Delayed Office Opening for Employee Training
This office will be closed from 8.45 am - 11.00 am on the first Thursday of each month.

PERTH & KINROSS COUNCIL

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Our ref TG/LM

Date 29 October 2026

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

Dear Dr Johnston

Local authority approaches to school education

Thank you for your letter of 7 October 2026 seeking an update on Perth and Kinross Council's response to the national thematic inspection of local authority approaches to supporting school improvement, and on our implementation of the revised national school attendance guidance.

Perth and Kinross Council recognises the challenges identified by HM Inspectors, particularly the variability in support for schools, the importance of rigorous self-evaluation and the need to strengthen leadership capacity at every level. These themes align closely with the priorities in our Education Improvement Plan 2026-7, which focuses on learning and teaching and curriculum, inclusive practice and additional support needs transformation, and leadership of change and improvement.

Quality improvement and support for schools
Our Quality Improvement Framework provides a consistent structure for self-evaluation, improvement planning, scrutiny, support and challenge across our schools and settings. The framework supports establishments to identify strengths, improvement priorities and emerging risks, while allowing the authority to differentiate its support according to the evidence available.

The framework was reviewed and updated in August 2026 following feedback from school leaders and central officers and to reflect relevant national policy developments. Associated documentation and links were also refreshed. The revised Annual Return process now brings together key information from schools and early learning settings to inform progress against the Education Improvement Plan, reducing the need for separate requests from different teams.

The intended impact is a more coherent and proportionate approach to quality improvement. It provides:

- a common language and set of expectations for self-evaluation across the authority;
- earlier identification of strengths, risks and areas requiring intervention;
- a clearer basis for allocating universal, targeted and intensive support;
- stronger connections between establishment planning and authority-wide priorities; and
- improved opportunities to identify and share effective practice between schools.

We recognise that a framework alone cannot secure consistency. Its effectiveness depends upon the quality of professional dialogue, the intelligent use of quantitative and qualitative evidence, and the capacity of officers and school leaders to provide appropriate support and challenge. For that reason, the continued development of quality improvement and leadership capacity is a central element of our improvement planning.

ADES QUAD and cross-authority improvement
Perth and Kinross Council is an active participant in the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland collaborative improvement QUAD arrangements. Our QUAD work has involved Aberdeenshire, Orkney and East Dunbartonshire and has included structured self-evaluation, professional challenge and the sharing of evidence and practice. The principal areas of development have been quality improvement and leadership capacity, including leadership programmes, support for middle leaders, subject networks, quality improvement frameworks and approaches to risk assessment. The collaborative improvement activity through the QUAD has also been undertaken by our Educational Psychology Service, with actions in the area of evaluation with parents being taken forward'.

This has enabled us to test our self-evaluation against the experience of other authorities rather than relying solely on an internal assessment. It has also created practical opportunities to compare frameworks, consider different approaches to targeted support and develop leadership capacity across organisational boundaries.

We view this as an important response to the variability identified by HM Inspectors. Collaboration of this kind supports greater consistency without seeking to impose an identical delivery model on authorities with different communities, geography, school profiles and resource contexts.

Collaboration across Tayside
Alongside the national QUAD arrangements, we have strengthened collegiate working with Dundee City Council and Angus Council. This includes collaboration in four connected areas.

Leadership development.
We are participating in a developing Tayside leadership and management partnership involving NHS Tayside, the Tayside Health and Social Care Partnerships, Dundee City Council and Angus Council. Opportunities include the Essentials of Leadership and Management programme for aspiring and new managers and the Forging Influence and Responsibility programme for established leaders.

The collaboration is intended to increase access to shared learning, broaden professional networks and expose participants to leadership practice across organisational and sectoral

boundaries. Further masterclasses are also being developed in response to the needs identified by participating organisations

Quality improvement.
Education leaders and quality improvement staff continue to share approaches across the three authorities. Recent engagement has included quality improvement, leadership and curriculum work, with the collaboration providing a means of comparing practice and identifying opportunities for joint development. There are a range of national networks in this area.

Curriculum improvement.
The three authorities are working collegiately as national curriculum reform develops. In Perth and Kinross, this work is being supported by locally developed 2–18 curriculum design principles, informed by engagement with headteachers, learners, parents, partners, industry representatives, Education Scotland and elected members. The principles will be tested through our quality improvement arrangements and are intended to support an ambitious, coherent and inclusive curriculum connected to learners' futures.

Virtual Campus.
Our joint Virtual Campus arrangements with Dundee City Council and Angus Council extend access to senior-phase courses, including Advanced Highers that may not be viable in every individual school. This is particularly important in an authority with a mixture of urban and rural schools. It allows the three councils to use specialist teaching capacity collaboratively and to widen learner choice while retaining appropriate local provision.

Leadership development and career progression
During May and June 2026, the Education and Learning Service undertook focused engagement with staff on career development, leadership progression and retention. Staff identified the need for clearer and fairer pathways, development opportunities within existing roles, stronger links between professional review and development and professional learning, and improved access for colleagues in rural, specialist, part-time and smaller teams.

The resulting work is focused on:
- developing a clearer Education and Learning career pathways framework;
- broadening the definition of career development beyond promotion;
- strengthening mentoring, coaching, buddying and shadowing;
- linking professional review, professional learning, talent identification and succession planning;
- reviewing progression routes for single-status and early learning and childcare staff;
- improving the visibility of project, secondment and system-leadership opportunities; and
- recognising professional expertise and development within roles.

This activity is directly relevant to the thematic inspection's findings on uneven leadership development. Our intention is to reduce structural and cultural barriers to progression and establish a more transparent leadership pipeline across the service.

Barriers to sharing practice
While the Council strongly supports collaborative improvement, we recognise several practical barriers. These include constrained staff capacity, differing governance and planning cycles, variation in data and digital systems, travel and geography, and the need to protect sufficient time for sustained professional engagement. A further risk is that collaboration may become an additional layer of activity rather than a means of simplifying work and increasing collective capacity.
Our response is to focus collaboration on clearly defined priorities where there is a practical benefit for schools, staff or learners. The ADES QUAD, Tayside leadership activity, curriculum collaboration and Virtual Campus are examples of work with a specific improvement purpose and identifiable application.

Support for pupils experiencing persistent absence
The Council welcomes the revised Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1 guidance published on 18 March 2026. The guidance emphasises inclusive school culture, early intervention, meaningful engagement with families, effective use of attendance data and coordinated support that responds to the individual circumstances of children and young people.

This approach reflects our own recognition that absence is rarely explained by a single factor and that improvement requires schools, families and partner services to understand and address the barriers affecting each learner.

Implementation in practice
Attendance is a priority within our Education Improvement Plan, with a particular focus on improving attendance in secondary schools. Our implementation activity includes:

- the use of school and authority-level data to identify patterns, emerging concerns and groups experiencing poorer attendance;
- a variety of approaches to intervention, with support increasing according to the persistence and complexity of need;
- direct engagement with children, young people and families to understand the reasons behind absence;
- quality improvement support and challenge for schools;
- coordinated support involving education, inclusion, family support and other relevant partners; and
- the sharing of effective local practice, including learning from successful school-level approaches.

National evidence confirms that, although attendance has improved slightly over the past two years, it remains below pre-pandemic levels and there continue to be concerns about persistent absence and poverty-related attendance gaps. The pattern in Perth and Kinross reflects that national challenge, with secondary attendance requiring particular attention.

Engagement with Education Scotland
We continue to engage with Education Scotland on attendance improvement and to use national research, improvement activity and examples of effective practice to inform our local approach. Education Scotland has expanded its attendance quality improvement programme across local authorities and has used learning from the programme, national

and local data, school evidence and learner voice to develop further recommendations and examples of practice.

This engagement provides external challenge and enables our practice to be informed by learning across Scotland. Locally, it complements our Quality Improvement Framework by ensuring attendance is considered not simply as an administrative measure, but as a central indicator of inclusion, engagement, wellbeing and educational equity.

Strategic Equity Funded programme
For the 2026/27 session, our Strategic Equity Funded programme is giving particular attention to secondary attendance. This reflects local evidence that attendance challenges and gaps are more pronounced in the secondary sector, consistent with the wider national picture. Attendance improvement is therefore being treated as an equity priority as well as a universal school-improvement issue.

The programme is focused on better use of data, earlier identification of emerging absence, targeted intervention and improved understanding of the barriers affecting different groups of learners. It is intended to complement, rather than replace, schools' universal attendance practice and their use of Pupil Equity Funding. Planning and monitoring are aligned with our wider Education Improvement Plan and Scottish Attainment Challenge arrangements. Scottish Attainment Challenge Funding Report 2025-26 sets out the authority's wider approach to Strategic Equity Funding, including planning, monitoring and the use of evidence to address poverty-related gaps.

The impact of activity during the current session will be evaluated through changes in attendance, reductions in gaps between identified groups, evidence of improved engagement, and qualitative evidence from learners, families, schools and partners. We are cautious about attributing improvement to a single intervention, as attendance is affected by a complex interaction of school, family, health, wellbeing and socio-economic factors.

Multi-agency support and sharing effective practice.
Schools use local staged intervention and child-planning processes to identify and respond to persistent absence and especially early indicators that this is likely. Where absence is linked to wider needs, education staff work with relevant partners to coordinate support around the child and family. The appropriate combination of services varies according to individual circumstances, but the objective is consistent: to intervene early, establish a shared understanding of the barriers and agree realistic steps towards improved attendance and engagement.

Learning is shared through quality improvement officers; headteacher and leadership forums; local management groups and targeted professional learning. School-level examples are used to demonstrate how improved analysis, stronger relationships with families and appropriately tailored support can influence attendance and engagement.

Conclusion
Perth and Kinross Council accept that variability in the quality and consistency of support is a legitimate national and local challenge. Our response has been to strengthen the infrastructure for improvement through an updated Quality Improvement Framework, more coherent data gathering, differentiated support and challenge, collaborative self-evaluation and sustained investment in leadership capacity.

We are complementing this local activity through ADES QUAD collaboration and practical partnership with Dundee City Council and Angus Council on leadership, quality improvement, curriculum development and the Virtual Campus. In parallel, attendance is being addressed as a key inclusion and equity priority, supported by engagement with Education Scotland and a Strategic Equity Funded focus on secondary attendance.

We will continue to evaluate the impact of these actions and adapt our approach in response to local evidence, national learning and the experiences of children, young people, families and schools.

Yours sincerely



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Perth and Kinross Council

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