Renfrewshire Council

Response to Education Scotland Thematic Inspection: Local Authority Approaches to Supporting School Improvement

This report provides Renfrewshire Council's response to the national thematic inspection of local authority approaches to supporting school improvement. It draws on the findings from Renfrewshire's thematic inspection in October 2024, the national thematic report, and ongoing self-evaluation activity informed by How Good is our Local Authority to highlight the strengths of Renfrewshire's approach to supporting school improvement.

The findings from this thematic inspection provide an important opportunity to consider both national themes and local practice, while offering strong external affirmation of Renfrewshire Council's approach to supporting school improvement. The findings from HM Inspectors' engagement with Renfrewshire provides very strong external validation of our arrangements for school improvement, self-evaluation, quality assurance and leadership.

Inspectors identified a number of significant strengths in Renfrewshire's approach, including:

- A highly effective Quality Improvement Framework which provides consistent support, challenge and accountability for schools.
- A strong culture of collaboration, self-evaluation and continuous improvement.
- A highly effective Data Strategy and school dashboard approach that supports evidence-informed decision making at all levels.
- High-quality professional learning and leadership development opportunities.
- Effective targeted support for schools, resulting in improvements in attainment, leadership capacity and school improvement outcomes.
- Strong approaches to inclusion and stakeholder engagement, including the ASN Parent Ambassador Programme.

The thematic inspection also identified two examples of practice considered worthy of wider dissemination nationally: Renfrewshire's Data Strategy and school dashboards, and the ASN Parent Ambassador Programme. These approaches were recognised as making a significant contribution to improving educational outcomes and strengthening inclusion across the authority.

Further evidence of the strength of Renfrewshire's education system can be seen through the consistently positive outcomes achieved during HM Inspectorate inspections. HM Inspectors Between 2023 and 2026 undertook 21 inspections across Renfrewshire schools, resulting in 48 individual evaluations. Inspection outcomes were exceptionally strong overall and consistently above the national average, with 65% of evaluations graded Very Good, 29% graded Good, and 6% graded Excellent. Importantly, no evaluation during this time period has been below Good, providing strong external validation of the quality of education across

Renfrewshire's schools and the effectiveness of our approach to leadership, self-evaluation, school improvement and support for children and young people.

This is further supported by our 2026 Qualifications Scotland outcomes with results demonstrating that Renfrewshire continues to perform well across the senior phase stages, with strong attainment across breadth and depth measures. In S4, attainment has been improving over the last 3 years at SCQF level 5, as the proportion of pupils achieving 5+ awards at SCQF level 5 has increased from 59% to 69%. At S5, the proportion of pupils achieving 1, 3, or 5 or more awards at SCQF levels 5 and 6 has increased when compared with results from 2024-25. A similar pattern can be found in S6, where improvements can be found across all SCQF level 5 measures when compared with data from the previous year. Additionally, the proportion of pupils achieving an award at SCQF level 7 has increased by 1 percentage point. Within S5 and S6, there have also been notable improvements in literacy and numeracy attainment. The proportion of S5 pupils achieving in literacy and numeracy remains in line with or above both comparators. In S6, there was a 2-percentage point increase in the proportion of pupils achieving in SCQF level 5 literacy as well as SCQF level 5 numeracy. In Renfrewshire we also work tirelessly to ensure positive and appropriate pathways for our young people with our Initial Leavers Destinations improving over the last few years and now sitting at 97.8% which was second in Scotland, our annual participation measure has also been released and is our highest figure in recent years at 94.3%.

1. Consistency and Quality of Support Provided to Schools

Strengths Identified

A key strength identified by HM Inspectors was the consistency and quality of support provided to schools through Renfrewshire's well established Quality Improvement Framework (QIF). Inspectors recognised that the framework provides clear expectations, robust quality assurance processes and a coherent approach to school improvement planning, standards and quality reporting, self-evaluation and professional dialogue. This ensures that support and challenge are applied consistently across the service whilst remaining responsive to the individual context and needs of schools. The inspection highlighted the effectiveness of Education Managers and central officers in providing a balanced approach to support, challenge and accountability that is highly valued by school leaders.

School leaders report high levels of confidence in the support provided by Education Managers and central officers, who know their schools well and tailor support and challenge appropriately to context and need. The inspection highlighted:

- Consistent and responsive support and challenge from Education Managers.
- Effective moderation of school improvement planning and Pupil Equity Fund planning.
- Strong collaboration between schools and central teams.
- Effective deployment of Development Officers to support literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and digital learning.

Schools requiring additional support are supported through targeted action plans with clear baseline measures and regular monitoring arrangements. Inspectors recognised that these approaches have led to measurable improvements in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy, as well as improvements in leadership capacity.

National and Regional Developments

Renfrewshire continues to engage actively in national and regional improvement activity aimed at strengthening the consistency and effectiveness of quality improvement practice. This includes participation in Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) activity, Professional Improvement Networks and collaborative quality assurance arrangements with other local authorities. Across a number of Quads, quality improvement methodologies are being shared and developed collaboratively, with some authorities undertaking joint secondary school improvement visits involving quality improvement officers from all four councils to strengthen professional dialogue and consistency of evaluation. In response to the thematic inspection findings, ADES and HM Inspectors have also developed a national action plan to support improvement and greater consistency across local authorities. Through continued participation in these national, regional and collaborative arrangements, Renfrewshire is further strengthening and refining its own quality improvement framework.

2. Rigour of Self-Evaluation in Maximising Children's and Young People's Progress

Strengths Identified

The thematic inspection recognised Renfrewshire's strong culture of self-evaluation and data-informed improvement. Inspectors found that self-evaluation processes are well embedded across the system and supported by robust quality assurance arrangements.

Particular strengths include:

Effective Data Strategy

Inspectors identified Renfrewshire's Data Strategy as a particular strength and an example of effective practice. The strategy has established a strong culture of data literacy across the education system and supports evidence-informed decision making at all levels. School dashboards provide accessible, high-quality data that can be analysed to identify strengths, emerging trends and priorities for improvement. As a result, education officers, headteachers and practitioners are increasingly confident in using data to target interventions, evaluate impact and improve outcomes for children and young people.

Evidence-Informed Improvement

Improvement activity is informed through:

- School improvement plans and standards and quality reports.

- Attainment, attendance and wellbeing data.
- Professional dialogue and quality improvement visits.
- Stakeholder feedback and engagement activity.

Information gathered is used systematically to identify common strengths, priorities and requirements for support, allowing resources and professional learning to be targeted effectively.

National and regional developments:

National developments are continuing to strengthen approaches to self-evaluation and quality improvement across local authorities. Guidance for Round 3 Quad activity in 2027 places a greater emphasis on robust challenge informed by evidence and data, while professional learning resources and podcasts have been developed to share practice from authorities identified as demonstrating highly effective quality improvement approaches through the thematic inspection. The revised *How Good Is Our Education Authority? (HGIOEA)* framework provides a stronger basis for evaluating performance, identifying priorities for improvement and supporting continuous improvement planning. Through the Professional Improvement Network (PIN), Education Scotland and Scottish Government colleagues have also shared national inspection and performance data to support local authorities in identifying areas requiring attention, including secondary school performance. From 2027, a third phase of collaborative improvement will further enhance opportunities for authorities to work together on shared improvement priorities and strengthen system-wide capacity for improvement.

3. Leadership Development and Capacity for Continuous Improvement

Strengths Identified

The thematic inspection recognised leadership development as a significant strength within Renfrewshire's education service. Inspectors highlighted the authority's highly effective professional learning offer and the contribution it makes to improving outcomes for children and young people. Development Officers play a central role in delivering high-quality learning across literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, digital learning and leadership, while leadership pathways support staff at all stages of their careers. Professional learning is closely aligned to identified needs and improvement priorities, ensuring that leadership capacity continues to grow across the system.

Key strengths include:

- High-quality professional learning programmes delivered by Development Officers.
- Leadership development opportunities at all levels.
- Strong collaborative learning and system leadership opportunities.
- Professional learning aligned to improvement priorities and identified needs.

The authority continues to invest in leadership pathways that include induction, coaching, mentoring, professional inquiry, collaborative networks and succession planning. These approaches support leadership development from early career stages through to senior leadership roles.

Collaboration was identified as a defining feature of Renfrewshire's improvement culture. Staff across the system report high levels of engagement in self-evaluation and improvement activity and feel they play an active role in shaping educational priorities and outcomes. Moderation processes further support consistency, equity and rigour across schools and continuous internal and external scrutiny confirms this.

National and regional developments

Renfrewshire is an active contributor to the West Partnership and is a member of several working groups and leads on the Emerging Issues workstream. We are also part of a Quad with South Ayrshire, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire with a Quad conference planned for early June to bring together leader and practitioners form across our schools to support school improvement.

National activity therefore continues to strengthen leadership development and improvement capacity across local authorities. Collaborative training for central officers is being delivered through our Quad partnerships, complemented by online professional learning from HM Inspectors focused on effective self-evaluation and evaluative writing. Professional Improvement Network (PIN) sessions provide opportunities to share effective practice and facilitate peer support between authorities, while a number of Quads have developed and delivered middle leadership programmes to strengthen leadership capacity across the system. In addition, ADES launched its inaugural Leadership Programme for Chief Education Officers in 2026, focusing on values-based leadership, strategic purpose and constructive challenge, and national CLPL programmes for central officers have been developed directly in response to the thematic inspection findings.

Effective Practice Worth Sharing

The thematic inspection identified two examples of practice considered by HM Inspectors to be worthy of wider dissemination nationally. These initiatives demonstrate Renfrewshire's commitment to innovation, evidence-informed improvement and meaningful stakeholder engagement.

Data Strategy and School Dashboards

Renfrewshire's Data Strategy has successfully embedded data-informed practice across the education system. The use of accessible dashboards and systematic data literacy development has strengthened decision making and contributed to improved outcomes for children and young people.

ASN Parent Ambassador Programme

The ASN Parent Ambassador Programme provides a strong example of meaningful parental engagement and co-production. Parent Ambassadors contribute directly to

policy development and service improvement and play an important role in strengthening inclusion across the authority.

Conclusion

The thematic inspection provides strong external validation of Renfrewshire's approach to school improvement, self-evaluation, leadership and quality assurance. HM Inspectors identified significant strengths across the system, including the highly effective Quality Improvement Framework, strong collaborative culture, high-quality professional learning, effective use of data and meaningful stakeholder engagement. Renfrewshire's Data Strategy and school dashboard approach, together with the ASN Parent Ambassador Programme, were recognised as examples of practice worthy of wider dissemination nationally.

The authority has reflected carefully on both the local inspection findings and the wider national themes identified through the thematic review. While the inspection was overwhelmingly positive, Renfrewshire remains committed to continuous improvement and will continue to strengthen learner participation, enhance stakeholder engagement and further develop its quality assurance arrangements. Building on the positive findings, we will continue to strengthen self-evaluation through the systematic use of stakeholder feedback, qualitative evidence and quantitative data, further embed learner participation through the Young Leaders of Learning programme, and enhance engagement with parents and carers through the Parent Council Forum and wider consultation and communication opportunities. These developments will support continued improvement in our quality assurance arrangements, increase awareness of local priorities, and ensure that children, young people and families play an active role in shaping future educational improvement across Renfrewshire.

Through its strong culture of collaboration, evidence-informed decision making and relentless focus on improving outcomes, Renfrewshire is well placed to sustain improvement and ensure that every child and young person has the opportunity to achieve and thrive.

Response to Improving Attendance: National Developments and Renfrewshire's Response

Improving attendance remains a national priority, with Education Scotland's *Improving Attendance: Understanding the Issues* report identifying six key areas for improvement. These priorities align closely with Renfrewshire's existing attendance strategy, Quality Improvement Framework and wider commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people through early intervention, effective partnership working and evidence-informed practice.

Support for Pupils with Persistent Absence

Renfrewshire has adopted a strategic, authority-wide approach to improving attendance through the implementation of revised attendance guidance, strengthened data analysis and a clear focus on prevention and early intervention. The revised *Standard Circular 5: Attendance at School*, introduced in January 2025, reflects the principles of *Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1*, GIRFEC and children's rights. Revisions were made to this circular in consultation with the wider multi-agency steering group and in consultation with representatives from SCRA. It places relationships, early identification of concerns and partnership with families at the centre of the authority's approach while providing clear guidance on attendance recording, adapted timetables, alternative provision and support for children unable to attend due to ill health.

The authority's sustained focus on attendance is beginning to demonstrate positive outcomes:

In 2024-25, attendance improved across primary, secondary, and ASN schools in Renfrewshire. These were the first increases to occur since the COVID-19 pandemic. Both primary and secondary attendance have remained in line with figures for 2023-24 at 93.3% and 86.8%. National data is not yet available for 2025-26, but previous data demonstrates that between 2014-15 and 2024-25, Renfrewshire have been consistently above the national average for primary and ASN attendance year on year.

Strengthening Data and Early Intervention

Nationally, there is an increasing focus on the effective use of attendance data to identify concerns earlier and target support more effectively. This aligns strongly with Renfrewshire's established Data Strategy and enhanced attendance dashboards. A four-weekly attendance dashboard provides schools and central officers with timely information on individual pupils, vulnerable groups and emerging trends, enabling earlier intervention and more robust monitoring. Attendance is increasingly considered alongside attainment and wellbeing data to provide a comprehensive understanding of children's experiences and support needs. To strengthen the actual data considerable work has been undertaken to ensure consistent use of the SEEMiS codes, with the creation with SEEMiS coding guidance and explicit examples of when to use or not use specific codes. This resulted in far clearer data around self-certified illness and has given us a clearer indication of when patterns are emerging and when to implement some of our early intervention supports.

Targeting Support Effectively

In line with national recommendations, Renfrewshire is strengthening the analysis of attendance data across demographic and vulnerable learner groups, including children affected by poverty, care experienced young people and those with additional support needs. This allows support and resources to be targeted where they are most likely to improve engagement and attendance. In exploring attendance patterns in Renfrewshire specific change ideas were identified and implemented in early years establishments, to support transitions, to increase partnership working and to offer specific supports to particular year groups like P6 and P7 where universal supports like Let's Introduce Anxiety Management (LIAM) in the classroom was undertaken in conjunction with a pilot supported by the local CAMHS The Early Intervention Training in Psychological Skills (TIPS) team and with care experienced young people who were supported in a social enterprises project.

Building Capacity Through Professional Learning

National guidance highlights the importance of staff understanding the complex factors that influence attendance, including Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA), mental health concerns, poverty and digital influences. Renfrewshire have specifically identified factors that are relevant to children and young people in our local authority. We have strengthened professional learning through participation in the Education Scotland National Attendance Programme, attendance-focused training, enhanced Educational Psychology training and support and the sharing of effective practice across establishments. This supports staff to adopt relational approaches and develop confidence in responding effectively to attendance concerns.

Strengthening Multi-Agency Working

Evidence consistently demonstrates that attendance is a systemic issue requiring coordinated support across services. Renfrewshire continues to build on strong existing partnerships involving Education, Social Work, Health, CAMHS, Educational Psychology, Community Learning and Development, Youth Services, the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and third sector partners.

Joint working has informed both the revised attendance guidance and the development of Renfrewshire's Attendance and EBSA Guidance. Multi-agency planning and intervention are central to supporting children, young people and families where attendance difficulties are more complex or persistent.

Staged Intervention Framework

Renfrewshire has implemented a clear staged intervention model to support consistent responses across establishments. Attendance percentages are used as a guide alongside professional judgement to determine the level of intervention required. Early stages focus on universal supports, relationship-based approaches and review of the learning environment, while more significant concerns may require targeted, multi-agency or specialist intervention.

Sharing Effective Practice

Renfrewshire uses a range of well-established mechanisms to share, embed and evaluate effective attendance practice across all establishments. These include Headteacher and senior leadership forums, Education Manager support and challenge, local authority and school Standards and Quality reporting, robust attendance analysis, authority-wide professional learning, attendance-focused Headteacher seminars, and targeted workshops using school-level data to identify effective interventions. Attendance improvement is further supported through the use of attendance dashboards and data literacy training for senior and middle leaders, enabling evidence-informed decision making at all levels. Participation in national networks, professional learning programmes and wider Education Scotland improvement activity also ensures that effective practice is shared, evaluated and applied consistently across the authority. Renfrewshire's Educational Psychology team represented Renfrewshire on the national attendance network and contributed to the creation of a national message campaign, the data officer and attendance leads within the team shared the work done through the pilot at a number of national and local conferences.

National Support

A range of national support continues to assist local authorities in improving attendance. This includes ongoing support from Attainment Advisors through the Local Authority Engagement and Curriculum Improvement Cycle, the National Attendance Network's facilitation of collaboration and the sharing of effective practice, detailed attendance analysis undertaken by Education Scotland to support local planning, and the development of national professional learning resources focused on attendance improvement and the effective use of data. National Quality Improvement Programme activity is also providing targeted support around attendance patterns among identified groups of learners, alongside continued national work to strengthen support for looked after children and young people.

In response to these priorities, Renfrewshire will continue to strengthen its attendance improvement approach through enhanced four-weekly attendance dashboards and reporting arrangements, consistent implementation of revised attendance guidance and procedures, participation in national attendance training programmes, increased Educational Psychology support and professional learning, including whole-school attendance and Emotionally Based School Avoidance training. The authority will continue to build multi-agency approaches, improve the early identification of attendance concerns, promote greater consistency of practice across establishments, and provide targeted interventions for vulnerable learners and those experiencing persistent absence. Ongoing review and evaluation of attendance improvement initiatives, including the Virtual Head Teacher pilot and wider attendance-focused activity, will ensure a continued focus on improving outcomes for children and young people.

Renfrewshire welcomes the strengthened national focus on attendance and the opportunities this provides to further improve outcomes for children and young people. National priorities closely align with the authority's existing direction of travel

and reinforce the importance of data-informed decision making, early intervention, relational practice and effective partnership working.