

# North Lanarkshire Council Report

## Education, Children and Families Committee

Does this report require to be approved?  Yes  No

Ref BS/MOH

Date 20/05/25

## Outcome of National Thematic Inspection: NLC

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### Executive Summary

Education Scotland is the national body that supports local authorities and the Scottish education system to gather, analyse, evaluate and share an agreed set of data, including independent external evaluation (scrutiny/inspection).

In addition to establishment inspections, Education Scotland carry out national thematic inspections; the purpose of these is to investigate specific topics or themes. During a thematic inspection, evidence is gathered and reported on, and this helps national and local government to make decisions and develop policies.

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### Recommendations

It is recommended that Committee:

- (1) Endorse the contents of this report.

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### The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority	Support all children and young people to realise their full potential
Ambition statement	(7) Enhance collaborative working to maximise support and ensure all our children and young people are included, supported, and safe
Programme of Work	Brighter Futures

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## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Each year, Education Scotland undertakes a programme of scrutiny (inspection) in each local authority to gather evidence of what is working well in our education system, areas which are showing improvement, and areas where further development is needed.
  - 1.2 In addition to establishment level inspections, Education Scotland also carry out thematic inspections.
  - 1.3 On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2024, the Cabinet Secretary wrote to all 32 local authorities in Scotland, advising them that Education Scotland would be carrying out a national thematic inspection around local authority approaches to support school improvement.
  - 1.4 The purpose of the national thematic inspection was to provide a valuable opportunity to identify what was working well and what challenges exist in local authorities across Scotland.
  - 1.5 All 32 local authorities were visited between September and October 2024, with North Lanarkshire's visit being the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October.
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## **2. Report**

- 2.1 A team of two inspectors visited North Lanarkshire over two days in October 2024 to gather information and views from local authority staff involved in school improvement.
- 2.2 The following questions were the focus for the inspection:
  - How do local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through implementing effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting?
  - How do local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through self-evaluation and quality assurance?
  - How do local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through professional learning?
  - How do local authorities deliver universal support and challenge for all schools, and/or targeted support for specific schools to improve the quality of education?
- 2.3 As part of the inspection process, the inspection team met with focus groups of central staff, headteachers, teachers, partners, parents and elected members to gather their views.
- 2.4 In preparation for the visit, a team of central officers gathered evidence around the four key questions and submitted a self-evaluation summary paper to the inspection team, prior to the inspection process beginning. They also presented a high-level summary of progress against each of the four key questions, on the first day of the visit.
- 2.5 During the visit, the inspection team used the focus groups as an opportunity to triangulate the evidence and statements that the local authority presented as their key strengths and next steps. They also looked at a small number of key documents, presented by the team, which exemplify progress made.

### **Key Strengths Identified**

- 2.6 The following areas were identified as key strengths during the thematic inspection:

- NLC's overarching vision is well understood by staff across the service and there is clear alignment of Corporate, Service and Establishment planning. Strategic plans include clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
- Chief Officers work closely with elected members, who highlight the importance of the positive, constructive relationships that exist between themselves and the officers.
- The Service's Quality Assurance (QA) framework provides a clear structure for self-evaluation activity and helps school leaders to plan for continuous improvement. The framework highlights shared expectations and makes clear to school leaders their duties and responsibilities.
- The service has clearly aligned processes and procedures in place to support improvement; this includes a package of support materials and the integration of Pupil Equity Funding with improvement planning.
- North Lanarkshire has strong, structural foundations to support empowerment and improvement at local level (i.e., empowering clusters).
- There is a comprehensive continuous lifelong professional learning (CLPL) offer at the universal, additional and intensive levels, which is helping to build overall staff capacity.
- The leadership framework and new headteacher induction programme is empowering leaders and supporting workforce development.
- The service has developed a strong culture of professional enquiry and use conferences well to strengthen professional learning opportunities for staff.
- Local authority led Validated Self-Evaluations (VSEs) are continuing to develop and respond to the needs of the service.
- The service is effectively developing a collaborative culture that supports continuous improvement at school and cluster level. Approaches to planning for improvement include a clear focus on identification and intervention to address local community needs through effective integrated partnership working.
- The virtual school model has been successful in improving outcomes for care-experienced young people.
- NLC's Learning Hub and pedagogy team support improvements in classrooms by modelling good practice and building staff expertise.
- Partnership with the West Partnership and Robert Owen Centre supports engagement with current research and new pedagogical approaches.
- Staff participation in collaborative programs like 'Improving Our Classrooms' positively impacts learning, teaching, and assessment.
- The 'Empowering Clusters' model supports targeted and contextualised improvement, with evidence of positive impacts on outcomes for children and young people.

### **Next Steps Identified**

2.7 The following areas for improvement/next steps were identified by the inspection team:

- Education and Families Managers should continue to develop a more consistent approach to support and challenge visits to establishments.
- More regular support and challenge in the self-evaluation of their work will increase the pace of improvement at school, and subsequently local authority, level.
- There should be continued use of central evaluation evidence to inform system level changes and improvement priorities.
- Improved attainment should remain an area of focus, particularly at the senior phase.
- As planned, the service should continue to address inconsistencies in Curriculum for Excellence data across the whole broad general education (BGE).
- Opportunities for parental engagement should be maximised.
- The local authority should, as planned, develop a data system that can be used uniformly across all establishments, ensuring consistency.

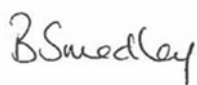
- Structured sharing good practice networks should be established across the local authority.
  - Continue to support establishment leaders to define the impacts of targeted and universal support more clearly.
  - As planned, continue to deploy HMIE Associate Assessors (AAs) to support school improvement.
  - Increase the frequency of scoping the quality of learning, teaching and assessment across schools to improve outcomes for all children and young people, over time.
- 2.8 The inspection team noted challenges faced in providing consistent, high-quality support across all establishments, as a result of the size and scope of central officers' remits.
- 2.9 A copy of North Lanarkshire's Thematic Inspection Report is included in Appendix 1. Education Scotland did not publish individual reports for Local Authorities. Information gathered from all Local Authorities was aggregated and used to create one National Thematic Report.
- 2.10 Officers will use the findings presented in the national report and our Local Authority report to inform service level planning for continuous improvement.
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### **3. Measures of success**

- 3.1 Improved attainment, particularly at the senior phase.
- 3.2 Improved consistency in establishment support and challenge.
- 3.3 Creation of a consistent data system, ensuring consistency in recording and understanding of data
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### **4. Supporting documentation**

- 4.1 Appendix 1: North Lanarkshire's Thematic Inspection Report.



**Barry Smedley**  
**Chief Officer (Education North)**

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## 5. Impacts

<p><b>5.1 Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty</b> Does the report contain information that has an impact as a result of the Public Sector Equality Duty and/or Fairer Scotland Duty? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?</p> <p>If Yes, has an assessment been carried out and published on the council's website? <a href="https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/your-community/equalities/equality-and-fairer-scotland-duty-impact-assessments">https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/your-community/equalities/equality-and-fairer-scotland-duty-impact-assessments</a> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>5.2 Financial impact</b> Does the report contain any financial impacts? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, have all relevant financial impacts been discussed and agreed with Finance? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?</p>
<p><b>5.3 HR policy impact</b> Does the report contain any HR policy or procedure impacts? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, have all relevant HR impacts been discussed and agreed with People Resources? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?</p>
<p><b>5.4 Legal impact</b> Does the report contain any legal impacts (such as general legal matters, statutory considerations (including employment law considerations), or new legislation)? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, have all relevant legal impacts been discussed and agreed with Legal and Democratic? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?</p>
<p><b>5.5 Data protection impact</b> Does the report / project / practice contain or involve the processing of personal data? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, is the processing of this personal data likely to result in a high risk to the data subject? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, has a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) been carried out and e-mailed to <a href="mailto:dataprotection@northlan.gov.uk">dataprotection@northlan.gov.uk</a> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>5.6 Technology / Digital impact</b> Does the report contain information that has an impact on either technology, digital transformation, service redesign / business change processes, data management, or connectivity / broadband / Wi-Fi? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?</p>

Where the impact identifies a requirement for significant technology change, has an assessment been carried out (or is scheduled to be carried out) by the Enterprise Architecture Governance Group (EAGG)?

Yes  No

**5.7 Environmental / Carbon impact**

Does the report / project / practice contain information that has an impact on any environmental or carbon matters?

Yes  No

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?

**5.8 Communications impact**

Does the report contain any information that has an impact on the council's communications activities?

Yes  No

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?

**5.9 Risk impact**

Is there a risk impact?

Yes  No

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the key risks and potential impacts, highlighting where the risk(s) are assessed and recorded (e.g. Corporate or Service or Project Risk Registers), and how they are managed?

Risks associated are included within the Service Risk Register, and managed accordingly

**5.10 Armed Forces Covenant Duty**

Does the report require to take due regard of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty (i.e. does it relate to healthcare, housing, or education services for in-Service or ex-Service personnel, or their families, or widow(er)s)?

Yes  No

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the provision which has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the particular needs of the Armed Forces community to make sure that they do not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services.

**5.11 Children's rights and wellbeing impact**

Does the report contain any information regarding any council activity, service delivery, policy, or plan that has an impact on children and young people up to the age of 18, or on a specific group of these?

Yes  No

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact and the provision that has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the relevant Articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

If Yes, has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) been carried out?

Yes  No

## Appendix 1:

### National Thematic Inspection: Local authority approaches to supporting school improvement

#### Summarised Findings

<b>Local Authority</b>	North Lanarkshire Council
<b>Lead HM Inspector</b>	John Paul Cassidy

In October 2024, a team of inspectors from Education Scotland visited North Lanarkshire Council. During our visit, we talked to senior leaders, local authority officers, parents/carers, headteachers, teachers, representatives from professional associations and elected members.

#### Purpose and themes

The purpose of the visit was to gather evidence about how North Lanarkshire Council supports school improvement, with a focus on how they support schools to improve the quality of education through:

- the implementation of effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting
- self- evaluation and quality assurance
- professional learning
- universal and targeted support and challenge

#### Context of the local authority

North Lanarkshire Council area covers a large geographical area. The council borders Glasgow City, as well as a number of small and rural communities across west central Scotland. The council stretches from Cumbernauld, bordering Stirling in the north, to the Clyde Valley in the south.

Thirty-two percent of children and young people in primary and secondary schools live within deciles 1-2 of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

Approximately 30% of children are registered with an additional support need. The average attendance in 2022/2023 was 88.7%. The national average is 90.2%.

In 2023/2024 in North Lanarkshire Council, children and young people are educated across 118 primary schools, 23 secondary schools, 13 Additional Support Needs schools and 15 supported learning centres within mainstream schools. Three schools provide Gàidhlig (Gaelic) Medium Education.

The Education, Children and Families service has an operating model of: two chief officers for Education and one for Social work, Justice and Integrative practices. In addition, there

are three Senior Education and Families Managers and nine Education and Families Managers.

A Principal Educational Psychologist, wider psychological services team, social work colleagues, and a number of education officers with a range of responsibilities also support schools. There are also a range of seconded posts such as the cluster improvement and integration leads (CIILs).

There have been a number of changes to staffing at senior officer level within the local authority central team for education, in recent years. Further changes in staffing are taking place currently, with senior officer vacant posts being filled over the next few months.

### **Theme 1 - How do local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through implementing effective improvement planning and standards and quality reporting?**

- *How clear and effective is the local authority's arrangements and advice to schools on self-evaluation, improvement planning and standards and quality reporting?*
- *How does the local authority ensure that schools' self-evaluation is accurate, rigorous and robust, based on reliable and comprehensive data and information?*
- *In what ways does the local authority promote collaboration with all stakeholders, especially learners, as essential to effective self-evaluation and identification of priorities?*
- *What is the role of central teams in providing critical feedback to school leaders on the quality/robustness of their self-evaluation and school improvement planning processes?*
- *To what extent does the local authority use the data from individual school or cluster improvement plans and standards and quality reports, to direct their officers' work?*

North Lanarkshire Council (NLC)'s Education, Children and Families service improvement plan and standards and quality reports contain performance measures which reflect clearly the shared vision. These plans reflect all aspects of the local authority's focus on 'resilient people and brighter futures'. The key drivers in education are derived from this service plan. These drivers include improving leadership; improving standards across schools and centres; improving wellbeing and ensuring children and young people thrive and; supporting families through effective partnership working. These drivers inform approaches to school improvement and self-evaluation processes and standards and quality reporting as part of the quality assurance (QA) framework. The QA framework provides a clear structure for self-evaluation activity. This helps create a shared understanding of key aspects of self-evaluation activity across establishments. Local authority data indicates that most headteachers and other stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities. This is helping to ensure effective implementation of the QA framework to support continuous improvement. The annual planning and reporting calendar outlines key planning and reporting activity across the school year. This highlights shared expectations and makes clear to school leaders their duties and responsibilities in relation to planning and reporting.

The local authority has standardised informative report templates for schools. These include standards and quality reports, school improvement planning and Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) plans and reports, based on national How Good is Our School? 4th edition (HGIOS?4) quality indicators (QIs). All schools use these reports and submit them within agreed timescales. The information gathered includes attainment data, attendance and exclusion figures and details about strategies to support parental engagement and



parental complaints. This complements the extensive working knowledge central officers have of schools. There are also self-evaluation documents that support schools to identify strengths and areas for improvement in aspects of the curriculum, such as literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. Feedback gathered by the central team from school leaders and central officers indicates that self-evaluation materials are beginning to impact positively on the quality and consistency of school-based planning for self-improvement.

Headteachers welcome the continuation of the high-quality drop-in sessions provided by central officers last session to support improvement planning and reporting of progress. These sessions were geared towards supporting headteachers better with the collation of relevant information, use of appropriate terminology and impact statements through their AIRs and AIPs. As a result, central officers have identified clear improvements in schools' reporting and improvement planning. This is allowing school leaders and central officers to monitor more clearly schools' progress in key priority areas for improvement.

Senior officers in the central team have prioritised building a more positive collaborative culture to capitalise on all capacity for improvement. Since the beginning of session 2024/25, headteachers in secondary schools work in cross local authority trios and quads. The central team has carefully designed these trios and quads to bring schools of similar size and demographics together. This development is at the very early stages. Headteachers and central officers speak highly of the 'Empowering Clusters Model', which is based around the needs of local communities. Headteachers create a shared priority that enables them to address cluster level needs and build on strengths identified through collaborative self-evaluation activity. Education and families managers (EFMs) and cluster improvement and integration leads (CIILs), link with each cluster to support a consistent drive for improvement. Headteachers believe this is a key mechanism in ensuring integrated partnership working centred around the wellbeing of children and young people within their local communities.

Across the local authority, there has been a strong focus on improving data literacy. There is a current focus on consistency of approaches to identifying effective and measurable outcomes. Central officers and headteachers have benefitted from bespoke professional training such as that provided by the Education Scotland Attainment Advisor, Insight training and coaching to develop their understanding of effective outcomes and measures. This is supporting higher quality, more focused discussions between central officers and headteachers. Evidence shows this has enhanced the central team's capacity to support improvement activity. Local authority officers provide schools with useful data in relation to performance measures to support planning for improvement. The local authority quality assurance calendar activities support schools to identify their areas of strength and areas for improvement.

The local authority senior officer team prioritises consulting stakeholders, although the process is at an early stage. This includes learners, who are involved in a range of focus groups, often promoted through community learning and development (CLD) partners. This has included consultation on poverty-proofing and The Promise. In addition, the local authority sends out extensive questionnaires, which inform aspects of planning for improvement and provides a child-friendly service plan. Chief Officers work closely with elected members, who highlight the importance of the positive, constructive relationships that exist between themselves and the officers.

Chief Officers helpfully hold regular meetings with the Chairs of the Parent Councils to

discuss relevant agenda items. These include information about educational priorities and strategies to increase parental engagement. Parents are very keen to contribute to improvement at local authority level in any way they can.

There are strong positive relationships between schools and EFMs. Each school has a link EFM/SEFM. Headteachers appreciate the planned, organised nature of this support. Meetings are seen as supportive in providing both challenge and support to establishments. The consistent nature of the EFM role gives school leaders regular support and challenge which is tracked over time, although the link EFMs may change on occasion. Central officers maintain a strategic overview of the level of capacity to improve, and/or the support required, for each school. There are clear criteria for additional support. The need for this is identified both through Validated Self-Evaluation (VSE) status and through quality assurance activities.

Education and Families Managers quality assure and provide critical feedback on the draft plans of every establishment. They verify that the identified priorities are based on reliable data and correlate with sound evidence, drawing from a range of sources. Each visit has a specific focus. The first discussion is an individual visit to review the improvement report, discuss the rationale behind the new priorities identified and agree the red, amber, green, (RAG) and Validated Self Evaluation (VSE) status. Central officers have concluded, through the review process of submitted plans and reports, that the majority of staff are improving their ability to analyse and use self-evaluation evidence to review and report on progress against set priorities and four Quality Indicators (QIs). Currently, the consistency and quality of feedback that headteachers receive is variable across the local authority and sectors. Senior officers are working with school link officers and other central colleagues who engage with schools to improve aspects of feedback and challenge more consistently. This will help to ensure that all headteachers receive an improved baseline level of expected challenge, support and feedback from central officers.

The central team makes effective use of information from school improvement plans to drive their own work in supporting schools on a school-by-school basis. They challenge school leaders when data indicates that school performance has fallen below expected standards and use stretch aims to challenge headteachers constructively to improve outcomes for children and young people. There is a need to balance the desire within the central team to be responsive to demand with their own capacity to deliver support. Key themes from VSEs are also collated and used to inform service improvement planning for continuous improvement. Local authority senior leaders should continue to maintain focus on raising attainment.

## **Theme 2: How do local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through self-evaluation and quality assurance?**

- *What methods does the local authority use to evaluate school performance (review the quality of education) for example, gathering evidence from stakeholders, review/validated self-evaluation visits, attainment analysis)? How effective are these methods? How often does this take place?*
- *To what extent do officers carry out regular and rigorous evaluation of the quality of school provision? How is this work quality assured?*
- *How does the local authority evaluate the quality of learning, teaching and assessment?*
- *How clear and effective is the advice and support for schools on approaches to self-evaluation and their quality assurance? How effectively does the local authority moderate this at strategic and school levels?*
- *How does the local authority identify and share effective practice through quality assurance? Is this making a difference across the authority?*

Education and Families Managers engage with their link schools four times per session, as a minimum offer. Almost all headteachers report that they receive a rigorous balance of support and challenging dialogue that helps to inform directly improvement priorities. Link officers over the last couple of years, have been working more collaboratively to improve the consistency of rigour and quality of their dialogue with, and feedback to, link schools. This consistency is beginning to develop and improve. Headteachers report that this is helping them to interpret and embed better national standards and expectations to bring about improvement, principally linked to the four 'core' quality indicators.

All headteachers have undergone formal training for self-evaluation and continuous improvement (SECI). This is beginning to improve the quality of improvement planning targets across schools. This is also beginning to improve the robustness of how headteachers, senior leaders and subject level teachers, monitor the progress of highlighted areas for improvement through their self- evaluation. It is currently too early to identify the full impact of this work. Support in this area is continuing between local authority central staff and school staff at all levels.

The local authority directs VSE visits to targeted schools based on local authority self-evaluation (RAG). However, there is also an option for individual schools to request a VSE on aspects of their practice. These requests are often supported by networks (pedagogy team, virtual team, learning and innovation hub, digital schools). The local authority is currently planning to update and strengthen their VSE model. A new model will have a revised approach for secondary schools as part of the improvement cycle, to ensure all establishments are included in a much more regular cycle that supports continuous improvement.

Currently, central officers carry out rigorous evaluations of schools' performance linked to a school's 'RAG' status. This status is agreed between the link officer and headteacher, depending on a number of variables. For example, if a new headteacher or leadership team has recently been appointed; if there is immediate and urgent improvement required to secure improvements; if additional support is required from the local authority to secure sustainable improvements or if the establishment has been performing consistently well across all measures. Twice per session as a minimum, schools engage in rigorous dialogue with their EFM to scrutinise their

annual improvement plan and evaluate evidence of progress against national Benchmarks.

Local authority officers currently evaluate the quality of learning, teaching and assessment through schools' self-evaluation of this area of their work. They also carry out reviews of learning, teaching and assessment across schools where this is a priority area for improvement. This is also the case where a school is likely to be selected for national HM inspection. This model of school evaluation is currently under review. The aim moving forward is that secondary schools will work in trios from next session. As such, they will be involved in three-yearly peer reviews of the provision of learning, teaching and assessment in each other's schools. This will be supported and co-led by central officers. Future models to assess this area of provision across primary schools is currently under review. Schools would benefit from further support and challenge in the self-evaluation of their work. This work to address the frequency of scoping the quality of learning, teaching and assessment across schools should help to improve outcomes for all children and young people over time. Work to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment is currently heavily supported by the Learning Teaching and Assessment Education Support Officer and central pedagogy team. Headteachers report that this team provides invaluable support and challenge to schools in terms of support, professional dialogue and provision of high-quality resources to support teachers to improve this area of schools' work.

The head of the local authority virtual school model and their team also support schools' improvement work well. They help schools improve the engagement of targeted children and young people, as well as those with protected characteristics, to improve engagement in their learning. Raising attainment at all levels and stages across schools is an improvement priority across the local authority. Education and Families Managers play a key role in supporting school improvement. The local authority is supporting schools to become more focused with their approaches to self-evaluation and quality assurance through the implementation of the local authority's quality improvement framework. This helpfully signposts potential support from within and beyond NLC, including Cluster Improvement and Integration Leads, the Learning Hub, West Partnership colleagues and Education Scotland Attainment Advisors to support improvement.

The local authority reports that self-evaluation materials are beginning to impact positively on school-based planning and development. Education and Families Managers are seeing more measurable outcomes in their annual improvement plans and headteachers are using more evaluative writing in their annual improvement reports.

There remains a degree of inconsistency in the approaches to self-evaluation and quality assurance across schools. The local authority is committed to continuing to support headteachers to develop further self-evaluation and evaluative writing skills. There are plans to strengthen the work of the Cluster Improvement and Integration leads to support improvement. Raising attainment at all levels and stages across schools is an improvement priority across the local authority.

Central officers, partners, the learning hub and innovation and improvement hub all

support the sharing of effective practice through well-planned strategic conferences. These include support and sharing good practice around learning, teaching and assessment, curriculum and building a culture of inclusion. There are plans to extend this offer moving forward.

Theme 3: How do local authorities support schools to improve the quality of education through professional learning?

- What professional learning does the local authority currently provide to support school improvement?
- What is the impact of this on developing the skills and knowledge of school leaders and staff on school improvement?
- What support systems (e.g., mentoring, networks of practice, peer support groups, cluster support) are available for school leaders and staff? How are these approaches improving school performance and outcomes for learners?
- To what extent do senior leaders have opportunities to support improvement beyond their own establishment? What difference is this making?
- How effectively does the local authority utilise Associate Assessors (if applicable) to support school improvement across establishments.
- Does the local authority's professional learning strategy draw on support from national organisations?

Local authority officers have developed a comprehensive offer of professional learning that supports school improvement. This is categorised under the headings of universal, additional and intensive support. This offer directly relates to aspects of the National Improvement Framework, QIs and individual needs that have been identified through both school and local authority self-evaluation. The wide range of high-quality professional learning opportunities supports the local authority in promoting their vision and values. It supports the development of what constitutes a high-quality provision for children and young people in North Lanarkshire.

There is an effective leadership framework in place that includes a range of induction programmes for newly qualified teachers, middle leaders, senior leaders and headteachers. These opportunities promote leadership and collaboration at all levels. Central officers report that the number of staff participating in the programmes is impacting positively on staff expertise and pedagogical practice. School staff speak very positively about how these programmes have supported them to develop their skills and abilities as leaders of learning. Local authority officers have developed a strong culture of professional enquiry which is now being used effectively to share good practice. The comprehensive suite of leadership and newly qualified teacher development opportunities promote leadership and empowerment at all levels, building overall staff capacity.

Central officers, partners, the learning and innovation hub and the improvement hub all support the professional learning offer. They do this through for example, well planned strategic conferences including 'Learning, Teaching and Assessment', 'Curriculum' and 'Building a Culture of Inclusion'. There are plans to extend this offer moving forward. The central team should now consider the impact of these

conferences on outcomes for young people alongside how best to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the professional learning offer.

Partnership working is a strong feature of the professional learning offer. Aspects of the offer are well-planned with a range of partners. This includes educational psychology, social work and health to deliver bespoke career long professional learning to address service level and locally identified issues. This is supporting the development of positive collaborative working across sectors. There is a strong commitment to co-create training to support improved outcomes for young people, children and families.

The local authority has taken the decision to fund, through their Strategic Equity Funding, a number of staff to facilitate the core function of the authority's support to schools. This has created opportunities for collaboration and capacity building which in turn is supporting improved outcomes for young people. The helpful virtual school that works with care experienced young people has had measurable success in relation to improving outcomes for care experienced young people across the authority.

The local authority has also developed a successful 'Empowering Clusters' model to support improvement. This supports improvement in a more targeted and contextualised way. Cluster improvement priorities allow schools to collaborate to create shared priorities to address cluster level needs and build on strengths identified through collaborative self-evaluative activity. This model is supported very well by a wide range of partners, who have a strong shared understanding of the needs within clusters.

The development of a wider pedagogy team is supporting improvements in classrooms across the local authority. This team exemplifies in practice the research-based pedagogical approaches promoted by the Learning Hub, modelling good practice and is supporting staff to build their knowledge and expertise. This team is used in both universal and targeted ways to support improvements in learning, teaching and assessment and to support best practice in literacy, numeracy and STEM. Staff speak positively about the impact of the work of both the Learning Hub and the pedagogy team.

The local authority uses Education Scotland Associate Assessors (AA) well, working with EFMs and headteachers to support aspects of school improvement. Some examples of how AAs have been deployed include: mentoring peer headteachers; participation in quality improvement visits including VSE; support in other areas of improvement planning and; preparation for inspection. The local authority has engaged frequently with Education Scotland colleagues to provide coaching and mentoring support for headteachers. The local authority leadership programme has been endorsed by Education Scotland. This programme is recognised and supported both within and out with North Lanarkshire. Education Scotland's Attainment Advisor has supported schools with improvement planning and quality assurance. This is proving valuable to school leaders.

Through effective partnership working with the West Partnership and The Robert

Owen Centre, the local authority has engaged well with current research to review and develop new pedagogical approaches. Staff speak positively about participation in West Partnership collaborative 'Improving Our Classrooms'. Staff recognise that this engagement is having a positive impact on building staff knowledge and skills to supporting high quality learning, teaching and assessment. The central team should now consider how best to use the outcomes from quality assurance to inform the planning of local authority professional learning.

**Theme 4: How do local authorities deliver universal support and challenge for all schools, and/or targeted support for specific schools to improve the quality of education?**

- What is the universal offer of support and challenge for all schools?
  - How does the local authority use the data from individual school or cluster improvement plans and standards and quality reports, to provide targeted support?
  - What measures are used to identify the need for targeted support?
  - Is there targeted support for specific schools? What might that look like? (examples?)
- What action is taken if a review of a school concludes that a school is not performing satisfactorily and requires targeted support?
- What support systems (for example: mentoring, networks of practice, peer support groups) are available for school leaders and staff?
  - What is the role of central staff in facilitating/contributing to collaborative approaches, which improve school performance and outcomes for learners?

For all schools across sectors, there is a baseline, universal offer of challenge and support by central officers. This involves the input of other key partners from a range of local authority services, as well as colleagues from more formal networks of support who lead on supporting targeted aspects of school improvement. For secondary schools, most central officers provide headteachers with an agenda of areas of attainment they wish to examine and discuss in advance. Across primary schools, attainment discussions focus mainly on the robustness of Curriculum for Excellence levels (ACEL data). Local authority officers correctly realise the need to address inconsistencies in Curriculum for Excellence data across the whole broad general education (BGE). This work has begun and is ongoing. To support this, next session all schools will be able to access a huge wealth of rich data supported on a standardised platform. This is currently under development. Once embedded, this has the potential to be powerful in identifying and making links more explicitly, to areas of school performance that require immediate attention.

As a universal offer of resources for schools-based staff to access, there is a high-quality 'suite' of resources provided by the Learning Hub and central pedagogy and digital teams. This helps to ensure that teachers can access high-quality support and resources at a time that suits them to engage in these professional learning activities. The extent to which officers direct school leaders and other staff to these resources, explicitly dependent on key reasons for a school's RAG status, is currently inconsistent.

Central officers use data from schools' AIPs and AIRs, to inform levels of the support schools require. For example, a school's current RAG status for support and

challenge and their journey to improve this, is based around improvement progress, mostly stemming from these plans and reports. Where schools' RAG status and subsequent improvement plans highlight the need for higher levels of support, central officers engage with schools in a more intensive way until agreed improvement targets have been met.

Central officers use a number of measures and criteria to determine a school's need for different levels of additional or more intensive support and challenge. For example, where there has been recent turn around in school leadership positions, this would trigger more targeted support. Also, areas for urgent improvement or where additional resources for improvement have been identified through a school or cluster improvement plan, may also trigger more targeted support. Cluster chairs and cluster improvement leads, some of whom are seconded from schools to support improvement, play a key role in facilitating aspects of improvement for individual and groups of schools across clusters. Headteachers report that this support is invaluable in facilitating targeted improvement. These roles importantly are helping to develop the local authority's 'Empowering Clusters' model. There is evidence of the model having an impact on improving outcomes for individual children and young people, as well as for targeted groups, over time. The 'Empowering Clusters' model is a very good example of colleagues from across sectors and agencies, working collaboratively to support schools to improved targeted outcomes for children and young people. This is helping school leaders broker essential support and resources at a time when central resources are limited. This 'team around the school' model is proving to be positive in supporting school improvement.

Across the local authority, there are a number of well-organised support systems available to school leaders, staff and clusters. For example, the authority has six defined networks where headteachers and leaders broker targeted areas of high quality support. These networks include: central officer support; a curriculum pathways team; a dedicated pedagogy team; the learning hub; the wider Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) team and the 'Empowering Clusters' team. These more formalised networks are at different stages in their inception. Collectively, they design their offers based on core, universal support. For example, deployment of universal SAC resources support and enhance additional cluster resources. They also provide more targeted, bespoke support to schools and clusters where required. Strong partnerships have developed through the central networks of support to schools. For example, education psychology, social work and CLD colleagues are working collaboratively and effectively, to provide universally agreed and targeted support to schools as required.

Moving forward, senior officers are aware of the need to enhance their own self-evaluation of their support and the other networks of support, provided to schools. Aspects of this self-evaluative work in the central team have already begun. This will help central senior officers to define the impacts more clearly of the targeted and universal support they provide to schools.