EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES & HOUSING

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ORKNEY
ISLANDS COUNCIL

4 November 2026

Dr James Johnston
Clerk
Education and Gaelic Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear James

Please find below the response from Orkney Island Council.

Local Authority Approaches to School Education

- The Local Authority has been reviewing the structure of support that can be provided to enable clarity of expectations and provision. A new team has recently been formed, and this will be more fully developed over the course of the next year.
- A key focus remains on improving learning and teaching and a significant investment on this is in place for 2026/27 through professional learning for 28 staff as part of a focused learning team.
- Greater guidance is being provided through policy development, and this is helping senior leaders in schools be more aware of expectations.
- Head Teachers and senior leaders are more involved in the direction of the LA through a variety of approaches; the establishment of an advisory body to guide content in relation to face to face days/briefings, undertaking complaint investigations, being part of short life working groups for policy development, leading on curriculum groups for the LA etc.
- The programme of School Self-Evaluation for school improvement has been reviewed and has been postponed this session. This will be further reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of schools. Individual support continues to be provided to schools who are due inspection.
- The local authority continues to prioritise schools where need is identified and works alongside the school team to provide support. An initial look at a risk register was started, and this will be developed more fully over the next session to ensure that appropriate support is targeted effectively.

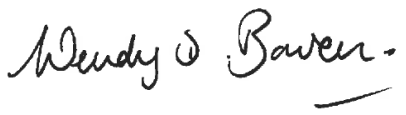
- All schools where there has been a satisfactory or less evaluation through HMIE, receives a follow up LA visit to evaluate progress made towards areas identified for improvement.
- Attainment continuous to be maintained and improved as a result of the rigorous monitoring and tracking of data in the primary sector. Further work on tracking and moderation is being carried out with Secondary schools in February 2027.
- Greater opportunities to share practise is being built into heads of establishment face to face days and we have increased the number of face-to-face days from 4 to 6 over the course of the academic session.
- One of the service managers leads on one of the QUADS. Within this QUAD, practice on self -evaluation across the LAs has been shared. All service managers are part of a QUAD. The local authority signposts national leadership developments to the team.
- Opportunities to share practice across the 3 islands groups is planned 3 times within 2026/27 for every school head teacher.

Support for Persistent Absence

- Reviewed and updated attendance policy to reflect current national guidance and local authority procedures.
- Strengthening attendance monitoring processes to identify concerns at an earlier stage.
- The whole family welfare fund support some of this work with the Family Engagement team. This work is only enabled to occur on annual basis due to the funding restrictions.
- Developed a more proactive approach to analysing attendance data, including trends, cohorts and vulnerable groups.
- Ensured attendance discussions focused on understanding and addressing barriers to attendance rather than solely recording absence.
- Enhanced partnership working with parents and carers, recognising them as key partners in improving attendance.
- An Alternative Pathways action plan is currently being created to ensure that there is support for learners who need a different path into education.
- Beginning to focus on promoting a whole-school culture where attendance, inclusion, wellbeing and engagement were everyone's responsibility.
- Updated Seemis codes for better monitoring and coding and consistent use.
- Strengthened staged intervention processes and ensured attendance concerns were considered within GIRFEC planning where appropriate.
- Beginning to work more collaboratively with multi-agency to support children and young people whose attendance was affected by wellbeing, mental health, ASN, family circumstances or poverty-related barriers.
- Continued to develop nurturing, inclusive school environments where children and young people felt safe, connected and valued.
- Primary school attendance continued to improve and remained above the national average, reaching 94.3% at the end of October 2026, which is close to the local stretch aim of 95%.
- Secondary attendance remained broadly in line with national trends, with a notable dip in S3 attendance impacting overall performance.

- Secondary attendance was 86.8% at the end of October 2026, below the local stretch aim of 93%.
- Ongoing improvement activity will continue to build on the strong performance in the primary sector while addressing attendance challenges within secondary schools, particularly in S3.

Yours sincerely



Wendy Bowen
Head of Education