

Agenda Item	7.
Report No	EDU/31/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Education

Date: 19 November 2025

Report Title: Education Improvement Plan and Raising Attainment and Achievement Update

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update through The Education & Learning Improvement Plan that details Service improvement priorities for session 2024/25, including progress with Local Authority Stretch Aims in both A Curriculum for Excellence (ACEL) and Senior Phase attainment measures. It also identifies key improvement priorities planned for session 2025/26. (**Appendix 2**)
- 1.2 This report also provides an update to Members on the performance of learners in attaining A Curriculum for Excellence Level (ACEL) data and the Senior Phase (S4, S5 and S6) at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher for session 2024/25. (**Appendix 3**)

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. Note the Education and Learning Annual Report for 2024/25;
 - ii. Approve the Education and Learning Improvement Plan for 2025/26 (**Appendix 2**);
 - iii. Scrutinise and note Highland's Senior Phase Attainment for session 2024/25 (**Appendix 3**)

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource - There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations this report. The Highland Improvement Plan will be delivered within existing approved central education and devolved school budgets.
- 3.2 Legal - There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- 3.3 Risk - There are no risk implications requiring an addition or amendment to The Highland Council's risk register arising from the recommendations in this report.

- 3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - There are no health and safety implications arising from the recommendations this report.
- 3.5 Gaelic - There are no specific implications for Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic Learners Education courses. The Highland Improvement Plan applies equally to both Gaelic and English medium education.

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 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

- 4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening was undertaken on 13 October 2025. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.
- 4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that there will be positive impacts on all children and young people from the introduction of the framework. All children and young people should experience high quality teaching and learning which should provide improved outcomes. It has therefore been concluded that a full impact assessment is not required.

Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.3 Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening/Full Assessment
Equality	- Children and Young People – <i>Positive</i> - Children affected by disability – <i>Positive</i> - Older adults – <i>no impact</i>
Socio-economic	<i>Positive</i>
Human Rights	<i>Positive</i>
Children's Rights and Well-being	<i>Positive</i>
Island and Mainland Rural	<i>no impact</i>
Climate Change	<i>no impact</i>
Data Rights	<i>no impact</i>

5. Education and Learning Improvement Plan

- 5.1 This Education & Learning Improvement Plan (ELIP) describes how The Highland Council Education and Learning Service intends to enhance equity and support for school improvement during the year ahead. In doing so the intention is to support all

children to achieve their potential, reduce inequalities of outcome experienced by pupils as a result of socio-economic disadvantage, and fulfil the requirements of the National Improvement Framework (NIF) for Scottish education. The ELIP reflects feedback received through engagement with schools, staff, and elected members.

- 5.2 At an Education & Learning Committee Members Seminar held on 31 October 2025 Officers provided information in support of this report. An interactive session was used to consult on the content of the Education and Learning Improvement Plan and this has helped to inform and validate the themes and foundation principles of the Plan.

Committee Members present were in broad support of the areas identified for focused improvement work, with the Health and Wellbeing and Learning and Teaching being rated highest importance. Other areas identified as important are reflected in the Plan and will also be progressed through a variety of different core pieces of work including the operational Delivery Plan's portfolios: Person Centred Solutions and My Highland Future; and developing work on an Early Years Strategy and Plan.

- 5.3 Progress towards Stretch Aims set over a three-year period from 2023-26 are detailed under the core model stipulated by the Scottish Government. The "core" sets a minimum requirement for key measures based on national data, and local data for health and wellbeing. These are: ACEL combined data for Literacy, ACEL combined data for Numeracy, SCQF Level 5, SCQF Level 6, Participation 16+, and Attendance at Primary and Secondary.

- 5.4 The progress report section within the Education and Learning Improvement Plan highlights key achievements identified under the National Improvement Framework priorities:
- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education;
 - Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing;
 - Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people;
 - Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people; and
 - Improvement in achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

- 5.5 The Education and Learning Improvement Plan for session 2025/26 outcomes and actions are detailed under four improvement themes stemming directly from work to formulate the [Raising Attainment Strategy](#)

- Leadership
- Learning & Teaching
- Curriculum
- Data Analysis for Improvement

In addition, three equally important foundation principles underpin all four of the above themes and are key to raising standards across schools:

- Additional Support Needs/Inclusive Practice
- Parental Involvement and Engagement
- Health and Wellbeing including Relationships and Behaviour

6. Performance Data - Attainment

6.1 Primary Attainment

6.1.1 Local Authorities submit A Curriculum for Excellence Attainment (ACEL) Data on an annual basis to the Scottish Government and this data is then officially verified and released at the end of the year, in December. As in previous years, a full data report will be brought to Education and Learning Committee in February.

6.1.2 In the interim, the following summary of A Curriculum for Excellence Data (ACEL) attainment over time is provided. Combined Primary 1,4 & 7 ACEL data for Literacy and Numeracy is used because this is what is reported on nationally. This shows sustained positive progress from 2021 to the present:

- Combined Literacy increasing from 53% in 2021 to 72% in 2025
- Combined Numeracy increasing from 60% in 2021 to 74% in 2025.

It is too early for comparative national data to be available but this will be included in the report to Committee in February 2026.

6.1.3 With regard to our Stretch Aim for 2025, current data indicates for Literacy a 0.4% increase on the previous year and meeting the Stretch Aim. Numeracy data shows a marginal 0.1% increase on the previous year and not yet meeting the Stretch Aim.

6.2 Secondary Attainment

6.2.1 Analysis of secondary schools' Senior Phase SQA attainment, based on the data set arising from qualifications taken by young people in Highland secondary schools during the 2024-25 school session, is provided in **Appendix 3**. This includes attainment in literacy and breadth and depth analysis. In addition, the changes to senior phase courses, through introduction of Skills for Work courses, National Progression Awards and Foundation Apprenticeship is also considered.

6.2.2 Attainment in literacy and numeracy in S6 at SCQF Level 6 is in line with or above the virtual comparator. Numeracy in S4 at SQQF Level 5 and S5 at SQQF Level 6 are also in line with the virtual comparator. Literacy attainment at these levels has slightly declined this year and is lower than the virtual comparator (VC). This decline will be subject to further scrutiny to understand what factors have contributed to this and look to ensure that all schools who have declined have planned approaches to improving literacy attainment.

6.2.3 Key attainment trends across S4–S6 using the lowest 20%, middle 60%, and highest 20% bands compared to the Virtual Comparator are indicating that

- in S4 the middle 60% and Highest 20% are in line with the virtual comparator while the lowest 20% is less than the VC
- S5 attainment is in line with the VC for all measures
- S6 both the lowest 20% and middle 60% are in line with the VC, with the highest 20% being lower.
- The breadth and Depth data in S4 and S5 has increased in nearly all measures, while in S6 they declined. Measure have been put in place to

address engagement of young people in S6 which included setting expectations around the number of courses studied and attendance.

7. Update on Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy

- 7.1 As result of input at the August meeting of the Education and Learning Committee the following update has been added to the Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy and the Education and Learning Improvement Plan.

The four themes of Leadership, Learning and Teaching, Curriculum, and Data Analysis for Improvement will be enhanced by three underpinning foundation principles:

- Additional Support Needs/Inclusive Practice
- Parental Involvement and Engagement
- Health and Wellbeing

It is recognised that work in these areas will strengthen progress towards our ambition to raise attainment, achievement and standards across The Highland Council Schools.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 7 November 2025

Author: Bernadette Martin-Scott, Chief Officer Primary
Fiona Grant, Chief Officer Secondary

Background Papers: n/a

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment

Appendix 2 – Education & Learning Report and Improvement Plan 2025/26

Appendix 3 – SQA Senior Phase Attainment 2024/25

The Education and Learning Improvement Plan describes the action that will be taken to realise the vision described within our Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy. The Integrated Impact Assessment screening undertaken in respect of the Education and Learning Improvement Plan 2025/26 highlights the following positive impacts on children and young people.

Improvement work undertaken in respect of the 4 pillars of Leadership; Learning & Teaching; Curriculum and Data along with the 3 principles of Parental Involvement and Engagement; ASN/inclusive Practice; and Health & Wellbeing will lead to positive learning outcomes for all children and young people including those with protected characteristics.

Schools will be more rigorous in scrutiny and analysis of school level data to ensure focussed support is provided resulting in increased attainment. Schools will identify supports, mitigations and appropriate interventions to ensure equity of experience through a targeted approach, focussing on closing the poverty related attainment gap.

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Education & Learning Report and Improvement Plan



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 NATIONAL CONTEXT

The statutory guidance Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 (as amended 2016), states that education authorities must prepare and publish an annual plan for the year ahead taking account of the requirements of the current National Improvement Framework (NIF) and an annual report on the progress made against the previous year's plan. This Education & Learning Improvement Plan (ELIP) describes how The Highland Council Education and Learning Service intends to take steps to support all children to achieve their potential, reduce inequalities of outcome experienced by pupils as a result of socio-economic disadvantage, and fulfil the requirements of the National Improvement Framework (NIF) for Scottish education.

It is a duty under the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 to submit this plan to Scottish Ministers each year.

The National Improvement Framework 2025 published in December 2024 describes the vision for Scottish education as ambitious, inclusive, and supportive in order to deliver:

- Excellence through raising achievement and improving outcomes: ensuring that every child and young person achieves the highest standards they can.
- Achieving equity: ensuring every child and young person has the same opportunity to succeed.

The key priorities of the National Improvement Framework are detailed below:

- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education;
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing;
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people;
- Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people; and
- Improvement in achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

The outcomes that the NIF expects to achieve are:

- A globally respected, empowered, and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level that supports children, young people, and adult learners to thrive. The system enables the development of their knowledge, skills, values, and attributes that give them the best opportunity to succeed and contribute to Scotland's society and economy.
- Young people experiencing the benefit of schools and early years settings working in excellent partnerships with wider children's services and other partners, families, and communities, in line with the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) approach.
- Inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment which gives young people the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to society, and shape a sustainable future, while celebrating and supporting progression for all.

- High levels of achievement across the curriculum for all learners, with action to close the poverty-related attainment gap.
- Highly skilled teachers and school-leaders driving excellent learning, teaching, and assessment for all, especially those with additional support needs.
- Improving relationships and behaviour, and attendance, with increased engagement in learning and a culture of dignity and respect for all. • An education system engaging in digital technology to enhance all aspects of learning and teaching, supported by a digitally skilled workforce and tackling digital inequality.

Our annual Education & Learning Improvement Plan, reinforced by our Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy, along with other important strategies, policy and guidance shown in Appendix 1, will support The Highland Council Education and Learning Service and its schools and ELC settings to progress towards realising this vision for Scottish education.

1.2 HIGHLAND LOCAL CONTEXT

Geography

Highland covers one third of the land area of Scotland and is nearly the size of Belgium.

19,019

Pupils live in Urban and Small Towns

10,321

Pupils live in a rural area

65%

of people in Highland live in remote rural, accessible rural areas or remote small towns.

Schools

In session 2025-26, there are



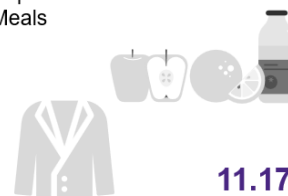
195 schools

- 29 secondary schools
- 163 primary schools
- 3 special schools

Free School Meals & Clothing Grants

4,530

Pupils are entitled to Free School Meals



11.17%

of pupils are entitled to claim a Clothing Grant

Care Experienced Children & Young People



There are **580** Care Experienced Children & Young People in Highland.

That's **2%**

Gaelic Medium Education

The Highland Council is the largest provider of Gaelic Medium Education.

6.96%

of pupils in P1-P7 in Highland are in GME settings.

1,896 total pupils in GME 3-18.

Foghlam tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig

Pupils

In Highland, there are

13,619

Secondary school pupils

15,525

Primary school pupils

196

Special school pupils

Overall attendance is

90.1%



Deprivation & Poverty

2,929

School-aged children live in 20% most deprived areas in Highland.

10.3%

Pupils live in SIMD1&2.



1 in 5

Children are affected by poverty.

Additional Support for Learning

12,434

Pupils have one or more recorded need(s) for ASfL (all sectors)

That's **42.4%**



7.2%

English as an Additional Language

Colleges & University

32.1%

Of young people leave school to go into

Higher Education

20.4%

Of young people leave school to go into

Further Education

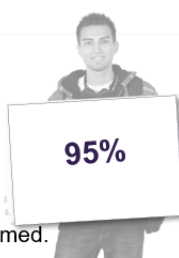


Education & Training

9,785 16-19 year olds are in education, employment or training. That's

2,325 Modern Apprentices are in training.

283 Young people aged 16-19 are not participating, with 228 unconfirmed.



95%

1.3 PLANNING FOR 2025/26

The 2025/26 ELIP outlines the high-level areas for improvement across all aspects of the Education and Learning Service and schools and details how we will realise the ambition set within our Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy. Both align closely to various other plans across the Council such as The Highland Council Delivery Plan, The Integrated Services Plan, The Child Poverty Action Report, The Gaelic Language Plan, and My Highland Future Plan.

The ELIP reflects this vision and the Council's core values of **Ambitious, Sustainable and Connected**.

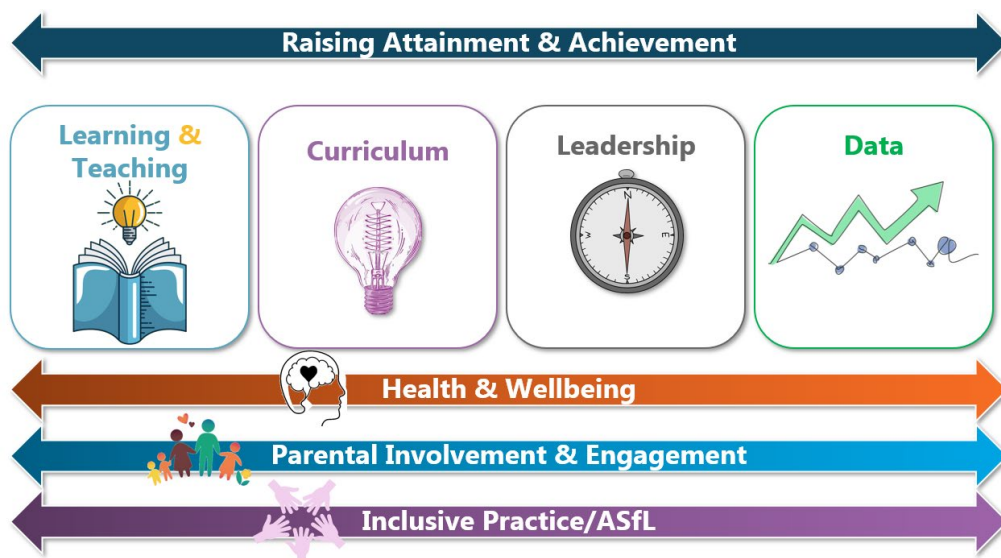


This plan sets out the ambition of The Highland Council Education and Learning Service to improve attainment and achievement and reduce inequity by prioritising improvement in four key themes:

- Leadership
- Learning and Teaching
- Curriculum
- Data Analysis for Improvement

Three foundation principles sit alongside each of these themes and act as a common thread between them:

- Inclusive Practice/ Additional Support Needs
- Health and wellbeing, including Relationships and Behaviour
- Parental Involvement and Engagement



It focuses on supporting delivery of national legislation, policy, and strategic priorities for education.

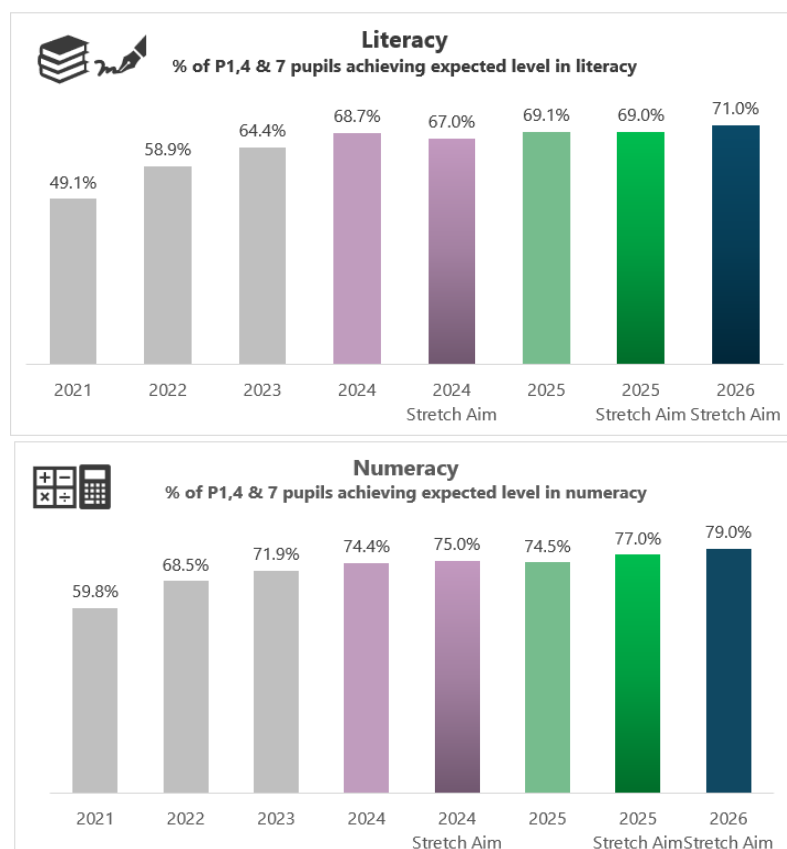
2. PROGRESS TOWARDS STRETCH AIMS 2025/26

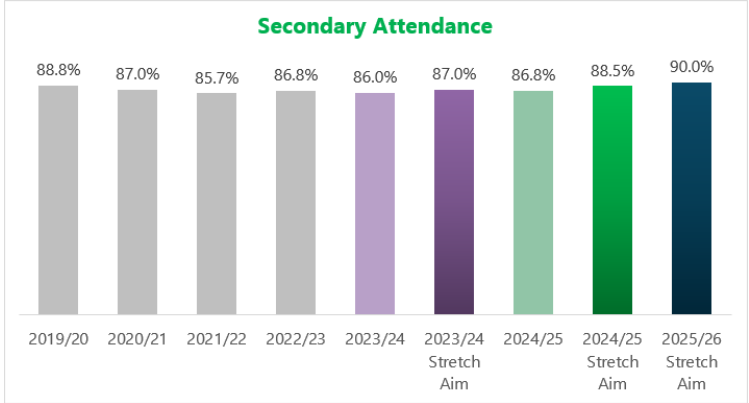
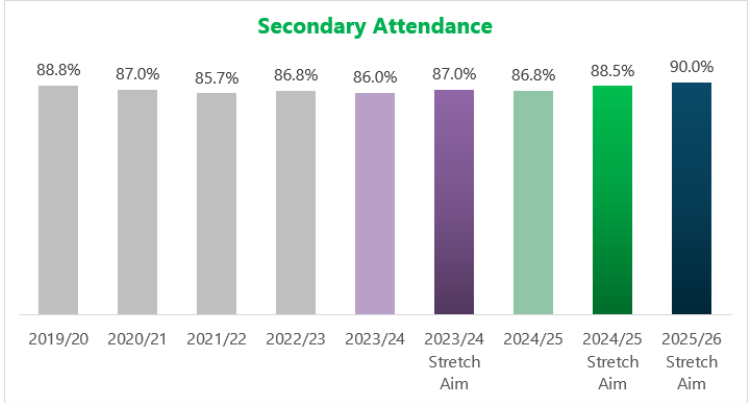
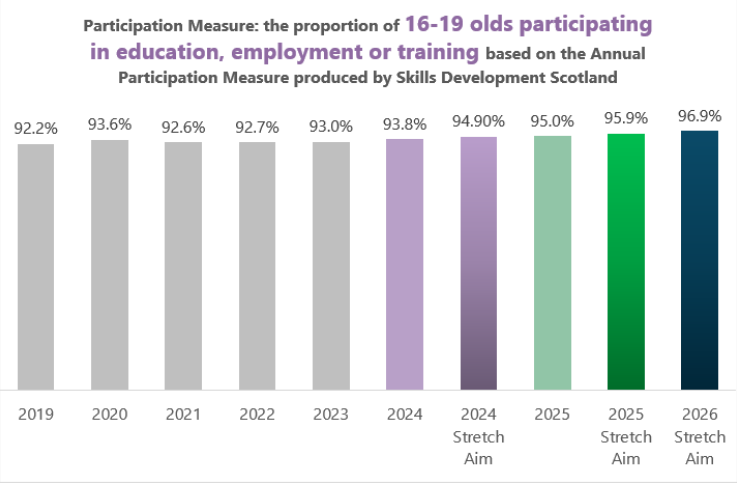
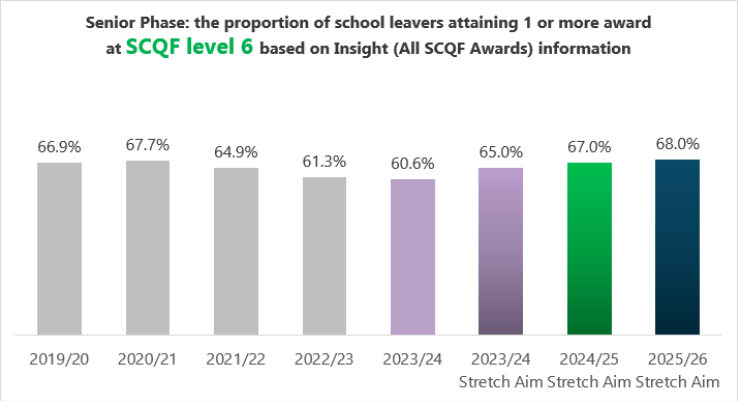
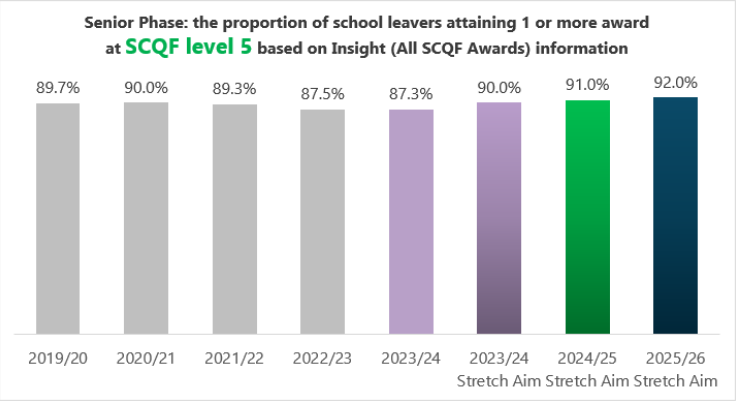
The Stretch Aims, agreed in 2024, use the core model stipulated by the Scottish Government: the "core" sets a minimum requirement for key measures based on national data, and local data for health and wellbeing.

The core stretch aims, highlighted below, have been developed to improve outcomes for all children and young people whilst closing the poverty-related attainment gap. They articulate ambitious. They have been supported and challenged through professional dialogue with Education Scotland to drive improved outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty across Highland.

Stretch Aims Core	2024	2025	2026
ACEL Combined Data Literacy	67%	69%	71%
ACEL Combined Data Numeracy	75%	77%	79%
SCQF Level 5	90%	91%	92%
SCQF Level 6	65%	67%	68%
Participation	94.9%	95.9%	96.9%
Attendance Primary	92%	93.5%	95%
Attendance Secondary	87%	88.5%	90%

The graphs below show an improving trend towards 2026-27 stretch aims.





3. PROGRESS REPORT ON IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2024-2025

3.1 Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education.

Children's Rights are realised in an increasing number of schools and early years settings. We continue to develop a strong ethos & culture of rights & respect based on UNCRC. 68% of School Standard and Quality Reports for 2024/25 session highlight active involvement with the Rights Respecting Schools agenda. 16 schools have already achieved gold status, 41 silver, 80 bronze, and all other schools have now registered to begin their improvement journey.

Work undertaken through our Educational Psychology Service detailed below to ensure Children Rights and Voice are an important part of our culture and their work on Participation in Practice: Children Shaping Highland's Future has been recognised nationally. We have been shortlisted for the National COSLA Excellence Award.

800+ children of all ages helped co-produce [The Children and Young People's Participation Strategy](#). A section on the [Children's Rights Highland](#) website, includes a process for gathering consultations undertaken with children and young people.

Workshops and focus groups involving 40 children and young people have been undertaken to co-produce a set of activity cards to inform professionals about 'Capacity' in children. This work has further informed the Highland Council Child Friendly Complaints process.

A myth buster series of resources have been developed to support understanding of children's rights. Two examples are illustrated below.

MYTH! Children under 12 can be assumed not to have capacity MYTHICAL MUNGO Mungo got parental consent to work with a child, but did not ask them if it was OK or give them any choices. He wrote a report without consulting on the contents 	NOPE! Capacity is not determined by any age or developmental cut-off. It is a function of both how well the child understands and how well we explain the choices for them CAPACITY CALLUM Callum carefully explained what the work was, and what it would be like, and checked the child understood. He asked for and recorded the child's consent, and checked what to report afterwards 	MYTH! Adults know better than children what is best for them MYTHICAL MUNGO Mungo thought it was obvious what to do so just went ahead; when it all went wrong, he realised the child had important information that would have made a difference 	NOPE! Sometimes true, but in any decision or situation there are elements that affect the child that they will have views about. Taking account of these leads to better outcomes. CAPACITY CALLUM Callum checked his plan with the child, and learned important information that led to new ideas. These helped change things for the better. 
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Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing

Children and young people increasingly have their needs identified, assessed, and met by skilled and confident staff working in effective multi-agency collaboration.

The multi-agency GIRFEC training has been refreshed in light of local and national guidance. Feedback from the pilot was very positive and monthly face-to-face training has been arranged for 2025-26 with pre and post training feedback on skills development being undertaken by the Psychological Service.

The [Supporting the wellbeing of our C&YP](#) website has been updated to take account of changes in national policy and practice. There were 671 visitors to this site, which is an increase of 291 from 2023-24.

The use of the [Neurodevelopmental Assessment Profile](#) in schools and ELCs is now accepted practice. A review of its use in 2025 has reinforced its usefulness as an early assessment tool to support child development.

20 training sessions on Promoting Positive Relationships were delivered by the Psychological Service during 2024-25. These were attended by 304 practitioners from schools and ELCs and a training module has been specifically created for ELCs.

Highland Lifestyle Survey conducted in session 2024/25 was completed by pupils in P7, S2 and S4 with a response rate of approximately 50%, providing around 3000-3500 pupil responses. Results show that children and young people have become more aware that they have a range of rights and increasingly school staff are delivering lessons on the UNCRC. The Rights Respecting Schools Programme has significantly helped with this work. In general terms, children have consistently reported that they feel their key rights are being met.

When asked the following questions high numbers responded positively.

- Are you aware that all children and young people have rights? **95%**
- Does anyone in school talk to you about your rights? **79%**
- To what extent do you feel the following rights are being met at least partly:
- Your right to education **96%**
- Your right to relax and play **93%**
- Your right to have a view and have this listened to **92%**
- Are you familiar with the term wellbeing? **92%**
- Does anyone in school talk to you about wellbeing? **66%**

When asked how that felt in terms of SHANARRI Indicators (Safe, Healthy, Active, Nurtured, Achieving, Respected Responsible and Included), wellbeing averaged at **75%** of respondents answering positively about their wellbeing.

School attendance levels across all Highland sectors have increased on the previous year by 0.4% in the primary sector and 0.8% in the secondary sector.

The focus of our plan last year was predominantly directed towards secondary schools and so impact across that sector is outlined below:

A new attendance framework and supporting resources has been created and is now fully implemented and embedded into secondary school practice. This includes the introduction of a process for fortnightly review of attendance data.

Education Scotland launched the Improving Attendance and Engagement Quality Improvement Programme last year and five secondary schools from Highland participated (Alness Academy, Dingwall Academy, Invergordon Academy, Inverness High School, and Tain Royal Academy). The programme provides information on the national picture of school attendance in Scotland and encourages use national resources to support improvement and ensure positive impact. Four of the five school attendance increased with the collective school attendance of the five schools improving by 0.2 %.

Training on Emotionally Based School Avoidance is regularly available to school staff by the Psychological Service. This training has been well evaluated. Overall, before training 45% of participants report being unclear how to identify Emotionally Based School Absence (ESBA) in children and young people. By the end of the training all participants feel they understand how to identify children and young people experiencing ESBA. 75% of attendees report that they have used the knowledge from this training in their practice.

An average of 1512 individual children access counselling over the course of a year. When asked (Lifestyle Survey 2025), 69% of those receiving counselling would recommend it to a friend.

3.2 Closing the gap between most and least disadvantaged children and young people.

The expansion of Early Learning and Childcare is impacting positively on children's outcomes, providing opportunities for early learning, and building skills through play. Data collected and analysed shows that the poverty related gaps in children's early development are reducing slightly. For children entering Primary 1 for session 2024-25 the gap had reduced slightly overall on the 2022-23 cohort. There a 3% increase for girls in both our most and least deprived vigintiles achieving all developmental milestones. However, the difference for boys was more significant. There was an increase of 10% of boys in vigintiles 17-20 who achieved all milestones and a 12% increase in relation to boys in vigintiles 1-4. Overall, however, girls still out-perform boys and while girls living in poverty have made improvement over the years, boys living in our most deprived areas continue to do less well than all other groups.

A new system for ensuring robust tracking and monitoring was established across all primary schools. A Progress and Achievement Dashboard is now used by all primary schools to support and inform planning to ensure pupil progress in learning. This allows school leaders and classroom practitioners to predict and monitor progress and includes options to filter data to enable greater scrutiny, particularly for targeted groups.

All primary headteachers engaged in attainment meetings with central officers to ensure rigorous scrutiny of school level attainment data. Through this process

seventeen schools were identified to participate in centrally supported moderation activity. All teachers in these schools engaged in sessions with Curriculum Development Officers and Collaborative Lead Officers to ensure greater consistency in assessment of literacy and numeracy.

178 schools across Highland receive Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) and create detailed plans for their spend on areas such as purchasing equipment and materials, staff training, employing additional staff (for example Children's Service Workers to provide planned support within and outwith school to identified children, families and groups) or increasing hours for existing staff members to lead interventions. Each school also reports progress and impact annually. Two case studies exemplify progress below:

Case study – Caol Primary School

PEF was carefully targeted at learners who required support to improve their attainment in literacy. PEF funding has been used to buy additional hours for a pupil support assistant to provide literacy interventions. To ensure that the support was given to children who need it, the school used a variety of baseline assessments, including phonological assessment information and Scottish National Standardised Assessments. Children have been able to access targeted support sessions, working through phonics and reading programmes.

What was the impact of this action?

P1 – P4 phonics focus: 100% of pupils increased their standardised score.

P1 – P7 reading focus: 55% of targeted pupils are on track and all pupils have been observed to make progress in their reading.

Case study – Millburn Academy

A poverty-related gap was identified regarding attendance at the school. Over session 23.24, attendance for the target group decreased. A drop in attendance was targeted through a programme of intensive support and repurposing a job role to allow for further targeted interventions and impact analysis. Interventions included partnership work with families alongside provision of a Nurture space. By supporting young people and families, the school's aim was to improve attendance and engagement at school and build positive, nurturing relationships with families.

A PEF coordinator is responsible for monitoring, tracking, working with young people and families and liaising with Guidance and Year Heads to support attendance at school. This provides oversight of attendance with an opportunity to build trusting relationships with family members and each young person, responding quickly to family needs.

What was the impact of this action?

Attendance and engagement have improved for most cohorts.

3.3 Improvement in skills and sustained positive school leaver destinations for all young people

The 2023/24 National Initial Leaver Destination Report shows that 96.5% of the 2629 Highland school leavers entered an initial positive destination on leaving school with 94.2% sustaining a positive destination 6 months later. Both sets of statistics are above the National average.

This positive impact is supported by Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) improvement activity embedded into a number of strategic plans across the council, included in portfolios within The Highland Council Delivery Plan and some notable achievements are detailed below:

- Improved approaches to destination planning in schools with better partnership working with schools, Skills Development Scotland and DYW. There is improved sharing of information and consistent training to support experiential career learning.
- Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) delivery in Highland schools continues to show strong growth. An upward trajectory continued, with current figures indicating that around 10% of the Senior Phase cohort are now participating in 10 out of the 15 available FA frameworks across SCQF levels 4, 5, and 6.
- As part of the Council Future Workforce workstream a Paid Summer Placement Pilot ran over the summer holidays, offering seven Senior Phase pupils four weeks of real-world work experience across six council services. Participants earned the Scottish Living Wage and received structured training, mentoring, and exposure to career pathways in local government and regional development.

3.4 Improvement in attainment, particularly literacy and numeracy

All schools now have experienced training in Literacy for All. This allows a whole school approach to tracking literacy difficulties starting at the end of Primary 1, so that by Primary 4 much evidence has been gathered as to where the difficulties lie and what intervention is required to provide the necessary support. This is becoming embedded in most schools now. Training is now available online to all schools for use as refresher training or for staff who are new to the school.

The National Improving Writing Programme is proving impactful in school across the Highlands. This session we have trained cohorts three and four bringing us to having 37 schools involved. We have recruited an additional four NIWP Local Leads (all headteachers) who will be trained to help to ensure the stability of the programme. Overall, we have seen an average 27.5% increase in the A Curriculum for Excellence Level (ACEL) data from the predicted data for the classes who have been involved in the programme.

All secondary schools and some primary schools have undertaken self-evaluation activity using the Northern Alliance learning and teaching toolkit. As a result, they now have clear plans for improvement in learning and teaching.

“Literacy Deep Dive” videos that explore specific aspects of primary literacy teaching have been created to support new teachers, those teaching a new stage, and support staff by offering clear, accessible guidance on key literacy practices.

Numeracy

All schools now have access to an updated Highland Numeracy Progression. This allows for adequate coverage of all numeracy and mathematics organisers building on skills and knowledge progressively across BGE. They have been supplemented with links to recorded training sessions, Summary Guidance documents, example activities, and resources. Four schools opted into in-person support provided by Development Officers to plan, model use of progression, advise on resources, support with analysis and evaluate of assessments and improving attainment.

A professional learning network for Early Years, Primary and Secondary practitioners was established following Highland Numeracy Champions programme in 2023 - 24. Practitioners attended six twilight sessions across the year. Sessions were well attended, with each session averaging thirty participants. Members were encouraged to take part in discussions and to be willing to share their ideas and suggestions, creating a network of peer support and collaborative learning.

3.5 Leadership & Professional Learning

Across Early Learning and Childcare settings, the National Induction resource has been accessed by staff to promote foundation knowledge and identify pathways for professional developments. Practitioners have reported improved confidence in delivering quality experiences and opportunities for children, understanding their roles and responsibilities and feel they have the underpinning knowledge and skills as they undertake the relevant qualifications to meet registration requirements.

Probationers have a comprehensive programme in place to support professional development and to help them develop their learning and teaching practice. 23 out of our 37 Primary 24/25 Probationers secured posts and 15 out of our 24 Secondary 24/25.

Lead On is a 15-month professional learning programme. Participants also supported to engage in a research-based change initiative in their own school that will provide the vehicle through which they can practice their developing leadership skills. The programme has GTCS professional recognition as a verified Masters Level course, meeting the standards required for teachers studying at a higher level. 16 course participants successfully completed the course with 5 of the teachers receiving professional recognition for their study and work.

Evaluations show that 100% of new and acting headteachers stated that they were well supported or very well supported as a result of the induction programme.

Staff across schools benefited from a wide range of learning and development opportunities and a few evaluations comments are highlighted below.

"The course helped to give me more confidence when helping the children understand maths and showed me different ways of helping them."

"I feel it is important to know your children well and to be aware of barriers they may face regarding their learning in literacy. The course has made me think carefully about the different areas of literacy where problems may occur."

"All good, very informative Found the elements on "what the developing brain needs: moderate resolved stress, responsive care (mind -minded), physical care & play stimulation", and highlighting staff supporting child to develop self-regulation of stress as child unable to do this within staff support very helpful and useful".

4. EDUCATION & LEARNING IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2025/26

Priorities for Session 2025/2026 are detailed below in the Education and Learning Improvement Plan and have been developed as part of The Highland Council Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy. This is based on four key improvement themes: Leadership; Learning and Teaching; Curriculum; and Analysis of Data for Improvement. In addition, three foundation principles underpin these themes: Parental Involvement and Engagement; Health and Wellbeing including Relationships and Behaviour; and Inclusive Practice/Additional Support Needs.

4.1 Theme: Leadership

Overall aim: All school leaders will engage with the refreshed offer and drive forward the raising attainment and achievement in their own school context.

Improvement Outcomes	Planned Action	How will we know?	National Improvement Framework (NIF) Priority
By June 2026 all leaders, teachers and practitioners will have a heightened awareness of and engagement with the RAAS.	Review and refresh Headteacher/Middle Leaders engagement with a focus on leading improvement in learning and teaching, curriculum, and use of data including leadership of Early Learning and Childcare.	Headteacher induction will include core modules on the raising attainment strategy and poverty related raising attainment gap. Probationer training will include core modules on the raising attainment strategy and poverty related raising attainment gap.	Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.
	National professional learning offers will be delivered as part of leadership offer.		Improvement in achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy.
	All Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) will have a focus on Raising Attainment Strategy and Closing the Poverty related Attainment Gap including Induction programme for new Headteacher, Middle Leaders and Probationer Teachers.	Headteacher Development Sessions will have a focus on data analysis for improvement and improvement methodologies.	
	Review and refresh current Collaborative	Feedback demonstrates an increased	

Improvement Framework to ensure 3-18 approach in readiness for consistent implementation across all eight areas.	awareness of the RAAS agenda at all levels of the system.
Plan opportunities across all eight areas to look outward within and out with THC.	Quality Indicators 1.3 and 3.1 will show an improving picture as part of external scrutiny inspections.
Implement school meetings planner, creating a variety of forums.	Gaelic Network established and well attended
Investigate establishment of Gaelic School Leaders Network.	

4.2 Theme: Learning & Teaching

Overall: There is improved practice in learning and teaching across schools and more consistent approaches to moderation and assessment.

Improvement Outcomes	Action	How will we know?	NIF Priority
By June 2026 school will have engaged with robust self-evaluation and improvement activity around Quality Indicators 2.3 and Learning, Teaching and Assessment QI within the ELC Quality Improvement Framework.	All schools identify Learning Teaching and Assessment (LTA) theme to improve based on evidence of need. Using the Northern Alliance toolkit school staff will answer all questions within the chosen theme to identify gaps and narrow focus for improvement. Create LTA policy for all schools to personalise. Short Life Working Group to review L&T Framework to ensure aligns with new policy. Review the Equity and Excellence Lead role in ELC, in line with the review commissioned by	Improved scores from baseline data. Increase school evaluations for Learning Teaching and Assessment Quality Indicator 2.3. Quality Improvement Visit records show improvements in LTA as a result. Feedback from children and young people and families. Highland wide annual survey demonstrating	Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people. Improvement in achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Scot Gov to identify impacts.	improved learning experiences.
Strategic roll out of the LTA policy through engagement with whole school programme.	All schools will have a Learning & Teaching policy in place consistently applied by all staff.
LTA focus for Quality Visits across identified schools.	Consistent approaches to observations of learning inform school self-evaluation and improvement planning.
All CLPL opportunities with a focus on LTA element (specifically Literacy and Numeracy) take cognisance of research and Education Scotland advice.	CLPL overview in place to support development of Learning and Teaching with ongoing monitoring of uptake and pre/post evaluations from participants.
All schools to complete Highland Council Assessment and Moderation self-evaluation toolkit to inform moderation strategy at school and (Associated School Group) ASG level.	
Gaelic standards will be incorporated into all above.	

4.3 Theme: Curriculum

Overall aim: The offer experienced by children and young people across schools encompasses the 4 capacities and the totality of the curriculum.

Improvement Outcome	Action	How will we know?	NIF Priority
By June 2026, all schools will have a heightened awareness of the National Curriculum Improvement Cycle and	Establish overview of staff who are engaging in CIC at national level, engage with them in progressing curricular areas as technical frameworks develop.	Increasing number of practitioners involved in work at national level.	Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education.
	Develop Literacy and Numeracy Framework	Curricular leads established for subject areas, with staff from all	Improvement in children and

consider how it impacts on their improvement journey.	further to ensure with 3-18 pathway considered. Primary schools will create or revisit their curriculum rationale with focus on developing learning across the 4 contexts. Establish routine curricular review across Highland. Secondary curriculum support groups to be established and supported to hold INSET training in February. Deliver professional learning linked to national work on Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC). CLPL will take cognisance of national work on CIC, research, and Realising the Ambition in primary. Develop play pedagogy across the early stages of Primary starting with Primary 1. Establish play strategy and create play (interaction, experiences, and spaces) audit tool for use across identified ELC and Primary 1 classrooms. Gaelic will be considered within all of the above actions.	schools attending the Inset sessions. All schools will use Highland literacy and numeracy frameworks to inform planning and assessment. More than 60% of primary schools will report consistent use of the Emerging Literacy approach in Early Level. All primary schools will have an agreed curriculum rationale in place with processes for review. Headteacher and middle leader development sessions will have a focus CIC. The ELC/CLPL Framework will be updated and reviewed by June 2026. CLPL overview in place to support curriculum developments with ongoing monitoring of uptake and pre/post evaluations from participants.	young people's health and wellbeing. Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people. Improvement in achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy.
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4.4 Theme: Use of Data

Overall aim: Leaders/School staff will systematically use data effectively to drive forward school improvement.

Improvement Outcome	Planned Action	Measure	NIF Priority
By June 2026, all staff use data to influence both children and young people progress, and the improvements required to raise attainment.	Use developmental overview data to plan next steps and progression for children in ELC and Primary 1.	Increased number of children meeting all milestones on entry to P1.	Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.
	Evaluate the current Primary Highland tracking system, identify necessary improvement, and refresh as required.	Progress & Achievement – data entry completed and Progress & Achievement dashboard template in place for all schools.	Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people.
	Continue to develop the Secondary Highland tracking system.		
	Tracking, Monitoring and Reporting Policy finalised and implemented consistently across all schools.	All schools complete their annual Attainment Template.	Improvement in achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy.
	Further develop a data dashboard for all schools. All schools issued with a data pack to support their improvement journey.	Attendance at data clinics for all Headteachers. (P&A Dashboard Clinics)	
	Build system to ensure heightened awareness and celebration of effective practice.	Attendance at Insight Analysis training delivered for all secondaries.	
	Develop a self-evaluation programme “Improving Highland”. Work with school leaders to agree system to capture and record self-evaluation activity conducted throughout the year ensuring full QI coverage over 3-5 year cycle.	Attendance of class teacher analysis training delivered– Feb inset day Improved confidence and support around	

Design a local authority performance calendar of analysis to support progress towards targets. AQIM Quality Assurance calendar/ Revised Collaborative Improvement Framework. Working group with Highland Associate Assessors to develop rigorous system of quality assurance/improvement activity.	inspection school processes – measure HT confidence before/after training. CLPL with a focus on data analysis will be incorporated into all networks.
Develop a training strategy to improve knowledge and understanding of school inspection processes. Associate Assessors to co-construct / lead local area delivery.	Risk management system tracking shows improvements in data through Universal, Focused, and Intensive support.
CLPL opportunities will be available at all levels to ensure effective use of systems to support data analysis for improvement.	Improved school self-evaluation and average Education Scotland evaluations.
Schools will use pupil surveys (e.g., Lifestyle Survey data) and consultations, to inform and monitor the impact of decision making and interventions.	Increasing levels of profiles across Early Level show evidence of consistent use of early level literacy and numeracy progressions.
School level stretch aims will be set as part of data analysis for improvement on an annual basis.	Individual school level data show improvement and moving towards closing the poverty related attainment gaps.
Use all inspection feedback to prioritise and promote improvement across all schools and ELC, learning shared across Highland.	

4.5 Theme: Health and Wellbeing

Overall aim: To develop a Health and Wellbeing Framework (HWB) and associated plan

Improvement Outcome	Planned Action	Measure	NIF Priority
By April 2026 HWB Framework will be launched.	HWB Framework will be modelled on the national framework, with actions co-created by staff, wider professionals, parents, and children.	HTs will be familiar with the framework and use it to inform actions within their SIP. (Number of SIPs referring to the framework).	Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing.
Restorative approaches will be embedded as a positive means of creating, repairing, and restoring positive relationships in schools and ELCs	Staff at all levels in schools and ELCs will be encouraged to refresh their knowledge of these approaches through attendance at training delivered by Psychological Services and follow-up coaching conversations.	Promoting Positive Relationships and Restorative Practices offered to all ELC, teaching and support staff have positive training evaluation results and impacts can be seen in Quality visits across participating schools.	
Improved attendance across all sectors.	Secondary schools' attendance framework will be embedded. Refresh Primary guidance. Creation of an Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) website by the Psychological Service to support staff who attend EBSA training and support sessions.	EBSA website will be created and populated with relevant resources. Monitor usage/downloads etc through 2025-26	
	Establish a primary fortnightly attendance process which will support school leaders, area teams, and families to improve primary attendance.		

4.6 Theme: Parental Involvement and Engagement (PIE)

Overall aim: Implement PIE strategy

Improvement Outcome	Planned Action	Measure	NIF Priority
By April 2026 schools and ELC have engaged with the PIE 3-year action plan and parent forums will have raised awareness of the PIE strategy.	Investigate the formation of Area Parent Council forums. Identify an effective online resource for parents.	Survey responses from parents, HSHA and PHRG meetings Focus group feedback from HTs, PC group, HSHA, PHRG agree on identified resource.	Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people. Improvement in achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy.
Develop Parent Councils	Promote the establishment of Parent Councils in schools and support their operation. Explore the options for family learning support for schools within existing Council and partner resource. GME provision will be considered as relevant school context.	Increased number of parent councils established in school. By June 2026 schools and AQIM cluster teams are aware of available family learning resources for their area for session 2026- 27 and are able to start partnership work in the new session.	As above

4.7 Theme: Inclusive Practice/Additional Support Needs

Overall aim: Developing & enhancing inclusive practice

Improvement Outcome	Planned Action	Measure	NIF Priority
By June 2026, the pupil support working group will undertake a review of pupil support staff roles and deployment. This will also include factors to support effective workforce development.	Review the job roles within pupil support workforce in line with needs following consultation on the role and deployment of Pupil Support Staff.	Revised job roles in place with career pathways.	Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education.
	Principal Teachers of ASN appointed to 8 AQIM areas along with a PSA lead practitioner in each area to support workforce development.	Principal Teacher in Post in 8 AQIM Areas.	Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing
	Development and delivery of an Inclusive Practice Programme open to all teachers delivered by members of the Psychological Service, HTs and Central Officers.	By September 2025 there will be a sign up from thirty attendees for the initial pilot of the Inclusive Practice Programme, with 90% reporting positive impact on practice. Evaluation report will enable consideration of running the programme annually.	Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.
	The implementation of the ASL Staffing Standard will be reviewed during the session.	Staffing standard reviewed.	
By June 2026, schools and ELC will have been supported to review their Relationships and Behaviour policies in line with Scottish	The Local Authority will update its policies on improving relationships and behaviour in schools.	Revised Local Authority relationships and behaviour in place.	
	All schools will have an update relationships and behaviour policy that will be co-created by staff, pupils, and parents. The CIRCLE resource to	Revised relationships and behaviour in place in all schools.	

Government guidance	support Inclusive Learning and Collaborative working will be promoted to Primary and Secondary schools with training available from the Educational Psychology Service.	Training on Circle resource delivered to school staff.
	Professional accreditation for de-escalation and escape strategies will be reviewed.	Number of schools using this approach.
	Stage intervention approach refreshed so that all schools understand and implement this approach to supporting learners.	Review will have been completed,
By June 2026, GIRFEC principles will be routinely used by all schools and ELC to ensure that all practitioners are working to support learners reach their full potential.	Establish Integrated Children's Services meetings will be held on a regular basis in each ASGs.	All Named Persons in schools and ELC managers will have attended the refreshed GIRFEC training delivered by the Psychological Service.
		Children's views will be heard and recorded in 95% of Child's Plans.
		The format of integrated children services meeting agreed Implementation plan agreed and meeting taken place in all ASG.

It should be noted that all work to progress improvement in skills and sustained positive school leaver destinations for all young people is detailed through The Highland Council's Delivery Plan and associated plan, My Highland Future.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation of Progress

The outcomes and associated actions outlined within this plan will be closely monitored by the Education and Learning Chief Officers, along with Area Quality Improvement Managers. Progress and impact will be monitored each term, with an annual update provided to Education & Learning Committee.

A final evaluation report will be contained within the 2026/27 Education and Learning Improvement Plan.

Appendix 3 – SQA Senior Phase Attainment 2024-25

1. Summary

This supplementary report provides more detailed analysis of secondary school senior phase attainment based on the set of data arising from the qualifications taken by young people in Highland secondary schools during the school session 2024/25. It is helpful to consider this report alongside the Education Service National Improvement Plan 2025-2026 which considers the full breadth of services provided in the area, including those supporting children and families in a range of ways which may not relate directly to school-based attainment and achievement but act to support children and young people to achieve their fullest potential.

2. Overview

The measures reported are based on SQA attainment at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. Literacy and numeracy are reported using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The SCQF measure includes National Qualifications, National Progression Awards and Skills for Work courses.

Insight Benchmarking Measures – Local Measures

The exam results are available to schools in August each year and analysis of these results for cohort groups appear within the Insight Senior Phase Benchmarking toolkit in September. It is possible to profile school performance within the local measures and in the breadth and depth of awards gained by learners on a cohort-by-cohort basis (i.e. of S4, S5 and S6 pupils). This provides a holistic approach to:

- Improving attainment in Literacy and Numeracy
- Improving attainment for all
- Tackling disadvantage by improving the attainment of lower attainers relative to higher attainers.

Virtual Comparator

In each of the measures, performance of Highland schools and learners is compared to national attainment and that of our virtual comparator (VC). The virtual comparator is made up of pupils from schools in other local authorities who have similar characteristics to those in Highland schools in terms of factors including stage, gender, additional support needs, and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Breadth and Depth

Insight allows us to profile the breadth and depth of qualifications completed by learners in each year in the senior phase. The attainment data presented to Committee within this report is collated from SQA results across the senior phase and will cover the following:

- S4 breadth and depth attainment at SCQF level 5 and National 5
- S5 breadth and depth attainment at SCQF level 6 and Higher
- S6 breadth and depth attainment at SCQF levels 6 and 7 plus, Higher and Advanced Higher

Tariff Scores

Each qualification on the Scottish Certificate and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is attributed a number of tariff points. The higher level of qualification, the more tariff points are attributed. Each pupil gains a number of points that represents the number and level of qualifications they have gained. This report uses complementary tariff points, which measures a fixed volume of learning. Complementary tariff points allow for comparison across Scotland, regardless of differences in curricular models.

Due to the differences in certification arrangements over the past five years, the INSIGHT national benchmarking toolkit contains the following advice note:

“There have been different approaches to awarding in each year since 2019. This means that comparisons of attainment between years should be treated with significant caution and do not allow for conclusions to be drawn on changes in education performance during this time.”

Insight advise that attainment figures can be used:

- As an accurate reflection of learner attainment in different years.
- To make factual comparisons of the proportions of learners attaining at different SCQF levels over time.
- To compare the attainment of different cohorts within years.

But attainment figures should not be used:

- As an indication that performance in 2019/20 or 2020/21 or 2021/2022 or 2022/23 or 2023/24 was better or worse than in previous years, without further evidence.
- Without taking full account of the different approaches to certification in recent years.

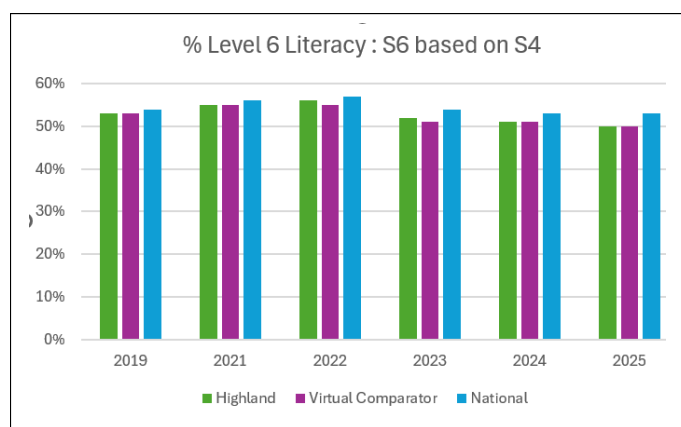
3. Attainment in the Senior Phase 2024-25 – Local Measures

3.1 Improving Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy

The percentage of S6 pupils achieving literacy at level 6 is 50% which is in line with the virtual comparator with numeracy at Level 6 at 26% which is above the virtual comparator. Level 6 literacy in S5 is at 44% which is below the virtual comparator and has declined from 2024. Level 6 numeracy at 24% which is in line with the virtual comparator. In S4, Level 5 literacy is 72% which has declined from 75% in 2024 and is below the virtual comparator. Level 5 numeracy has increased to 62% from 57% in 2024 but remains below the virtual comparator. Further analysis of the literacy attainment in S5 and S6 will take place, with targeted support offered to schools around this measure.

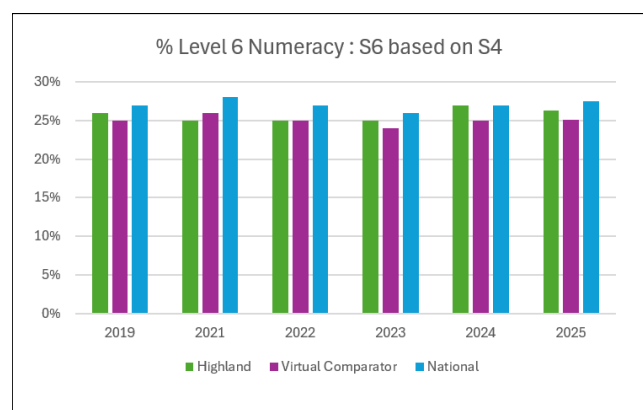
Attainment at SCQF Level 6 Literacy in S6

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	53%	55%	56%	52%	51%	50%
Virtual Comparator	53%	55%	55%	51%	51%	50%
National	54%	56%	57%	54%	53%	53%



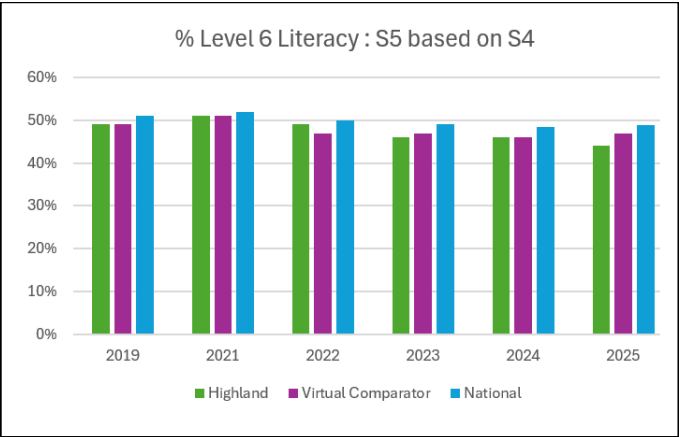
Attainment at SCQF Level 6 Numeracy in S6

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	26%	25%	25%	25%	27%	26%
Virtual Comparator	25%	26%	25%	24%	25%	25%
National	27%	28%	27%	26%	27%	28%



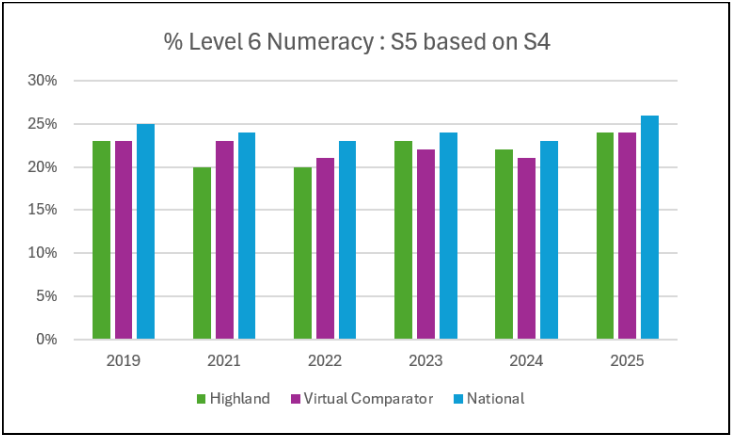
Attainment at SCQF Level 6 Literacy in S5

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	49%	51%	49%	46%	46%	44%
Virtual Comparator	49%	51%	47%	47%	46%	47%
National	51%	52%	50%	49%	49%	49%



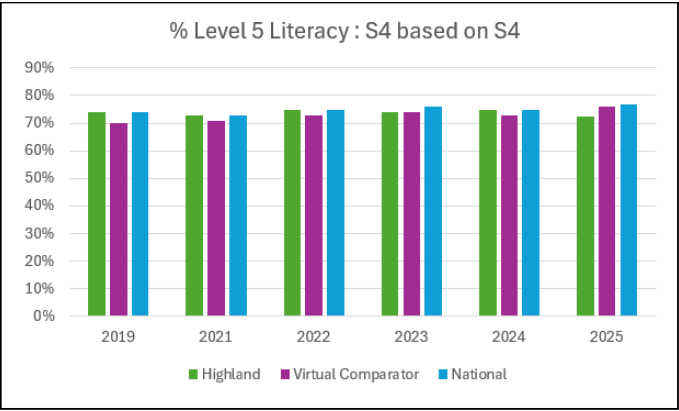
Attainment at SCQF Level 6 Numeracy in S5

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	23%	20%	20%	23%	22%	24%
Virtual Comparator	23%	23%	21%	22%	21%	24%
National	25%	24%	23%	24%	23%	26%



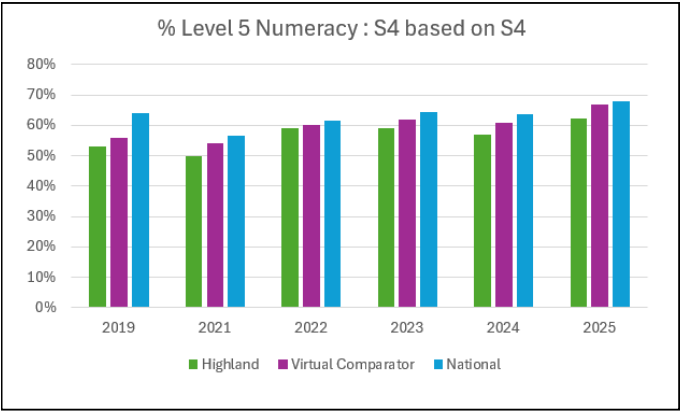
Attainment at SCQF Level 5 Literacy in S4

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	74%	73%	75%	74%	75%	72%
Virtual Comparator	70%	71%	73%	74%	73%	76%
National	74%	73%	75%	76%	75%	77%



Attainment at SCQF Level 5 Numeracy in S4

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	53%	50%	59%	59%	57%	62%
Virtual Comparator	56%	54%	60%	62%	61%	67%
National	64%	56%	62%	64%	64%	68%

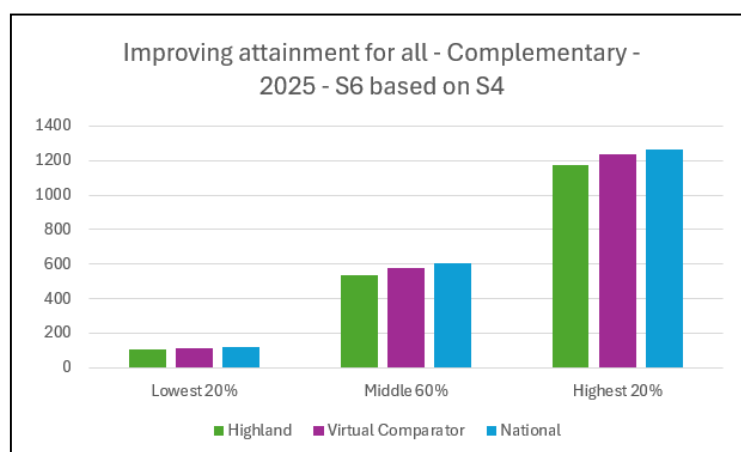


3.2 Improving attainment for all

This measure demonstrates the attainment of the lowest performing 20%, the middle 60% and the highest performing 20%. This is an important measure as it directs attention to the performance of all learners. In S6 the performance of the lowest 20% and middle 60% are in line with the virtual comparator, while the performance of the highest 20% is lower than the virtual comparator. In S5, the attainment of the lowest 20%, middle 60% and highest 20% are in line with the virtual comparator. In S4 the lowest performing 20% is lower than the virtual comparator while the middle 60% and the highest 20% are in line with the virtual comparator.

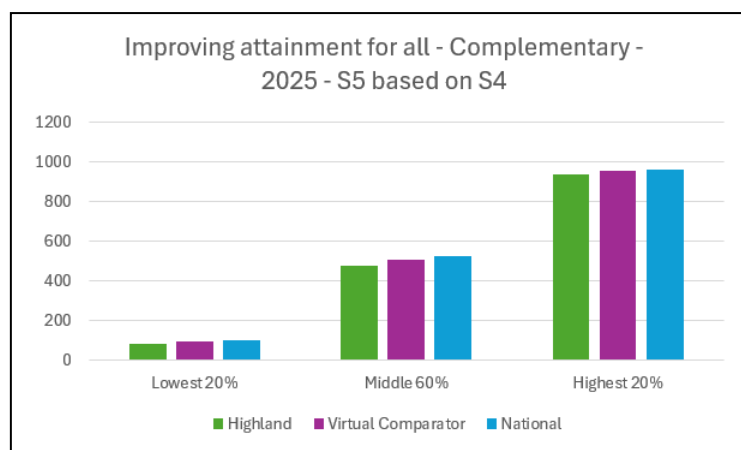
Attainment for all in S6

Improving attainment for all - Complementary - 2025 - S6 based on S4			
	Highland	Virtual Comparator	National
Lowest 20%	103	115	120
Middle 60%	539	575	604
Highest 20%	1173	1238	1266



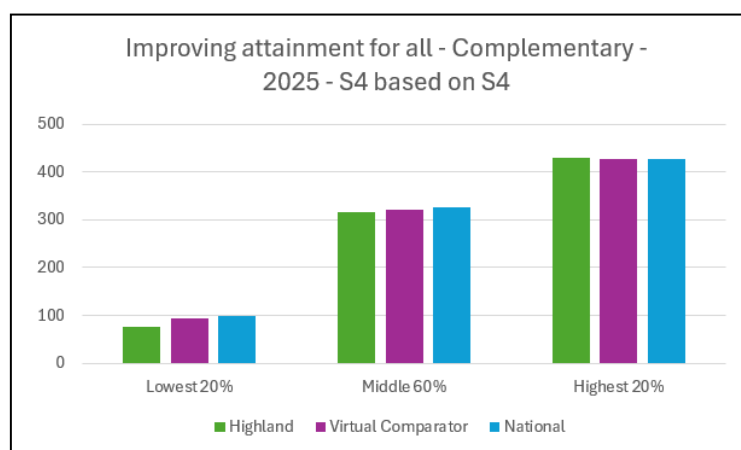
Attainment for all in S5

Improving attainment for all – S5 Average Complementary Tarriff Point 2025			
	Highland	Virtual Comparator	National
Lowest 20%	84	99	104
Middle 60%	480	507	525
Highest 20%	937	954	956



Attainment for all in S4

Improving attainment for all - Complementary - 2025 - S4 based on S4			
	Highland	Virtual Comparator	National
Lowest 20%	76	95	99
Middle 60%	315	322	326
Highest 20%	429	427	428



3.3 Breadth and Depth Attainment data for Year Stage based measures for 2024-25

The breadth and depth measure provides information on the percentage of the cohort who achieved any number of awards at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. These are known as 'breadth and depth' measures. This data is looked at in conjunction with the Insight measures to gain a broader understanding of attainment

Attainment at SCQF Level 6 & 7 in S6

Attainment in S6 is below the virtual comparator for all key benchmarking measures and has declined from 2024. The performance of this cohort in S5 in 2024 was also lower than the virtual comparator. All schools are aware of the need to focus on the attainment profile of S6 with a key emphasis this year being placed on attendance and number of subjects being studied.

1+ Awards at SCQF Level 7 in S6

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	23.2%	21.5%	22.0%	20.9%	16.9%
Virtual Comparator	26.5%	26.3%	23.5%	23.8%	23.3%
National	27.5%	27.1%	25.7%	25.3%	25.3%

5 + Awards at SCQF Level 6 in S6

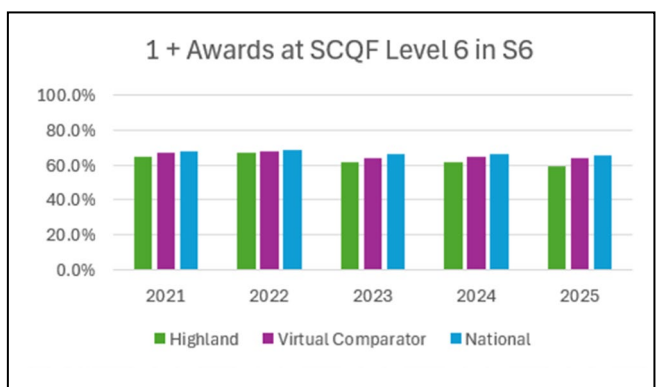
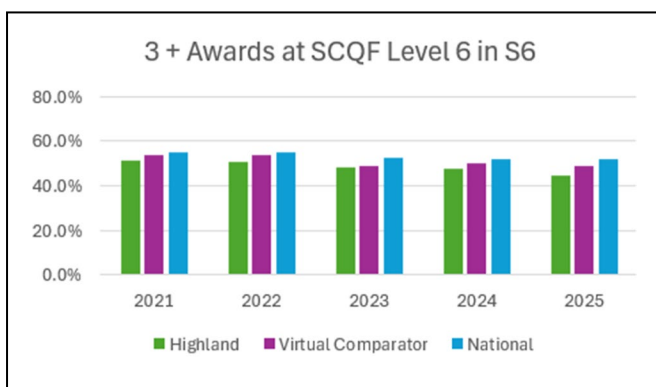
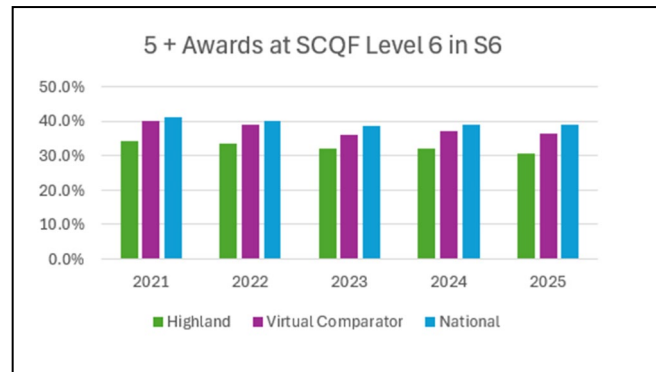
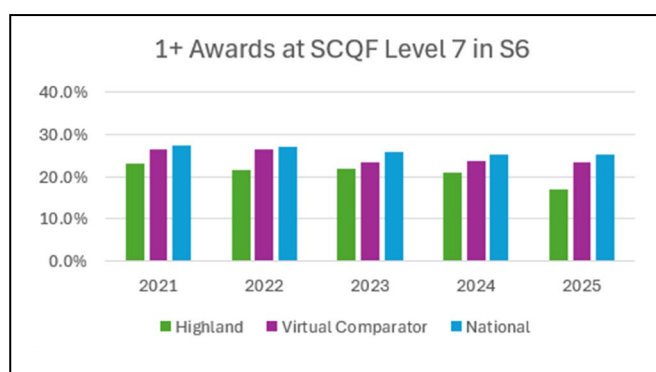
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	34.4%	33.3%	32.0%	32.2%	30.4%
Virtual Comparator	39.9%	39.0%	36.0%	37.2%	36.4%
National	41.0%	40.1%	38.5%	38.8%	39.1%

3 + Awards at SCQF Level 6 in S6

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	51.5%	50.6%	48.2%	47.4%	44.8%
Virtual Comparator	53.7%	53.8%	48.7%	50.3%	49.1%
National	54.9%	54.9%	52.4%	51.8%	51.8%

1 + Awards at SCQF Level 6 in S6

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	64.9%	67.3%	62.1%	62.0%	59.2%
Virtual Comparator	66.8%	67.5%	64.2%	64.7%	64.0%
National	67.7%	68.7%	66.5%	66.1%	65.9%



Attainment at SCQF Level 6 in S5

The percentage of Highland pupils achieving 5+ awards at SCQF Level 6 in S5 is 19.0% which is an increase of 1.9% from 2024. The percentage achieving 3+ awards at SCQF Level 5 in S5 is 38.9% which is a 1.0% increase from 2024. The 1+ awards SCQF Level 6 in S5 are at 56.4% which is in line with 2024. Highland's SCQF level 6 attainment in S5 is behind the virtual comparator.

5 + Awards at SCQF Level 6 in S5

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	18.2%	18.1%	18.9%	17.1%	19.0%
Virtual Comparator	23.0%	22.0%	23.3%	23.0%	25.0%
National	25.0%	24.2%	25.0%	25.0%	26.9%

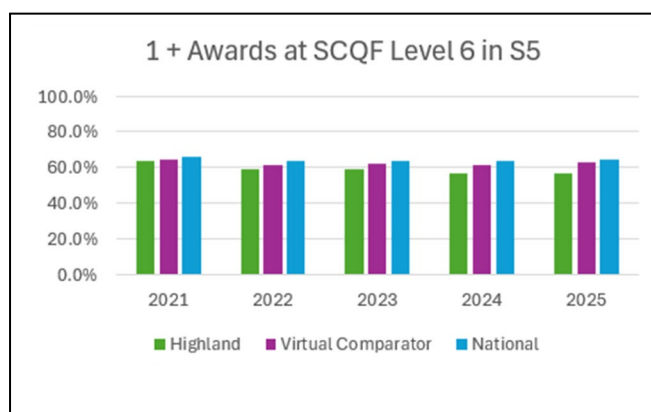
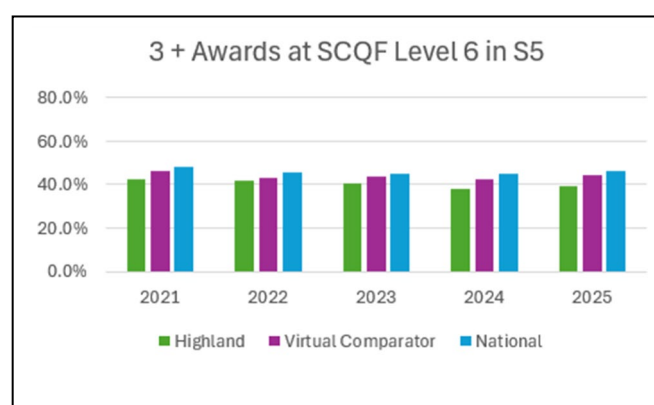
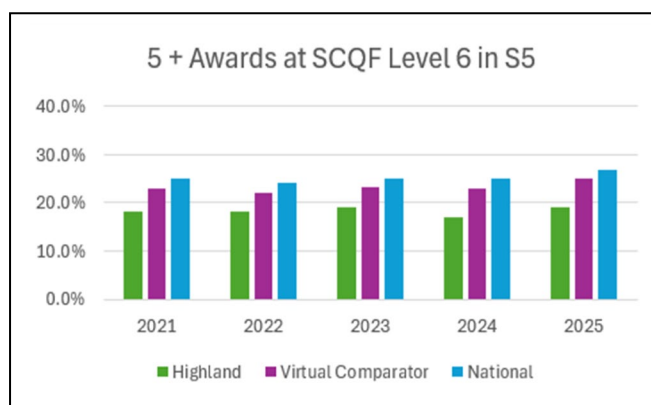
3 + Awards at SCQF Level 6 in S5

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	42.4%	41.6%	40.6%	37.9%	38.9%
Virtual Comparator	46.4%	43.2%	43.3%	42.2%	44.1%
National	47.8%	45.7%	45.0%	44.7%	45.9%

1 + Awards at SCQF Level 6 in S5

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	63.8%	59.4%	59.3%	56.7%	56.4%

Virtual Comparator	64.6%	61.2%	62.0%	61.6%	62.7%
National	66.0%	63.8%	63.6%	63.6%	64.5%



Attainment at SCQF Level 5 in S4

The percentage of Highland pupils achieving 5+ awards at SCQF Level 5 in S4 is 52.9% in 2025 which is a 4% increase from 2024. The percentage achieving 3+ awards at SCQF Level 5 in S5 is 68.5% which is a 0.5% increase from 2024. The 1+ awards SCQF Level 5 in S4 is at 82.8% which is in line with 2024. Highland's SCQF level 5 attainment in S4 is behind the virtual comparator in all measure for 2025. In 2024, the 3+ & 1+ SCQF Level 5 awards were in line with the virtual comparator.

5 + Awards at SCQF Level 5 in S4

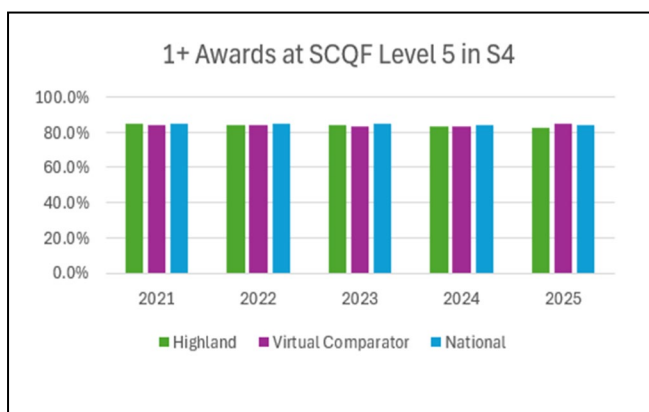
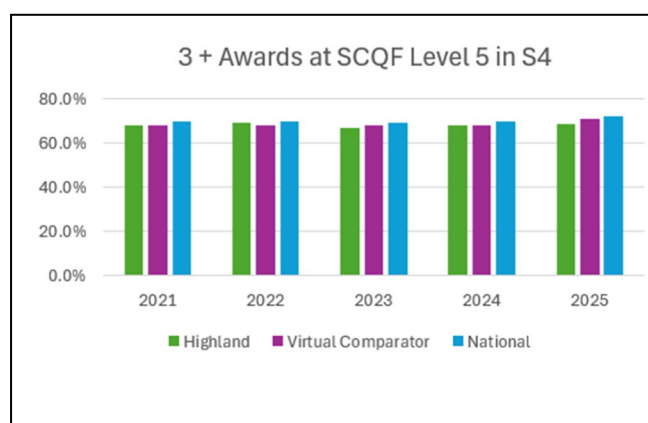
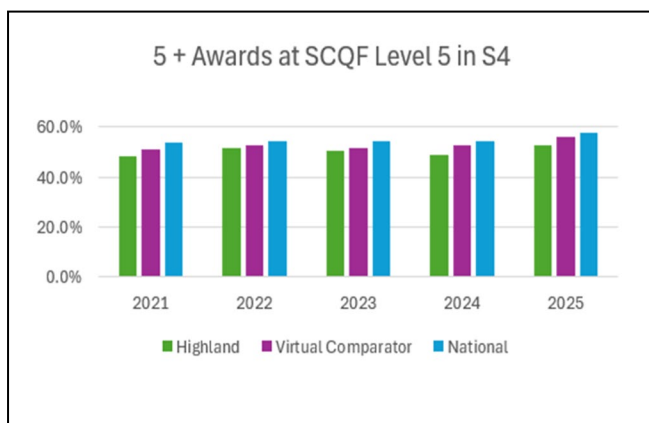
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	48.0%	51.8%	50.5%	48.9%	52.9%
Virtual Comparator	51.0%	52.6%	51.8%	52.6%	56.2%
National	54.0%	54.3%	54.1%	54.4%	57.5%

3 + Awards at SCQF Level 5 in S4

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Highland	68.0%	69.0%	67.0%	68.0%	68.5%
Virtual Comparator	68.0%	68.0%	68.0%	68.0%	71.1%
National	70.0%	70.0%	69.0%	70.0%	72.0%

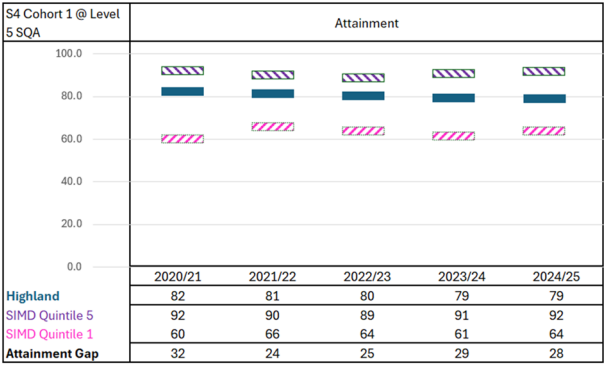
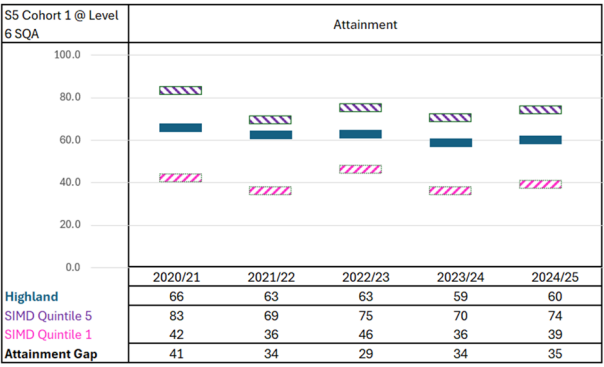
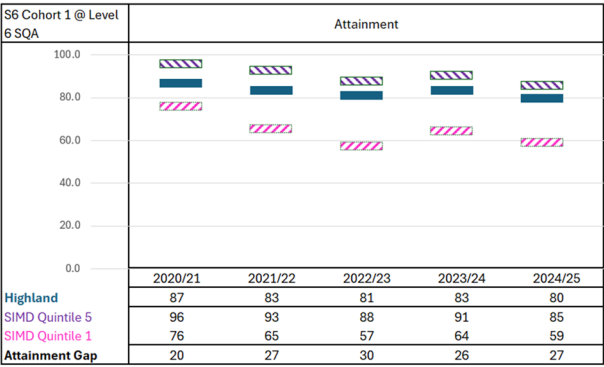
1 + Awards at SCQF Level 5 in S4

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024
Highland	85.0%	84.0%	84.0%	83.0%	82.8%
Virtual Comparator	84.0%	84.0%	83.0%	83.0%	85.0%
National	85.0%	85.0%	85.0%	84.0%	84.0%



Attainment versus deprivation

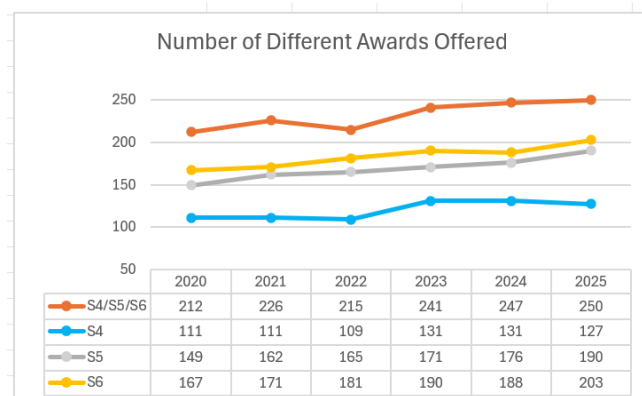
The attainment in 2025 for the S5 Quintile 1 for 1+ awards at SCQF 6 cohort has increased by 3% from 2024. Similarly, the S4 SCQF Level 5 attainment has increased by 4%. The S6 Quintile 1 attainment for 1+ awards at SCQF Level 6 has decreased by 5% in 2024. The gap between the least and most advantaged learners in this cohort has not significantly changed over the for last two years.



3.4 Range of Subjects/Awards

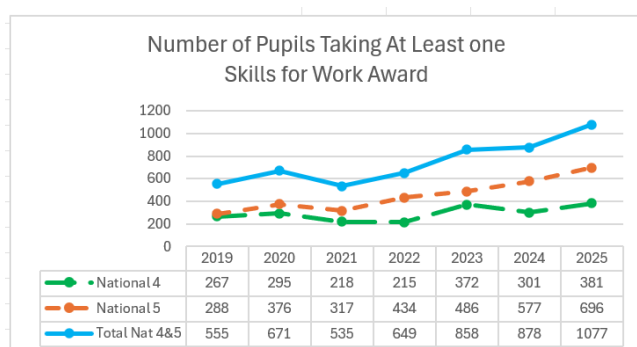
The delivery of the senior phase curriculum in Highland schools has been changing. The number of different accredited subjects/awards taken by S4, S5 and S6 pupils in Highland secondary schools has increased by from 212 different awards in 2020 to 250 awards in 2025. The number of subjects taken at National 4 and 5, Higher and Advanced Higher over the period 2020 to 2025 has remained almost the same.

Highland number of different awards offered



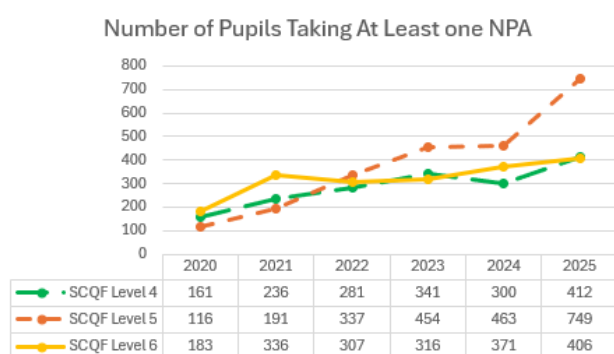
This increase has been because our schools have been widening their curriculum offer to include vocational Skills for Work awards, National Progression Awards (NPA), and Foundation Apprenticeships (FA). Skills for Work courses focus on general employability skills, while NPAs assess a more specific, vocational-based set of skills and knowledge in a particular industry, linked to National Occupational Standards. Foundation Apprenticeships provide work-based learning opportunities for learners in S5 and S6. By spending part of the school week with a learning provider and a local employer, learners work towards a Foundation Apprenticeship alongside their other qualifications such as National 5 and Highers.

The number of pupils taking at least one Skills for Work awards at SCQF level 4 has increased from 267 pupils in 2019 to 381 in 2025 and the number of pupils taking at least one Skills for Work awards at SCQF level 5 increased from 288 in 2019 to 696 in 2025. Examples of Skills for Work courses offered include Rural Skills, Early Learning & Childcare, Automotive Skills and Hospitality.



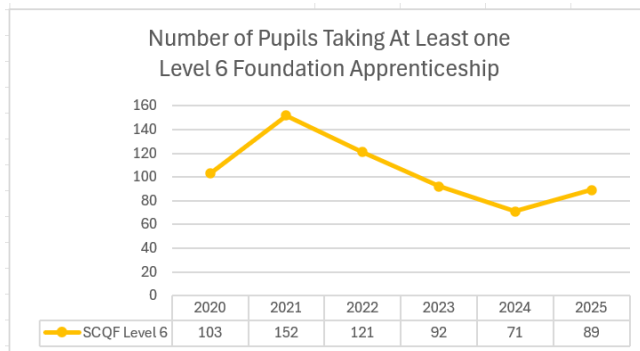
In Highland Schools in 2025, 26 different National Progression Awards were offered at Level 6, these included Scientific Technologies, Exercise & Fitness Leadership and Social Services: Children and Young People. At level 5, 28 different National Progression Awards were offered including Construction Skills, Cyber Security, Furniture Making & Business & Marketing. At Level 4, 14 courses were offered including Professional cookery, Computer Games Development and Aquaculture.

The number of pupils taking at least one National Progression Award at SCQF Level 4 increased from 161 in 2019 to 412 in 2025, at SCQF level 5 increased from 116 in 2019 to 749 in 2025 and at SCQF Level 6 increased from 183 in 2019 to 406 in 2025.



Foundation Apprenticeships are a work-based learning opportunity lasting one or two years, Pupils begin their Foundation Apprenticeship in S5 or S6. Young people spend time out of school with a learning provider, and complete the Foundation Apprenticeship alongside their other subjects like National 5s and Highers. Completion leads to a qualification at the same level of learning as a Higher and can lead to progression on to a job, such as a Modern or Graduate Apprenticeship. For young people, Foundation Apprenticeships are a chance to get a head start on their careers by gaining an industry-recognised qualification, work on real projects and broaden their career options when they leave school. Foundation Apprenticeships offered last year included FA in Business Skills, FA in Civil Engineering, FA in Creative & Digital Media, FA in Information Technology: Software Development, FA in Social Services & Healthcare and FA Social Services: Children and Young People.

The number of pupils taking at least one Foundation Apprenticeship at SCQF Level 6 increased from 103 in 2020 to 152 in 2021. The numbers then reduced to 71 in 2024 partly due to employers been unable to commit to supporting a young person's training following covid. The number has increased in 2025 to 89.



One of the workstreams in the My Highland Future portfolio is to rapidly increase the number of Foundation Apprenticeships offered. As well as providing students with a valuable qualification that supports the next steps on their vocational and academic pathways.