Midlothian Council response to the request from the Education and Gaelic Committee

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.'

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

Midlothian welcomed the validation that the national thematic brought. It confirmed that we had good systems and processes in place to support schools with improvement. It also recognised that we knew our schools well and our differentiated support model was effective.

Since the publication of the report, we have revised our Quality Improvement framework to ensure greater consistency through improved training, moderation, and publication of resources.

Our QI processes involve a range of people including central officers, HTs, DHTs and EYPs from Midlothian and neighbouring local authorities. Schools say that the engagements are robust, rigorous, and supportive. Overall, our assessment of schools matches the external validation from HMI and CI.

Midlothian is part of a Quad with Stirling, Scottish borders, and Highland. We have shared quality improvement approaches as well as approaches to leadership development, professional learning, meeting learners needs.

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

Midlothian has a risk and capacity register which categorises schools based on outcomes (attainment, attendance, ASN, leadership, QIs, complaints etc). This determines the level of support provided to each setting. This has proved invaluable in our improvement journey and ensuring those that need us most get the support required to improve.

Midlothian has engaged with the Education Scotland podcasts on QI approaches; these were developed from the good practice identified during the national thematic inspection.

Midlothian engaged in the development of the ADES HGIOEA framework and has used it to self-evaluate strengths and weaknesses.

Midlothian is part of AOEA and learns from being others through four-nation conversations and developments.

Midlothian is represented on ADES networks. The PIN (Performance Improvement Network) regularly shares Scottish Government data and LA good practice. This promotes understanding, networking, and greater consistency across the system.

Leadership development at all levels remains uneven and this is essential for building capacity for continuous improvement.
Midlothian has benefited from joint training of central staff training on QI, leadership development, and ASN.

Midlothian engaged with HMI online training on using self-evaluation materials and evaluative writing.

Midlothian appreciated the PIN input on the Thematic Inspection.

Midlothian has invested in the development of middle leaders; this has been welcomed by school leaders and will help with succession planning.

Midlothian is committed to developing empowerment and a self-improving system Headteachers attend three system leader days per year and are part of a HT trio. Midlothian has an Executive Education Group of headteachers and central officers who develop strategy, policy and inform decision making. This has proved invaluable in our improvement journey.

Midlothian has an assurance board that meets four times a year to review outcomes and achievement of stretch aims. The Excellence + Equity board involves education, Children's services, CLD, and Education Scotland. Again, we have found the shared commitment and collaborative working have helped to ensure priorities are achieved and interventions are timely and effective.

Support for pupils with persistent absence
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.

Midlothian, like many local authorities saw a drop in attendance post covid. For the past 4 years we have worked hard to developed more robust data sets for local authority and school use, revised our policy to ensure consistent application at the earliest stage, and strengthened our partnership approaches to working with families.

Midlothian has an attendance partnership network which involves educational psychology, home school practitioners, children's services, third sector and schools. As well as developing the strategy the group have been co-researching with children

and young people to better understand barriers to attending school as well as listening to parents lived experience.

Midlothian has worked with our Education Scotland Attainment Adviser on this and we have also connected with West Lothian and Forth valley collaborative to learn from their work. A headteacher from City of Edinburgh attended a headteacher meeting to share how she had improved attendance at her secondary school. This informed the development of the attendance toolkit and attendance mentoring work with schools.

Mindful of the plethora of reasons why children do not attend school and the limited capacity that schools have to unravel some of the complex issues facing families, Midlothian invested its Strategic Equity Fund (SEF) into a family wellbeing service. This is a non-statutory service which schools and families can refer into for support. A key part of the Family wellbeing teams work is on promoting school attendance.

Recognising that attendance declines in S2/S3, Midlothian has revised its curriculum offer and pathways to try and encourage attendance. Tests of change are taking place in two of our most deprived areas. It is a 12 week focus with targeted children/families.

Tracking and monitoring data is issued to schools on a monthly basis with follow up by central officers. We share the Scottish government fortnightly rankings via the headteacher bulletin. ASGs (clusters) have attendance as a standing item on meeting agendas. Recently an attendance newsletter was shared with all staff.

The Education Scotland updates are useful reminders, most of which Midlothian already has in place. Although we have seen some improvement over the last 4 years we remain concerned by the level of unauthorised absence and the persistent absence of a growing number of pupils.

Chief Education Officer, Midlothian Council
4 November 2026