

Agenda Item	11.
Report No	EDU/8/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Education

Date: 26 February 2025

Report Title: Attainment Update - Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL)

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides attainment data and P1,4,7 and S3 Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) and includes information on measures to improve levels of pupil attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap.
- 1.2 The data shows that Highland has been consistently and systematically closing the gap to National in terms of primary attainment over the last 3 years, culminating in the current year where Highland has achieved its highest attainment for primary aged pupils in every area of literacy and numeracy.
- 1.3 Highland is one of the most improved authorities in Scotland across all primary measures. Highland improvement in all measures compared to National has resulted in reducing the gap for literacy and numeracy between Highland and National by 3% and 2% respectively.

Highland improvement highlights:

- On current trajectory, by 2027/28 Highland will surpass Scotland for Literacy and match Scotland for Numeracy;
- In Primary Literacy, improvement over the last 2 years equates to a 10% increase and is now 12% above pre covid figures;
- In Primary Numeracy the improvement over the last 2 years equates to a 6% increase and is now a 7% increase on pre covid figures;
- Gaelic Literacy has increased by 15% in the last 2 years, now sitting at 75% which is in line with National;
- both literacy and numeracy attainment for S3 pupils at fourth level has seen a three-year rising trend with 65.9% of S3 pupils achieving level 4 numeracy. This is an 11.3% increase over the previous 2 years and is now above National figures for the first time.

The data evidences that the rate and trajectory of improvement is positive – amongst the best in Scotland - and shows that the approach we are taking is making a sustained impact. The Service is ambitious to continue to advance and to see Highland's relative

national position improve and attainment is the top priority in the Council's NIF Plan, approved by Committee in 2024.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the Council's commitment to improving attainment and achievement at all stages through strategic initiatives developed in collaboration with school staff;
- ii. Note the accelerated improvement in Achievement of a Curriculum for Excellence Level (ACEL) in Literacy and Numeracy at key learner stages in comparison to previous years;
- iii. Note full implementation in Primary schools of a tracking and reporting system module on Seemis with supporting analysis data dashboard tool for all;
- iv. Note implementation of Attainment Boards to drive improvement in secondary schools;
- v. Note that attainment meetings take place in January/ February 2025 with targets for improvement agreed with Headteachers and monitored thereafter;
- vi. Note the impact of target setting, tracking and resources and interventions used by schools to raise attainment and address learner attainment gaps at school, Associated School Group and local authority level;
- vii. Note next steps outlined in Section 8.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource - There are no direct resource implications arising as a direct consequence of this report.
- 3.2 Legal - There are no legal implications associated with this report.
- 3.3 Risk - The Service is committed to a sustained focus on progress and improvement to mitigate against the risk of under-performance which impacts on children and young people being able to achieve their full potential. Attainment is one aspect of measuring performance and the Raising Attainment Action Plan, service re-structure, and associated activity to support schools will strengthen the delivery of improved results to address this.
- 3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - There are no health and safety risks arising from this report.
- 3.5 Gaelic - Continued improvements in primary phase Gaelic Medium Education attainment will support progress and achievement in the secondary phase in Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE) courses.

4. Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Overview

- 5.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the progress made in attainment across the stages of the Broad General Education (BGE) phase. The performance data reported are based on Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) in literacy and numeracy. These are key performance measures for the Highland Council, Scottish Government and the Local Government Benchmarking Framework.
- 5.1 In the BGE phase, pupils in P1, P4, P7 and S3 are assessed against national standards. Class teachers use their professional judgement to assess whether a pupil has achieved the expected level in literacy (a combination of reading, writing, listening & talking) and numeracy. Teachers use a range of evidence to make their judgements, not just a single assessment or piece of work. Assessment evidence is collected throughout the academic year as a normal part of learning and teaching and schools undertake moderation, standardisation and quality assurance as part of the process.
- 5.2 Teachers record levels for the pupils in their class (P1, P4, P7 and S3) towards the end of the academic year. Ongoing moderation and standardisation activities take place within and between schools. This is to ensure that teachers' assessments are accurate and reliable. Teachers have benefited from a programme of professional learning and development, delivered both internally and by Education Scotland colleagues, to support this process.
- 5.3 For the first time in our committee reporting, the Council is also using the Scottish Government's Broad General Education (BGE) Benchmarking Tool to measure improvement. It is part of the National Improvement Framework (NIF) and provides data to inform analysis of how children and young people are achieving in the Curriculum for Excellence, including how children are performing in relation to their peers across the country. The data provided in Appendix 1 uses the BGE Toolkit to compare Highland performance with national averages.
- 5.4 The Benchmarking tool has also been designed to support teachers' professional judgment of achievement of a level; help teachers plan learning, teaching, and assessment; help schools plan for choices, changes, expectations, and aspirations; and help schools ensure that there are no major gaps in children's learning. Going forward it will one of the ways in which schools are supported with their improvement planning and attainment as part of the Council's refreshed attainment strategy.

6. Highland Attainment - Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (ACEL)

- 6.1 Detailed data and analysis for all of the categories of measurement set out below are contained in Appendix 1.
- 6.2 **Literacy**

Highland literacy overall for Primary 1,4 and 7 stages has improved by 4% in 2024 from the previous year and the 10% increase over the last 2 years is underpinned by improvement at every stage in the three elements of reading, writing and listening and talking. A 3 year Highland improvement trend for Primary stages in literacy is 12% above Highland pre covid figures. The data shows a smaller 3% increase over the same time period for National performance.

6.3 **Numeracy**

Following a similar pattern to Literacy, Highland Numeracy attainment for Primary combined stages of P1, P4 and P7 shows a 3 year improvement trend resulting in 7% improvement on pre covid figures; an increase of 2% on the previous year and 6% over the last 2 years. National improvement from pre covid figures is 1%.

6.4 **Closing the Poverty Related Attainment Gap**

Attainment in literacy and numeracy for Primary stage pupils living in Highland's most deprived data zones has increased by 12% in literacy and 7% in numeracy since 2022.

6.5 **Attainment in Gaelic Literacy – Primary Stages**

Attainment in Gaelic Literacy has increased by 15% in the last 2 years and is in line with the National average. Literacy attainment of P1 and P4 children in Gaelic Medium settings is not included in the overall literacy statistics however, it should be considered as part of the overall literacy attainment picture for Highland.

6.6 **S3 ACEL Attainment - Literacy**

Currently 85.5% of pupils achieve level 3 literacy or above by the end of S3. Attainment at fourth level literacy for S3 pupils has seen a 3 year rising trend, currently 51.5%, an increase of 10% over the last 2 years. The gap in National attainment at Fourth Level Literacy has reduced by 2.4%.

6.7 **S3 ACEL Attainment – Numeracy**

Currently 88.2% of pupils achieve level 3 numeracy or above by the end of S3. Attainment for S3 pupils at fourth level has seen a 3-year rising trend with current attainment at 65.9% of S3 pupils achieving level 4 numeracy. This is an 11.3% over the previous 2 years and is now above National figures for the first time.

6.7 **S3 - Closing the Poverty Related Attainment Gap**

Literacy - Attainment at level 4 for children living in our most deprived data zones has increased by 5% on the previous year and is double the National rate of improvement.

Numeracy – there has been a 3-year improving trend for attainment at level 4 numeracy. L4 numeracy attainment for young people living in our most deprived zones is in line with National attainment for the same measure.

7. **Supporting Improved Attainment**

7.1 Key initiatives new to last session 2023/24:

- **Moderation Programme** to improve consistency in assessment and professional dialogue.
- **Supporting Continuous Improvement - school attainment action plans** for targeted support to schools with significant attainment gaps. 90% of

schools in this category improved attainment from the previous year in literacy and / or numeracy attainment in session 2023/24.

- **Expansion of the National Improvement in Writing Programme.**
- **Establishment of Moderation Collaborative Networks** for peer support and professional development.
- **Enhanced tracking procedures and data analysis** using the Seemis Progress and Achievement Module.
- **Additional support for schools in numeracy** linked to training and bespoke input from a dedicated Numeracy Education Support Officer.
- **The development of Highland Learning, Teaching and Assessment framework** developed in collaboration with Headteachers to outline good practice, support self-evaluation and provide training support resources for schools in this area.

7.2 Embedding the Attainment Programme – Current session 2024/25

Continued improvement activity to support schools to embed the attainment programme for continued raised attainment includes the following:

- **Establishment of Secondary Attainment Boards** and associated performance tracking and school improvement action planning.
- **Draft tracking, monitoring and reporting policy in place for all Primary schools.** This policy outlines expectations including supporting the use of Seemis Progress & Achievement Module now in use for all primary school stages to support a common approach to tracking and reporting.
- **National Improvement in Writing Programme** - continued roll out of a further two cohorts involving 20 more schools.
- **Moderation Collaborative Networks** – practitioner-led support in schools and across ASGs. Currently 50 schools involved in this first year of roll out.
- **Continuation of Moderation Programme** - Collaborative Lead Officers (CLOs) continue to work with school staff to support increasing confidence in using National benchmarks.
- **Continued training and support in specific areas of literacy and numeracy**, delivered through a training programme on offer to all; individualised school engagement/staff training; and Highland/National networks.
- **Supporting Continuous Improvement in Attainment Schools** – continued support to schools for attainment action planning and support.
- **Embedding use of the new Highland and Northern Alliance Learning & Teaching framework** through networks and CLO engagement with schools.

Further detail is provided in Appendix 2.

8. Next Steps

- ### 8.1 Vision 30' Improvement Programme
- As stated in the Secondary attainment committee paper in November 2024, raising attainment across all schools and at all stages is a priority for the Service. As agreed at last Committee, the Raising Attainment Action Plan created in 2022 is under review to ensure continued raised attainment and improved outcomes for young people in Highland. The Highland Primary Attainment programme and current actions are being included within this

review. All headteachers, central officers and elected members will be invited to engage in the development of our Strategic 'Vision 30' Improvement Programme which will set the course for the next 5 years.

- 8.2 **Restructure of Central Team** The Service is also undergoing a restructure of the central support team. A new area-based model will push resources from the centre to 8 operational areas with a strong focus on raising attainment and driving improvement in all settings from Early Years through to post school destinations.

8 Senior officers reporting to the 2 Chief Officers will be responsible for providing support and challenge to clusters of ASGs, with clear spans of control and strategic remits. Responding to feedback from headteachers; Education Scotland; wider staff groups and elected members; this new structure will provide clarity of role and function for senior officers responsible for quality improvement who will work together with Headteachers across all Highland schools to raise attainment and deliver improved outcomes for all Highland's children and young people.

The structure will be simplified and streamlined, removing a number of layers of management and providing clear lines of responsibility and accountability, delivered at significantly less cost.

Staff and union engagement is currently underway. It is important to get the process right, but at the same time maintain momentum. The intention is to establish the first new tier of management reporting to the Chief Officers in March/April, with the wider team in place as soon as possible thereafter with the aim of having the new structure established in time for the beginning of the new session in August 2025. The expectation is that positions will be found for all staff whether in the new central support team or in schools. Training and support will be provided for all officers undertaking new roles.

An update will be provided to the Education Committee in May 2025.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 14.02.25

Authors: Kate Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive, People; Fiona Grant, Chief Officer Secondary Education; Beth Brown, Senior Lead Manager – Performance & Improvement;

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Highland attainment data

Appendix 2 - Supporting Improved Attainment - 2024/25 Improvement Activity

Appendix 1

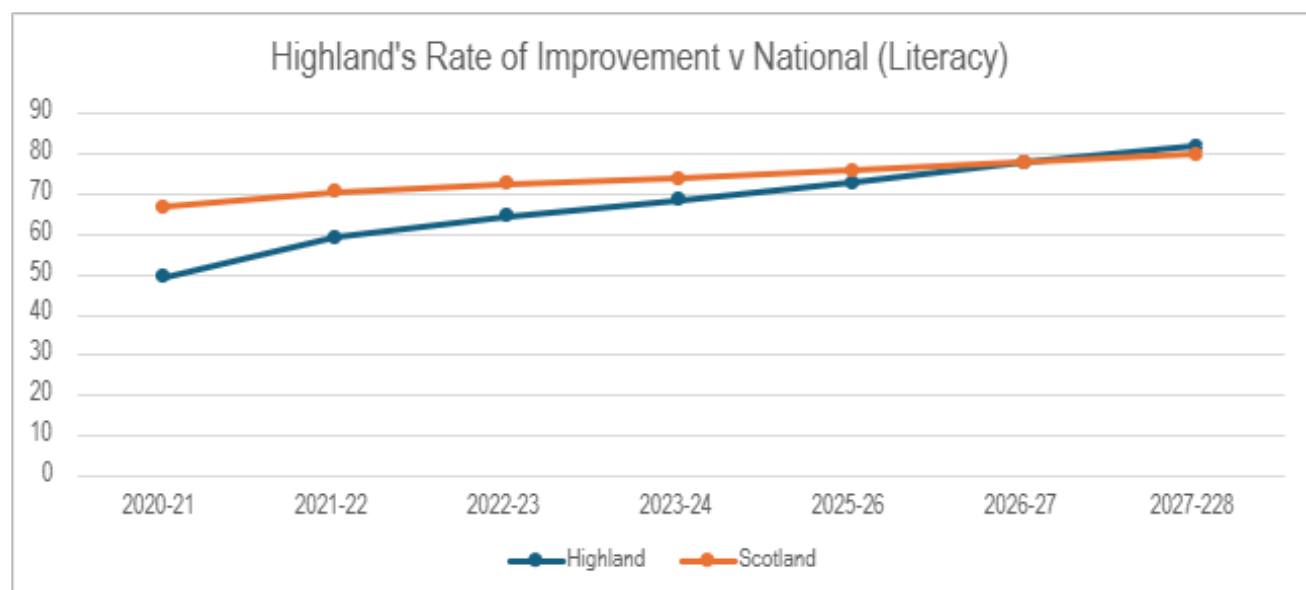
BGE Toolkit Data

The data in this section is extracted from the Scottish Government's BGE toolkit. It ensures that all children's scores are included and a numerical factor applied. It shows the relative position of Highland compared to other authorities and the improving picture of how schools and pupils are performing.

Working on the basis of current trajectory for the rate of improvement in Highland and National, the tables below show that by 2027/28 Highland will surpass Scotland for Literacy and match Scotland for Numeracy. This is based on the average rate of improvement for Highland versus Scotland. Highland is improving year on year three times as quickly as Scotland.

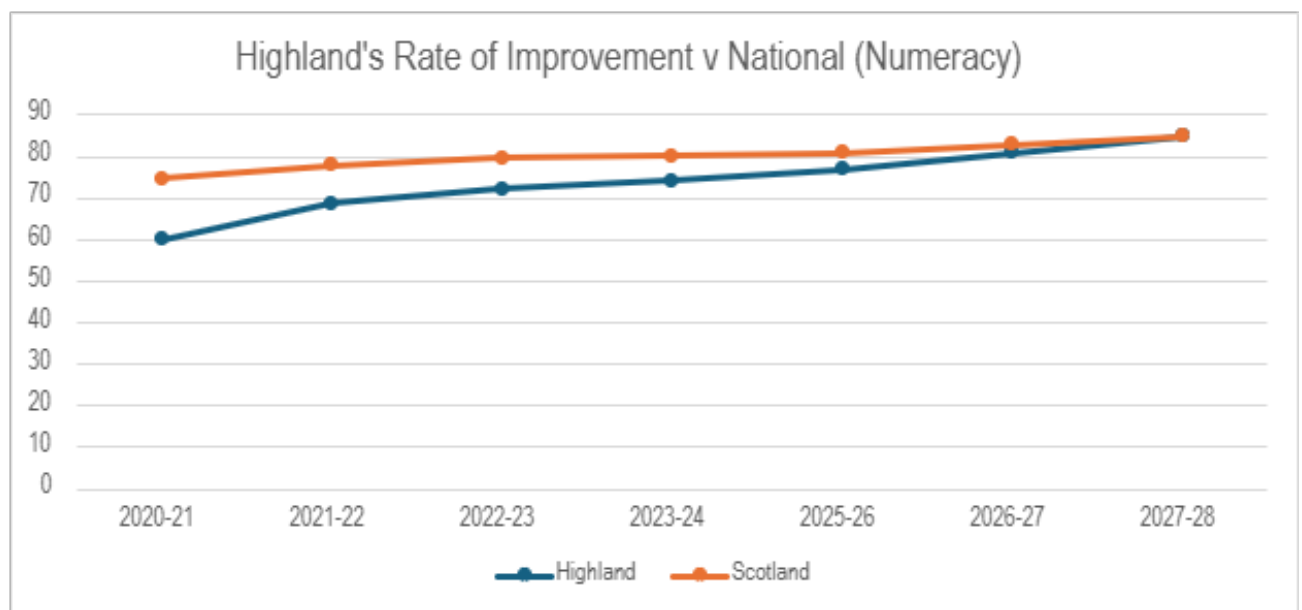
Literacy

Literacy	Highland v Scotland								
					Trajectory				
Local Authority	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	Improv. 21 - 24	Average Annual Imp.
Highland	49	59	65	69	73	78	83	20	5.00
Scotland	67	71	73	74	76	78	79	7	1.75



Numeracy

Numeracy	Highland v Scotland								
					Trajectory				
Local Authority	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	Improv. 21 - 24	Average Annual Imp.
Highland	60	69	72	74	78	82	85	14	3.57
Scotland	75	78	80	80	82	83	84	5	1.25



The toolkit also enables a comparison between the position of Highland in relation to other local authorities and shows the progress being made in the last 3 years.

Literacy

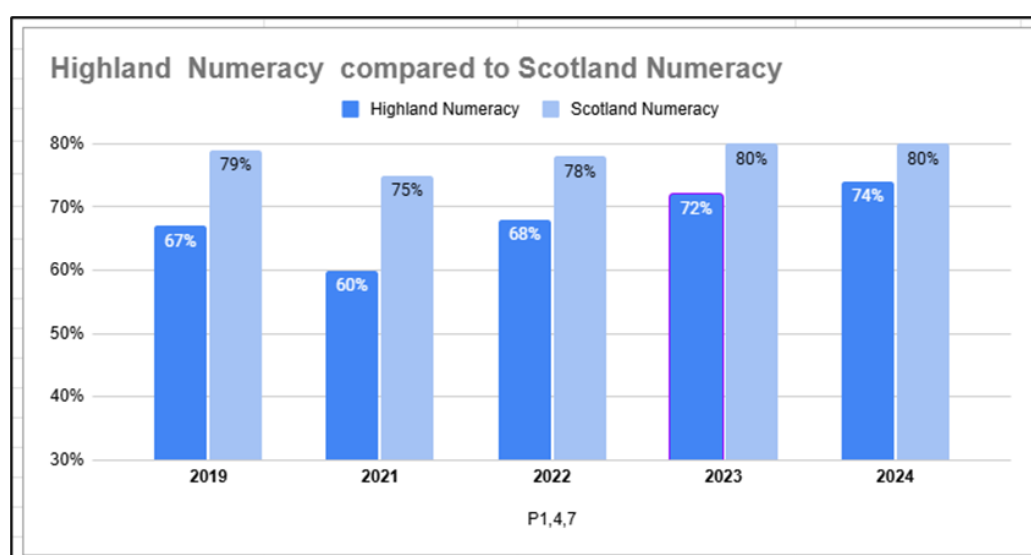
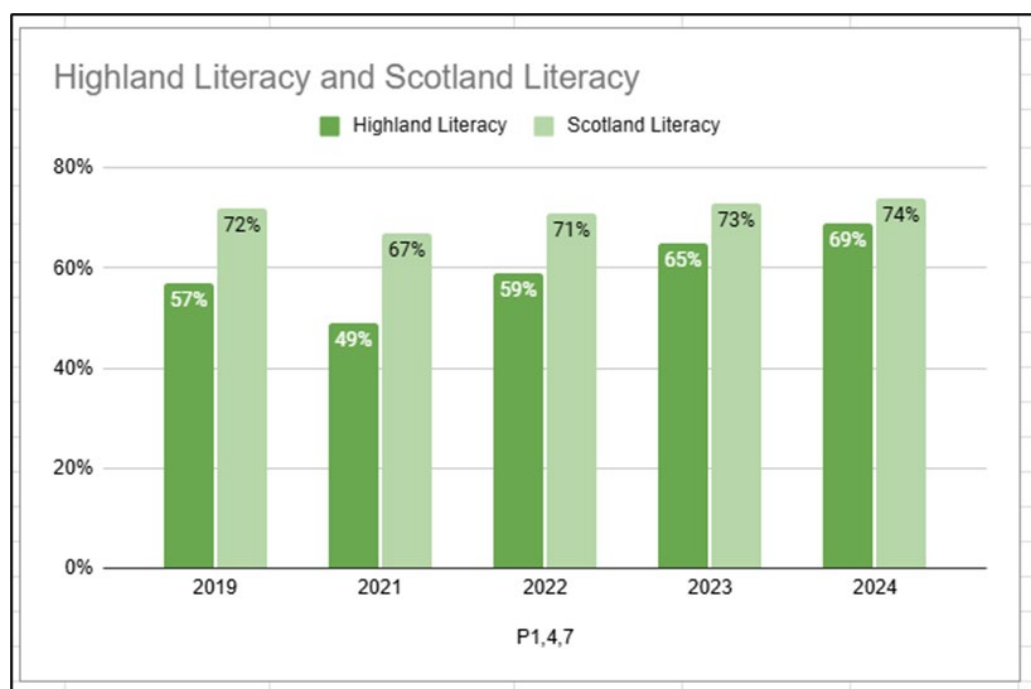
2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
31	31	30	29	28

Numeracy

2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
31	31	31	29	27

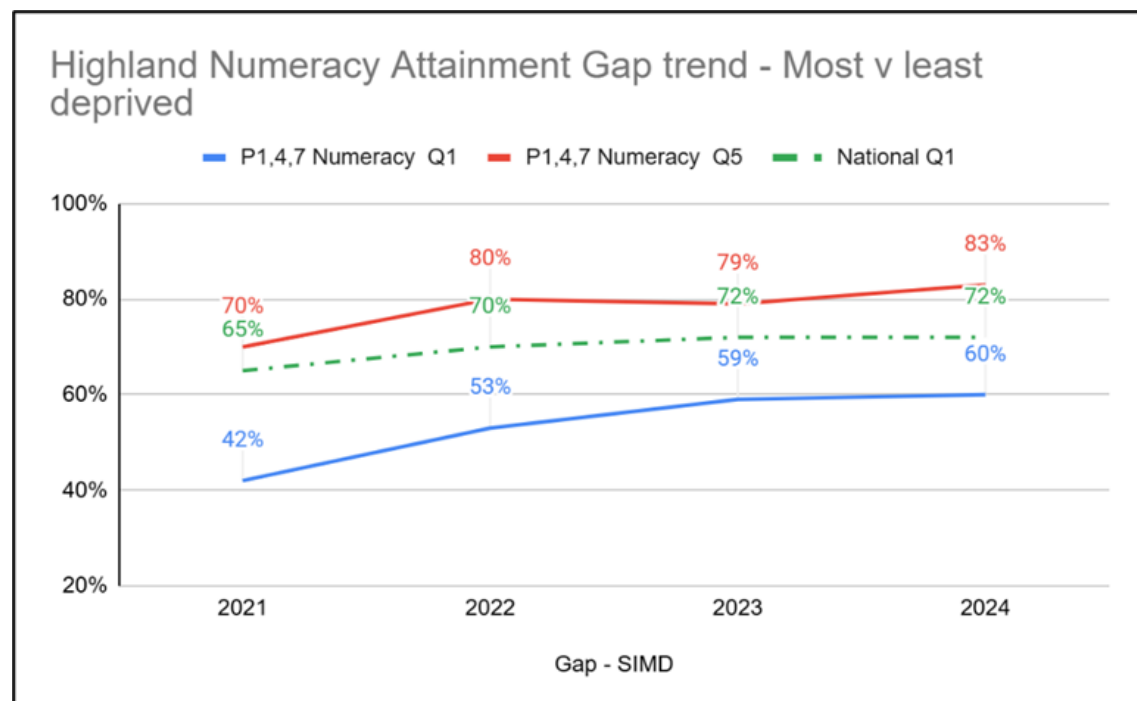
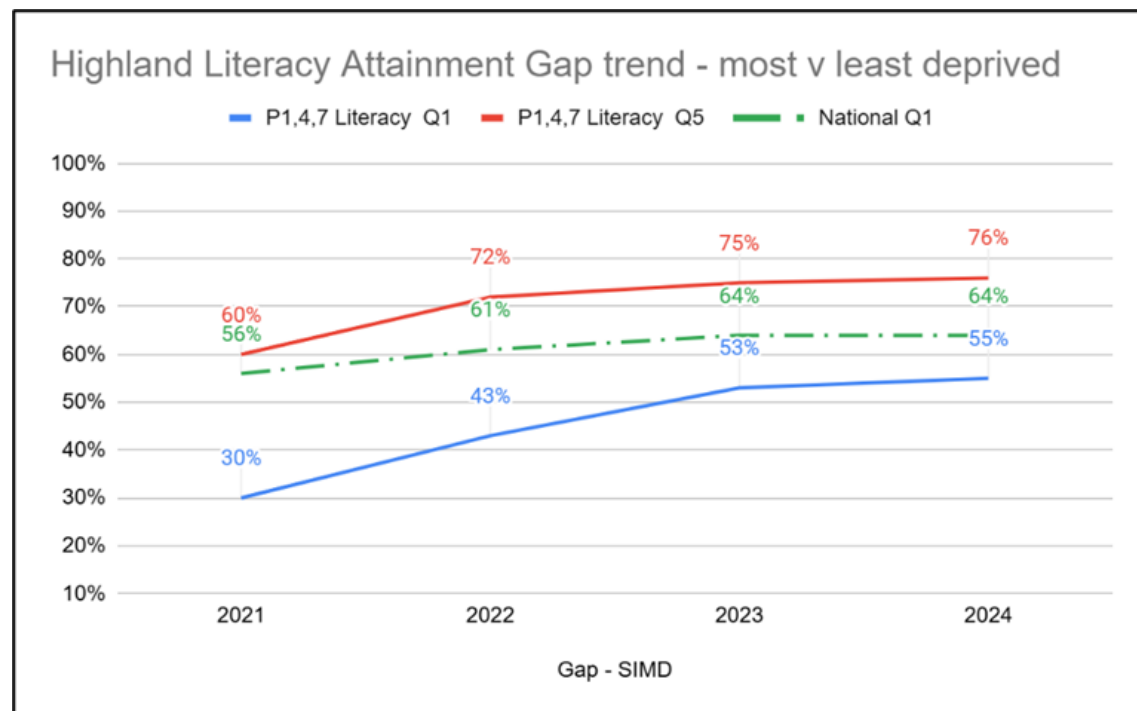
Primary ACEL attainment

To demonstrate attainment progress over time, and as a comparison to pre-covid figures, the graph below shows Highland performance in the combined primary stages of P1, P4 and P7 in literacy overall, compared to National for the last 5 years. Session 19/20 is not included due to no collection of data linked to the Covid19 pandemic. Highland's consistent improvement and accelerated progress has resulted in a closing of the gap to National figures from 18% in 2021 to 5% in 2024.

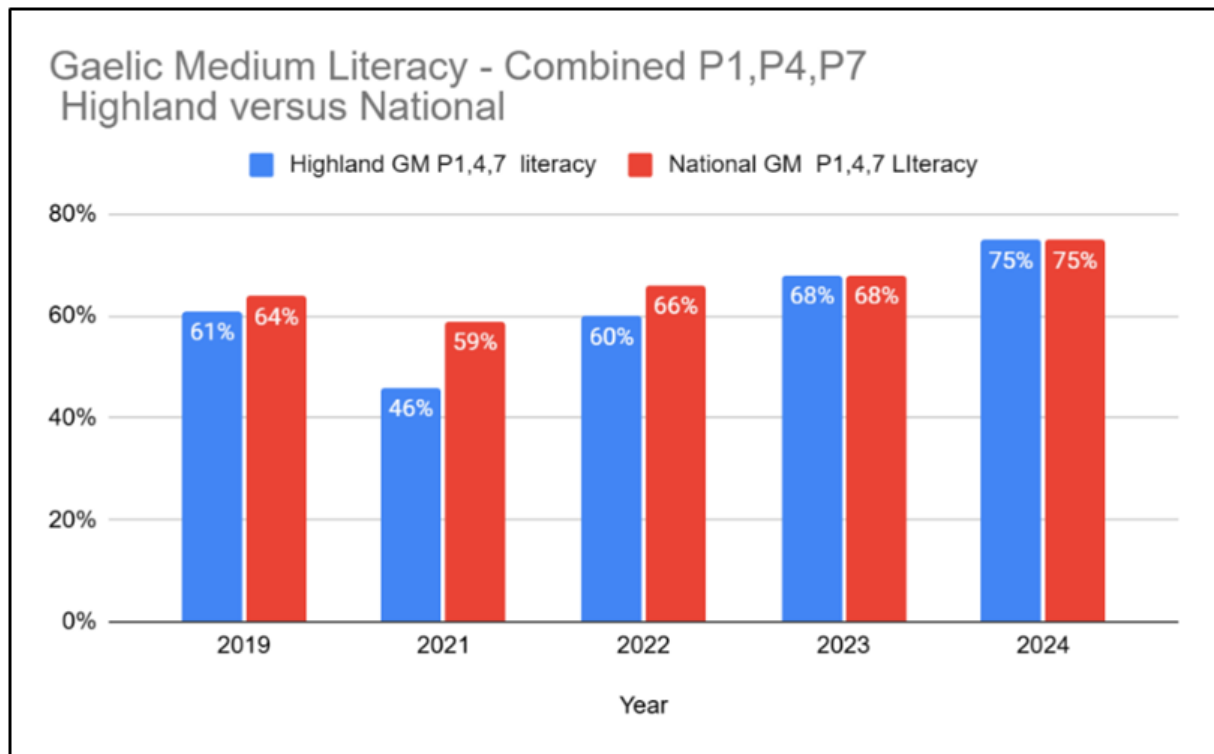


The charts below show attainment in literacy and numeracy for Primary stage pupils living in Highland's most deprived data zones, with an increase of 12% in literacy and 7% in numeracy since 2022. ACEL statistics provide information on performance in the reading, writing, listening & talking and numeracy 'organisers'.

A pupil is deemed to have achieved the expected level in literacy if they have achieved the expected level in all organisers; reading, writing and listening & talking.

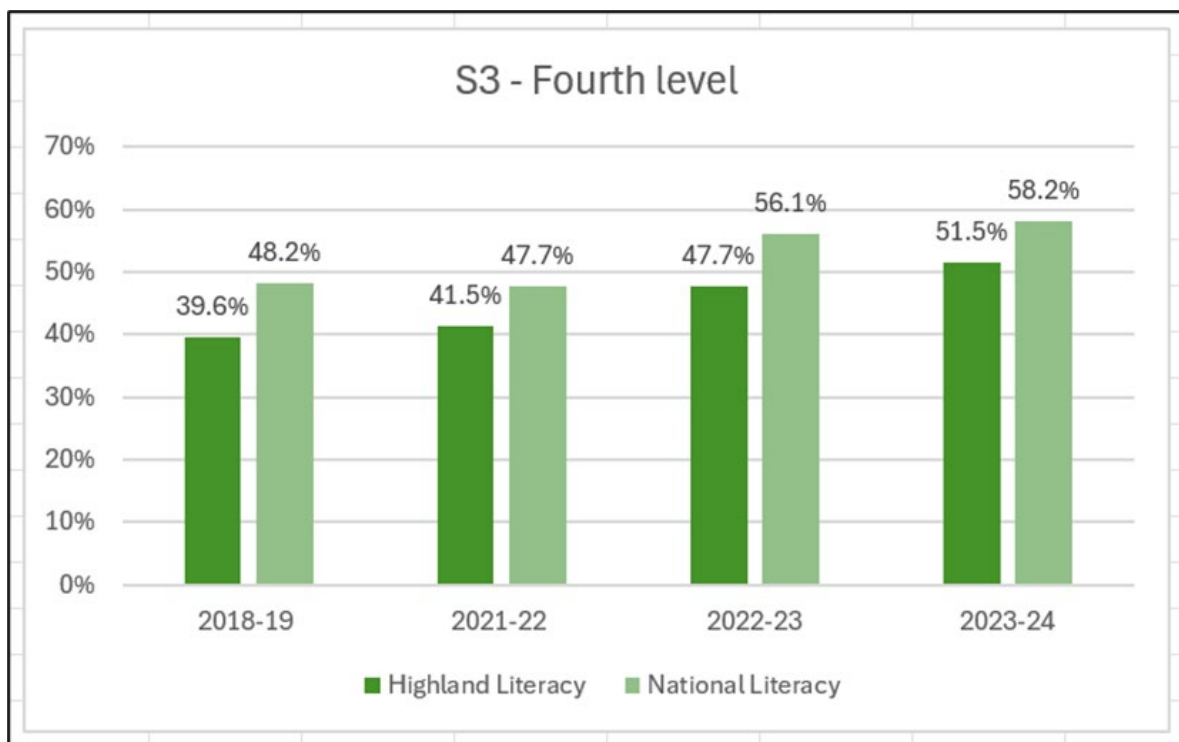
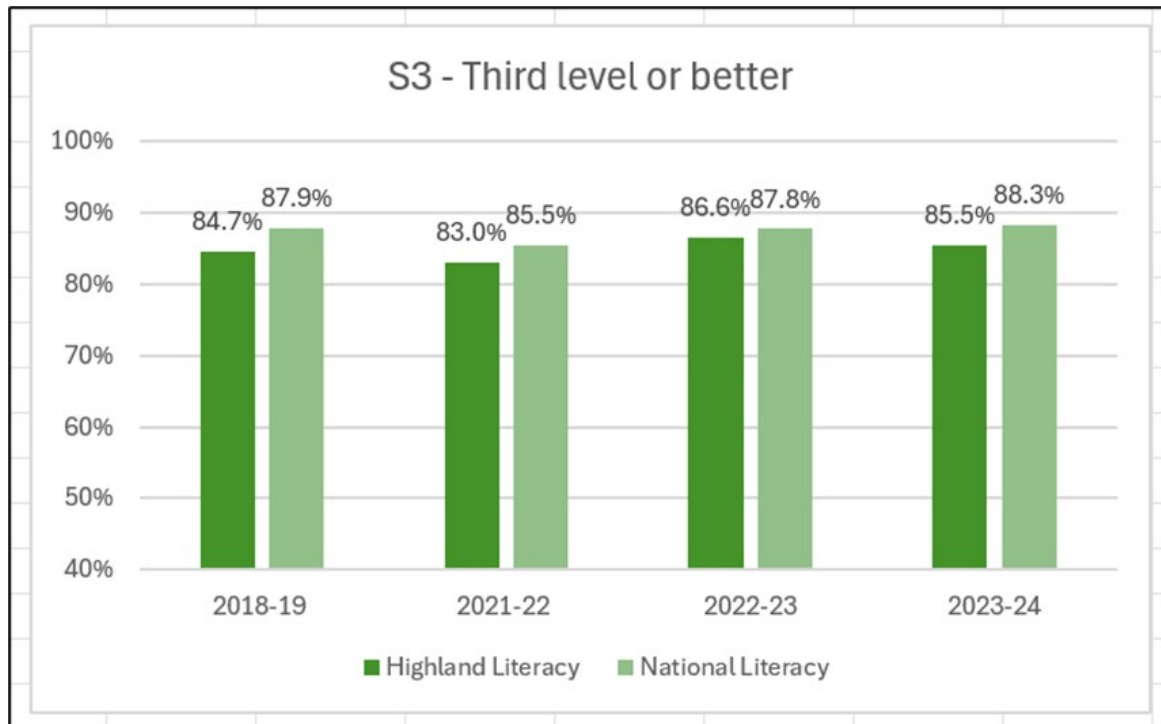


The chart below displays combined P1, P4 and P7 literacy attainment in the medium of Gaelic over the last 5 years (2020 omitted due to no collection of data). The chart shows an increase in attainment with figures in recent years overtaking pre covid results and in line with National figures. This means that there was a 7% improvement on last years' performance and 15% in the last 2 years.



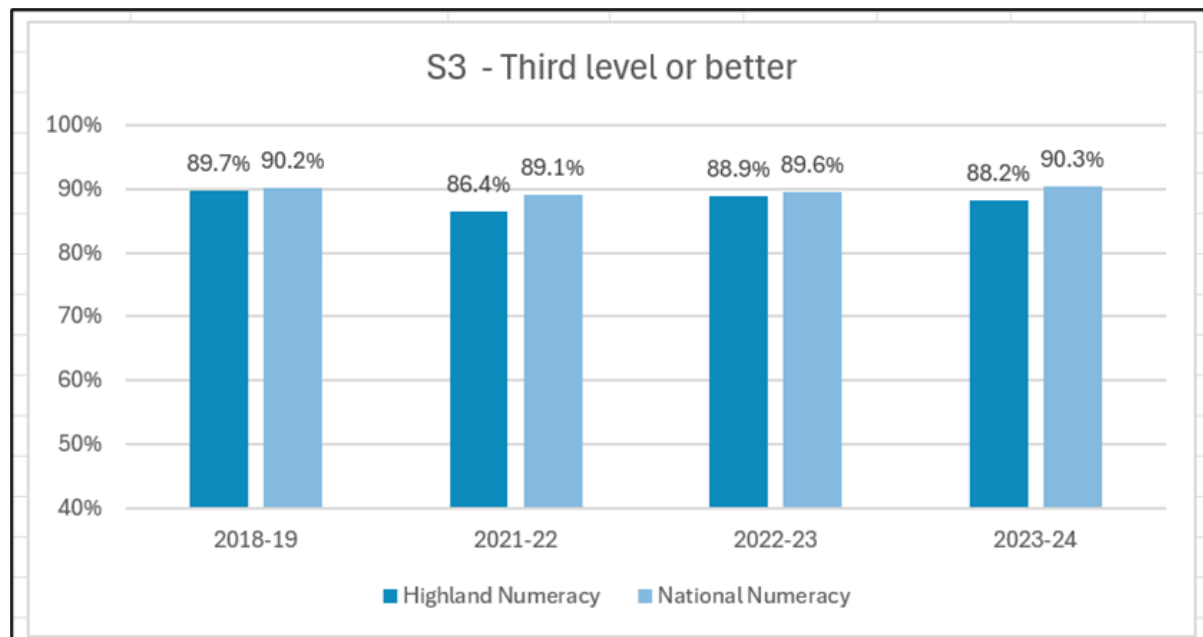
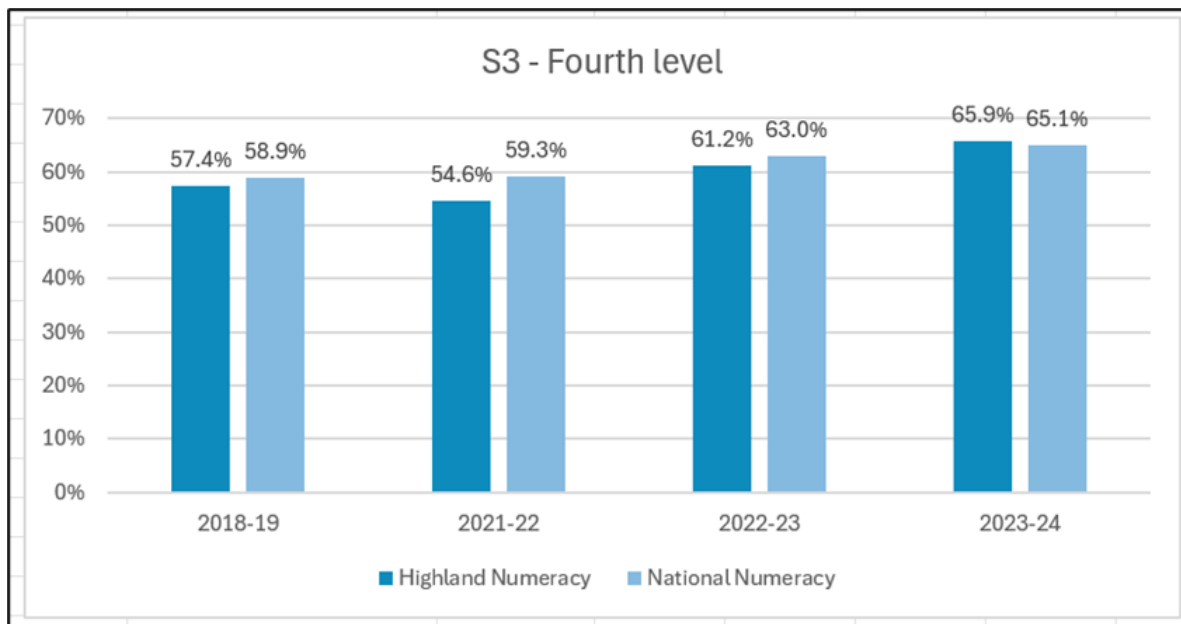
S3 ACEL Attainment – Literacy

Currently 85.5% of pupils achieve level 3 literacy or above by the end of S3. Attainment at fourth level literacy for S3 pupils has seen a 3 year rising trend and is currently 51.5%, an increase of 3.8% from the previous year, and 10% over the last two years. The gap at Fourth Level Literacy has reduced by 2.4%.



S3 ACEL Attainment – Numeracy

Currently 88.2% of pupils achieve level 3 numeracy or above by the end of S3. Attainment for S3 pupils at fourth level has seen a three-year rising trend with current attainment at 65.9% of S3 pupils achieving level 4 numeracy. This is a 4.7% increase on the previous year and 11.3% over the previous 2 years and is now above National figures for the first time.

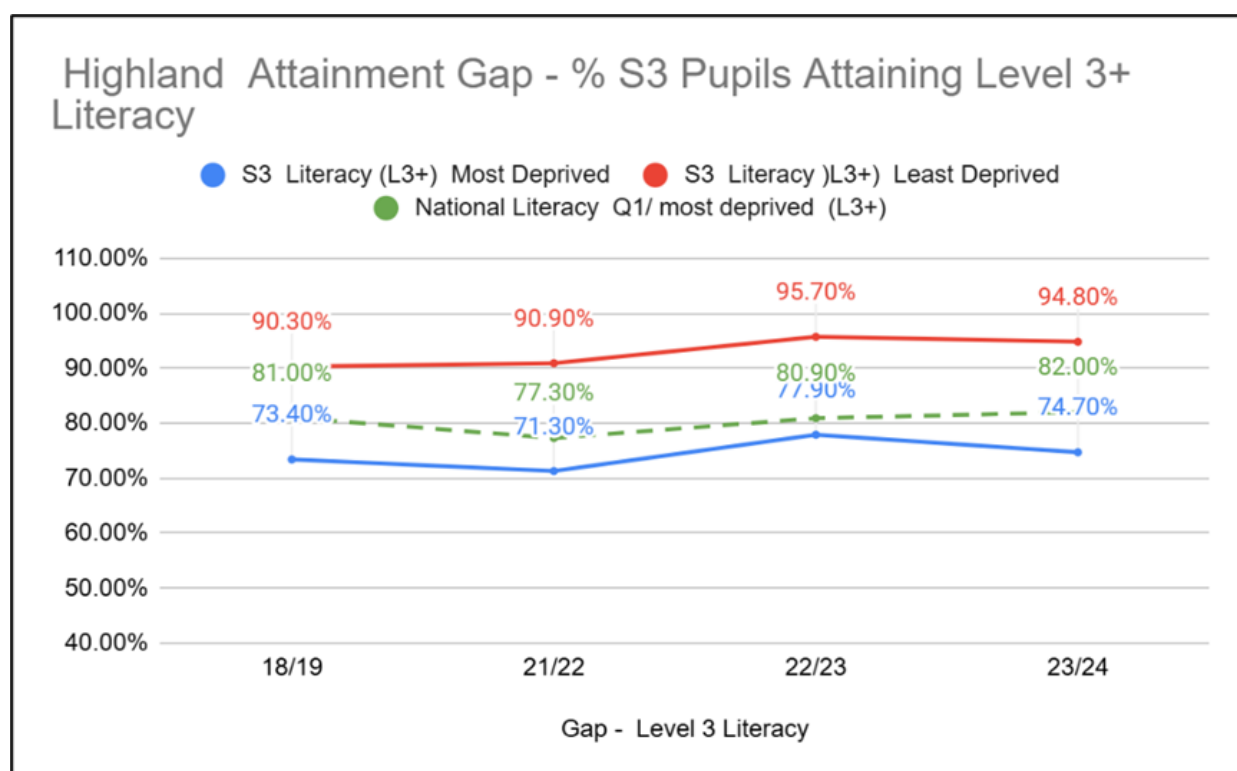


S3 - Closing the Poverty Related Attainment Gap – Literacy

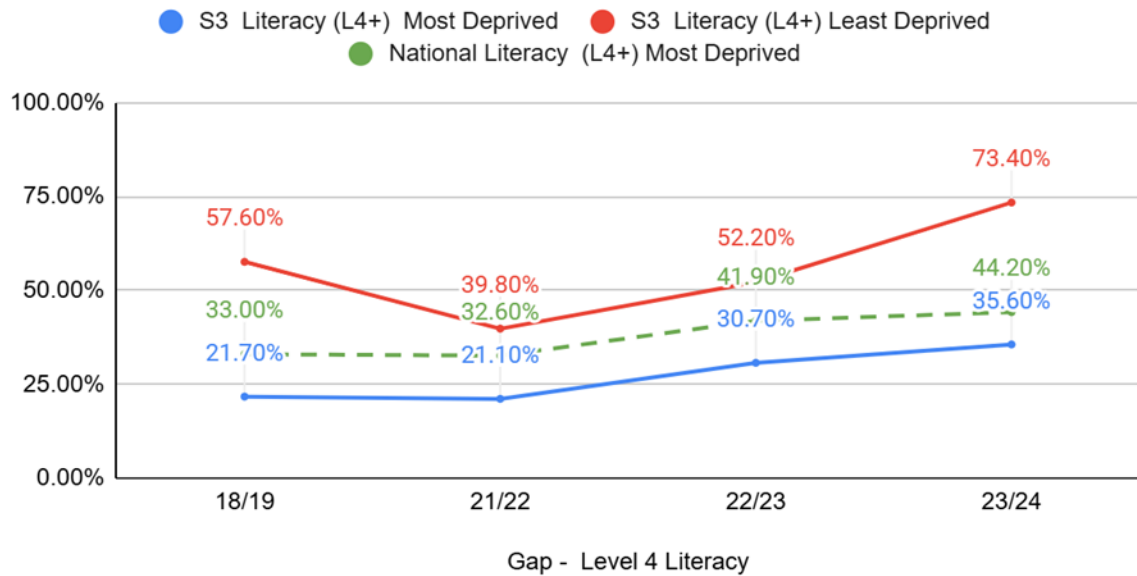
The charts below show attainment in literacy for Secondary stage 3 pupils living in Highland's most and least deprived data zones. This provides an attainment gap information over time for literacy at CfE levels 3+ and level 4+.

Literacy - Attainment at level 4 for children living in our most deprived data zones has increased by 5% on the previous year and is double the National rate of improvement

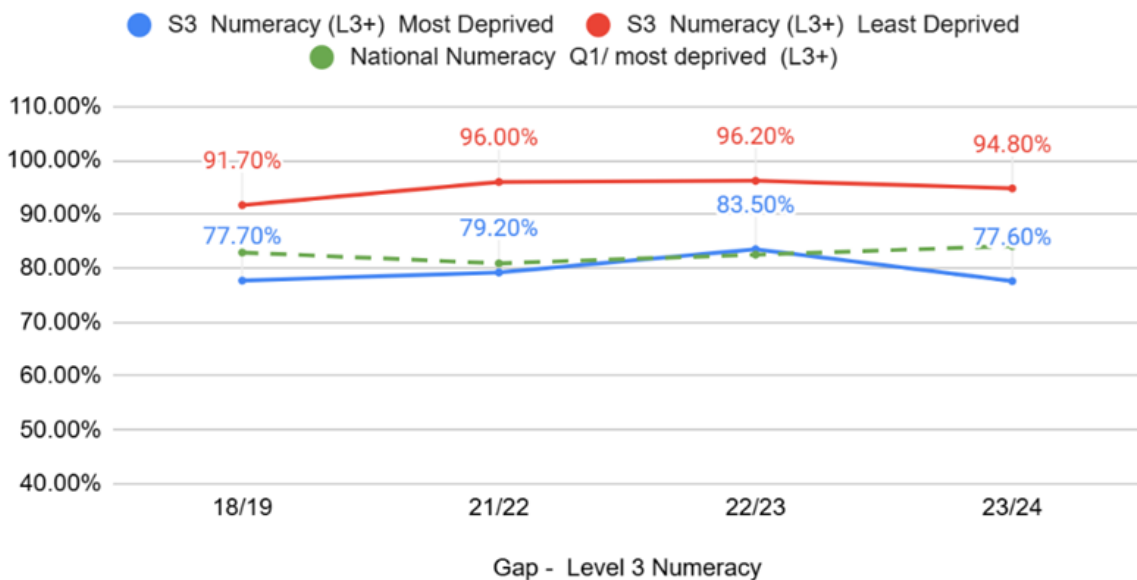
Numeracy – there has been a 3-year improving trend for attainment at level 4 numeracy. L4 numeracy attainment for young people living in our most deprived zones is in line with National attainment for the same measure.



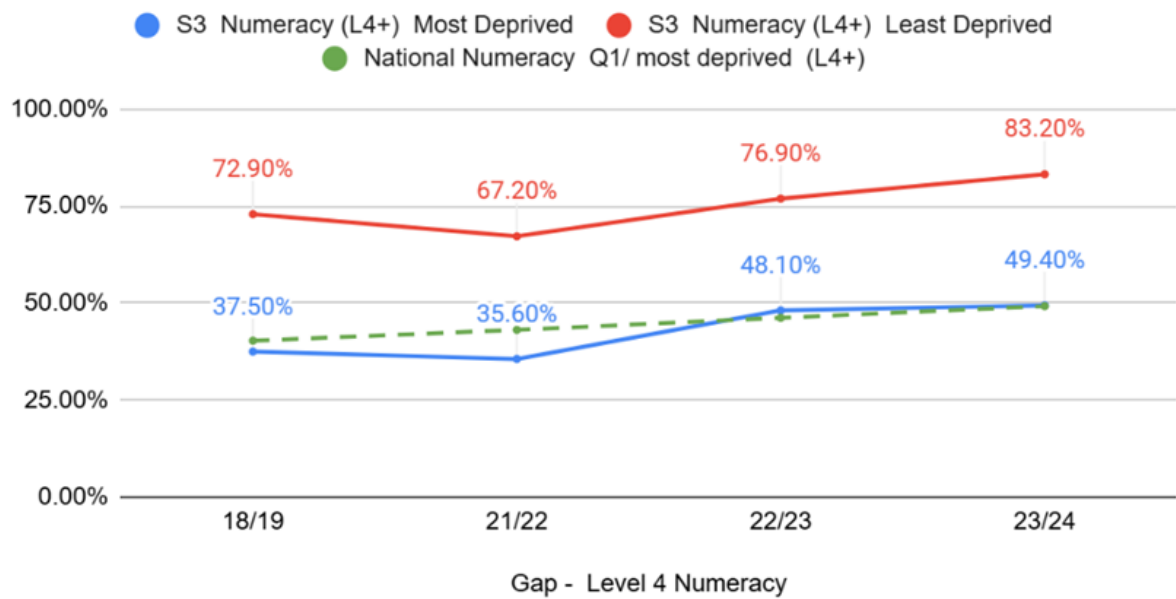
Highland Attainment Gap - % S3 Pupils Attaining Level 4+ Literacy



Highland Attainment Gap - % S3 Pupils Attaining Level 3+ Numeracy



Highland Attainment Gap - % S3 Pupils Attaining Level 4+ Numeracy



Stretch Aims

Every Local Authority in Scotland is required to submit aspirational three year 'stretch aims' for specific core measures, as determined by the Scottish Government. The core stretch aims in Highland, detailed below, were agreed by Education Committee in February 2023 and approved by the Scottish Government thereafter. They articulate ambitious but achievable aims and have been supported and challenged through professional dialogue with Education Scotland to drive improved outcomes for all children and young people in Highland.

The table below shows Highland stretch aims and has been annotated to include the published 2024 data for comparison. Highlighted figures for 2023/24 indicate where Highland has achieved or over-achieved the stretch aim.

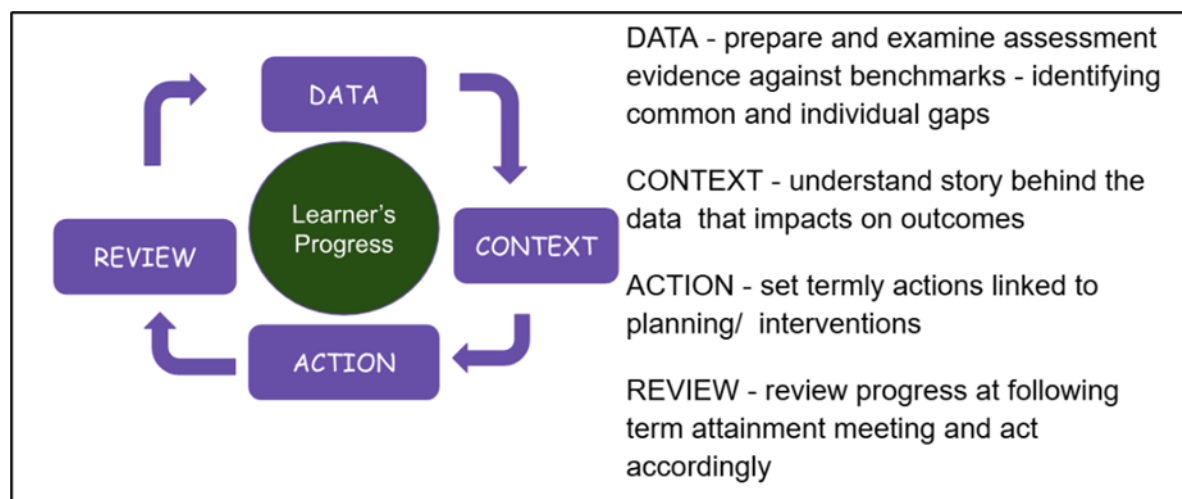
Highland Stretch Aims for P1,P4, P7 (combined) Literacy and Numeracy ACEL.

ACEL Literacy combined P1, P4 & P7					ACEL Numeracy Combine P1,P4 & P7			
Annual Trajectory	Overall levels	SIMD Quintile 1	SIMD Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)	Overall levels	SIMD Quintile 1	SIMD Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
22/23 (published)	65%	53%	75%	22pp	72%	59%	79%	20pp
2023-24 Stretch aim	67%	56%	77%	21pp	75%	62%	80%	18pp
2024 published	69%	55%	76%	21pp	74%	61%	82%	22pp
2024-25 Stretch aim	69%	58%	78%	20pp	77%	64%	81%	17pp
2025-26 Stretch aim	71%	60%	79%	19pp	79%	66%	82%	16pp

Highlighted figures -
achieved / out
stretched aim

Supporting Improved Attainment- 2024/25 Improvement Activity

The Highland Primary Attainment programme involves a raised expectation that all schools regularly consider and discuss class attainment data using improved data analysis tools linked to a new Seemis tracking system. There is emphasis on a 'responsibility of all' agenda with the class teacher at the heart of the attainment conversations. Attainment meetings take place termly with a focus on class/stage targets and progress of individual learners. A common approach is framed with analysis templates for different roles and all involve consideration of:



Training and support tools are offered to classroom teachers as well as senior leaders with class and whole school level analysis tools issued. Headteachers have a discussion with class teachers around class attainment and individual pupil progress towards achievement of a level in each curriculum area of literacy and numeracy.

Support to schools around equity as an attainment focus is provided through officers and strategic networks including headteachers, deputy headteachers, curriculum and sectoral staff to identify effective practice to address equity through the implementation of PEF planning; sharing knowledge and expertise between settings; and engaging in professional dialogue and share practice.

A calendar of professional learning ensures staff at all levels have access to high quality information and clear guidance that outlines the expectations for PEF. This is supported by a range of partners, including Education Scotland. A recent Primary Headteacher strategic event included equity as a key focus with effective practice through PEF was shared.

Improvement actions impact and support Gaelic Medium attainment as well as English medium. This session a discreet Gaelic Medium attainment analysis dashboard has been introduced with bespoke attainment analysis templates to better support Gaelic Medium and mixed medium settings to inform additional attainment interventions.

2024/25 Improvement Activity

Improved Tracking procedures and use of data tools - As a next step to using the Seemis Progress and Achievement Module, officers have rolled out the full use of the tracking and reporting tool this session with all schools. A tracking, monitoring and reporting policy was launched at the start of session which sets out clear expectations of all schools in terms of tracking for all stages using the system. Training on use of the tool was rolled out over the September inset days for teaching staff with follow up Headteacher data clinics in December to support best use of the data tool that accompanies the tracking procedures. The outcome should be improved analysis linked to attainment meetings and tracking and monitoring through the year. All schools will also use the system to report to parents in May which will provide a consistent approach to reporting across all primary schools. A current review of profiling approaches is taking place to support this reporting focus.

National Improvement in Writing Programme - Pilot cohorts last session have included 10 schools. All report significant increases in their writing this session in both raising attainment and teachers' confidence in the pedagogy of writing and using the CfE benchmarks for assessing a level. In session 2024/25, we will have Cohorts Three and Four (around 20 schools) and anticipate similar or greater success rates. Cohort 3 began in August, participating schools have been targeted linked to their writing attainment data over last session as well as their size (bigger schools with a larger cohort) to impact Highland attainment most.

Moderation Collaborative Networks - In addition to continuing the attainment programme cycle of activity in the 24/25 session, Moderation Collaborative Networks have been established. These networks support embedding the effective use of Highland moderation tools and resources and build on the evaluative feedback received during the central moderation events. Schools can access a framework of support through the setting up of a moderation collaborative of teaching staff. This framework takes a 'train, study, review and do' approach with class practitioner leaders in schools participating in two modules of training from central officers and then cascading their learning in their own settings. The modules focus on using the moderation tools and resources when considering a body of evidence linked to these resources and National benchmarks. There are currently over 50 schools involved in this first year of the collaborative.

Central Moderation - Following LA central analysis of predictions in December 2023 and attainment meetings in February 2024, schools were targeted linked to need and enrolled onto a Central Moderation Programme which involved a central team of officers (CLOs, Literacy / numeracy EOs) along with schools staff and SMT to sample pupil evidence linked to stage / areas of focus and for the team to model use of benchmarks and Highland moderation resources to support professional dialogue with teaching staff and provide more confidence in understanding standards. 16 schools were involved in the programme last session and feedback was very positive with teaching staff reporting back how helpful they have found the sessions and how it has supported their confidence in judgement and use of the benchmarks. The Central Moderation Programme will run in the second half of this session with schools identified following Local Authority attainment meetings.

Supporting Continuous Improvement Schools (SCIS) - Last session Collaborative Lead Officers agreed support status (Universal, focussed, intensive categories) with all schools and have paperwork and monitoring procedures for all Intensive schools. Towards the end of last session the team piloted target

attainment schools which were identified as our bigger schools with lower than benchmarked attainment. With their larger cohorts, improvement would positively impact on more pupils whilst also have most effect on Highland attainment data. These schools were supported through a short-term attainment action plan which involved a range of improvement activity linked to context. Most of these schools also took part in the central moderation programme. In session 24/25 schools will be identified for similar additional support following prediction analysis and January attainment meetings and/ or linked to 2024 submission. As a next step in 24/25 and beyond, the progress of the agreed SCI schools will be considered at Education & Learning senior leadership team level as a means of monitoring progress and supporting wider strategic discussions around the improvement agenda.