures. Schools work collaboratively with families through the national GIRFEC framework to understand and respond to barriers to attendance for individual children and young people and intervene early to any emerging patterns of non-attendance.

Nationally overall absence rates for academic year 2024/25 were 9.0%. With overall absence rates in primary schools 6.9% compared to 11.7% secondary schools. The City of Edinburgh Council absence rate of 8.1% remained below the national average, demonstrating comparatively stronger attendance performance across the

local authority with overall absence rates in primary schools of 6.1% and 10.1% in secondary schools. As a local authority we have seen a slight increase in school absence in both the primary and secondary sectors. For the academic year 2025/26, overall primary absence was 6.2% and 10.6% for secondary schools.

- **How schools identify and respond to persistent absence**

Attendance data is reviewed by schools led by the school's Attendance Lead - a minimum of fortnightly to identify trends and to ensure appropriate supports can be implemented at the earliest stage when patterns of attendance show a decline which may indicate potential barriers. Additionally, there is central monitoring of attendance data, monthly attendance reports and key messages are shared with relevant stakeholders to support a consistent strategic focus on maximising attendance. The Education Wellbeing Service (EWS) actively tracks attendance below 90% at an individual school level enabling targeted challenge and support where required. Attendance data is used to monitor the attendance of all pupils as well as placing a specific focus on groups of the most vulnerable children and young people (e.g. those who are Care Experienced, have Additional Support Needs and/or Disability, are living in the lowest SIMD). The EWS target interventions required for specific individuals and groups of children and young people, set and monitor annual attendance targets, continually review performance in relation to attendance. This support is delivered under the national GIRFEC framework, where targeted support is formally structured and monitored through the multi-agency child's plan.

Key challenges affecting reporting and responding to persistent absences:

- definition of persistent absence
- data and reporting: differences between Scottish Government and local authority approaches to absence reporting
- threshold for intervention: consistency in reporting concerns about a child or young person and thresholds for initiating active social work involvement
- multi-agency referrals to Scottish Children's Reporter Administrator (SCRA)
- parent engagement and corroboration in regard to children's non-attendance
- the impact of mental health and wellbeing needs among children, young people as well as parents/carers

- **How schools and councils are sharing effective practice**

The City of Edinburgh Attendance Network is hosted on MS Teams where data, professional learning, and good practice is conveyed. Many schools and/or learning communities have employed a Pupil Support Officer (PSO) who has a role for supporting school attendance and working directly with families. Our Attendance PSO Network maintains regular communication through their Microsoft Team platform and meet once each term to share good practice, collaboratively solve challenges and engage in professional learning. The Education Wellbeing Service

(EWS) provides advice and guidance to all schools on children and young people experiencing barriers to attending school and delivers tailored support working directly with children young people and families to help improve wellbeing outcomes with the aim of improving engagement and access to education.

The EWS delivers group work to pupils and family support through their parent drop in. The EWS is also a partner on our Single Point of Access; which through this collaborative partnership and multi-agency approach aims to help families access the right support at the right time. Our Educational Psychology Service have developed an Emotionally Based School Non-attendance toolkit (EBSNA) and have delivered training to support implementation and effective use of the resource. We know from our data that mental health can be a barrier to school attendance. The City of Edinburgh Council's approach to implementing the Scottish Government's Community Mental Health framework has been to enhance our EWS provision to support collaboration and consistency of delivery of early support through third sector partners. They deliver targeted interventions for children and families with an equitable provision of support offer across the local authority of Therapeutic Interventions with systemic or family support and the delivery of Mental Health Interventions through evidenced based individual or groupwork. Further examples of this approach in action are highlighted through our early years' centres in a test of change project. Practitioners are utilising a newly developed maximising attendance in early years toolkit and resources to support attendance at our early years' settings. Barriers that have been evidenced in this work are multi-layered and intersectional, for example bedtime/ sleep routines, family circumstances, children with ASN. Building and strengthening practitioners' capability to influence and support positive and sustainable family change for improved outcomes has been a focus of this work. The impact in the early years settings has been evidenced through increased data, case studies, child and parent feedback.