STANDARDS AND QUALITY REPORT
AITHISG INBHEAN IS CÀILEACHD

2025-2026

Thurso High School

In this report the following words are used to describe the numbers and proportions used:

All	Almost all	Most	Majority	Less than half	Few
100%	Over 91%	75% - 90%	50% - 74%	15% - 49%	Up to 15%

Teamwork **R**espect **A**chievement **C**ommitment **K**indness

School Profile

Pròifil na Sgoile

It is important to remember that statistical data alone is not a measure of how well we are doing. All schools are unique. To understand how well we are doing it is important for us to look at a range of different sources.

Thurso High School, built in 1958, is the most northerly secondary school on the Scottish mainland serving the coastal town of Thurso and the west of Caithness. We educate around 710 young people in a truly comprehensive environment and are proud of the social diversity of our catchment. The Headteacher is supported by three Depute Headteachers, seven Curriculum Faculty Heads, four Pupil Support teachers and a Faculty Head of Learning Support.

We have seven associated primary schools covering a wide geographic area. More than 50% of pupils use school transport with some pupils travelling up to twenty miles. Of our current pupils, 43.8% have recognised additional support needs and 10.7% are registered for free school meals.

Attendance has shown improvement in recent sessions and was in line with the national average in 2024/25. Exclusions are generally in line with the national average.

Attainment across the school in literacy and English and numeracy and Mathematics is good. Children achieve appropriate CfE levels in literacy and numeracy and, across the school, a few children are exceeding nationally expected levels. Almost all children who face barriers to learning are making good progress towards meeting their individual targets. Staffing can present a challenge due to our geographical remoteness and there is continual work required in being creative in this area to meet pupils' curricular needs. Despite this we work hard to offer as broad a curriculum as possible, with a strong partnership with our close geographical neighbour North Highland College and use of online provision from the Highland Digital School and E-sGoil digital learning. Almost all of our leavers, 95.7%, move into positive post-school destinations.

Inclusion is a strong feature of our school with all pupils welcomed and valued equally. We have an Enhanced Provision base attended by eleven young people with a range of additional support needs (ASN). This includes young people with severe and complex needs. We aim for all pupils to be supported in appropriate and inclusive settings and pride ourselves on proactively addressing barriers to learning with a Nurture programme that includes a Softstart Base, a Children's Service Worker base with excellent support for pupils, in school Youth Development Officer support and safe space provision and varied further opportunities for pupil support such as an extensive in-school mentoring programme. Our experienced and extremely diligent Pupil Support team provide excellent pastoral support to pupils. We aim to personalise what we offer wherever possible to ensure achievement and wellbeing for all pupils.

We have been a Gaelic Medium school since 2020-21, with one feeder school, Mountpleasant Primary, and a total of 10 pupils in session 2025-26.
There is very good behaviour across the school in general, with staff and pupils working together on agreed and consistently upheld whole school and classroom procedures. Where pupils have greater social, emotional or behavioural needs we work very hard with them, and parents or carers and other partners supporting them, to adapt arrangements that allow them to cope and to support them as fully as possible with this.

Visitors to the school consistently find the pupils of Thurso High School to be polite and helpful, with a warm, friendly atmosphere in the school. We also consistently receive excellent reports of the conduct of our pupils when away from school on trips or outings. We have good school and parental support through our Parent Council.

All our staff, teaching and non-teaching, are valued members of our community and all are highly committed to providing the best for the pupils, who in turn contribute to the school in many ways including through our Prefect and House system which promotes our core values of Teamwork, Respect, Attainment, Commitment and Kindness.

Data relating to our context:

Pupil Numbers	Attendance	Teacher Numbers
709	90%	51.02

S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
136	135	132	131	110	65

SIMD Q1	SIMD Q2	SIMD Q3	SIMD Q4	SIMD Q5	Unknown
0%	19%	41%	40%	0%	0%

ASN	FSM	EAL
43.8%	10.7%	2%

Glossary:
FTE – Full Time Equivalent
SIMD – Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SIMD1 % pupils living in most deprived areas
SIMD5 – % pupils living in least deprive areas
ASN – Additional Support Needs
EAL – percentage of learners whom English is an Additional Language

1

Attainment

Literacy and Numeracy in S1-S3 – Broad General Education -

2024/2025 Proportion of pupils achieving Curriculum for Excellence Levels by the end of S3

Level 3

Reading	Writing	Listening and talking	Numeracy
Almost all	Almost all	Almost all	Almost all

Level 4

Reading	Writing	Listening and talking	Numeracy
Majority	Majority	Majority	Majority

Gaelic Medium 2024/2025 Proportion of pupils achieving expected Curriculum for Excellence Levels by the end of S3

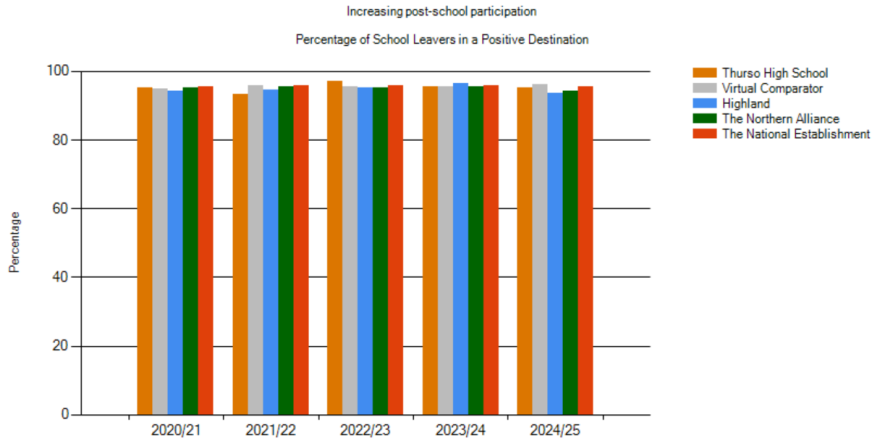
Thurso High School is a Gaelic Medium school but given the small numbers involved it would not be appropriate to report these numbers.

Senior Phase

Working with senior leaders, staff leading literacy have developed a number of very effective targeted interventions to ensure all young people leave school with appropriate literacy qualifications From 2020/21 to 2024/25, almost all young people left school with Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 4 literacy or better and most young people left school with SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. This is significantly higher than the virtual comparator (VC) in three out of the five years. Around half of young people achieved SCQF level 6 or better in literacy, in line with the VC.

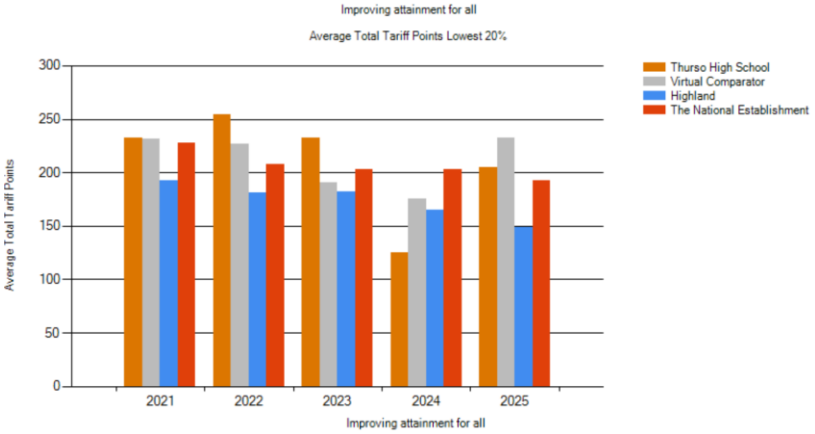
Staff have developed effective approaches to increase the percentages of young people who leave school with an appropriate numeracy qualification. This work helped ensure most young people left school with SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy in 2024/25. Over time this measure is generally in line with, or significantly higher than the VC. Staff have increased the number of pathways for young people to achieve this level and are now presenting more young people for SCQF level 5 or better. A minority of leavers achieved SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy from 2020/21 to 2024/25, significantly higher than the VC in the past two years and is following a three-year pattern of improvement.

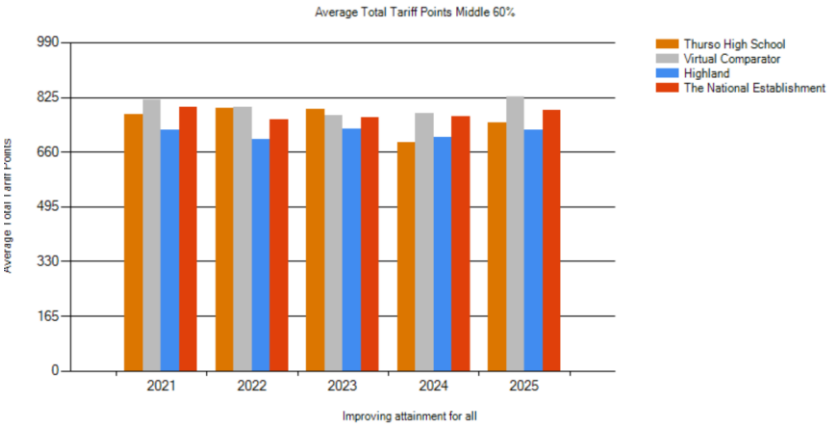
Senior Phase Leavers

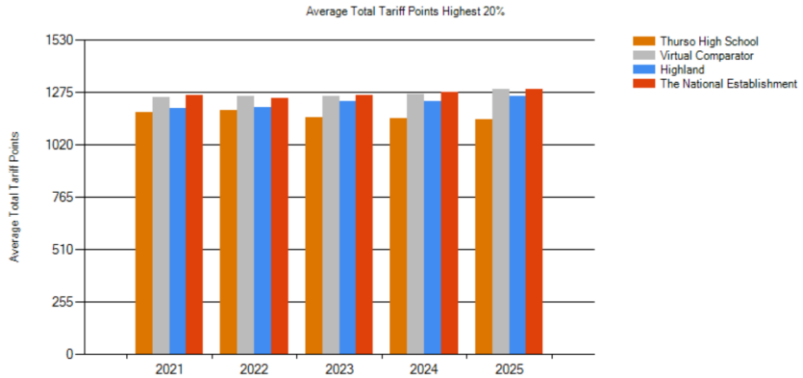


Senior leaders and staff use their extensive knowledge of the local context to prepare young people very well to transition successfully from school. Staff have developed a very well-considered range of effective partnerships across all curricular areas. Staff and partners identify early and support swiftly a few young people who are at risk of not progressing to a positive destination when leaving school. Young people value greatly the well-planned university trip which helps to develop the skills and resilience they need for moving away from the area. These highly impactful approaches result in almost all young people between 2020/21 and 2024/25 progressing to a positive destination on leaving school, in line with the VC.

Cohorts – Attainment for All





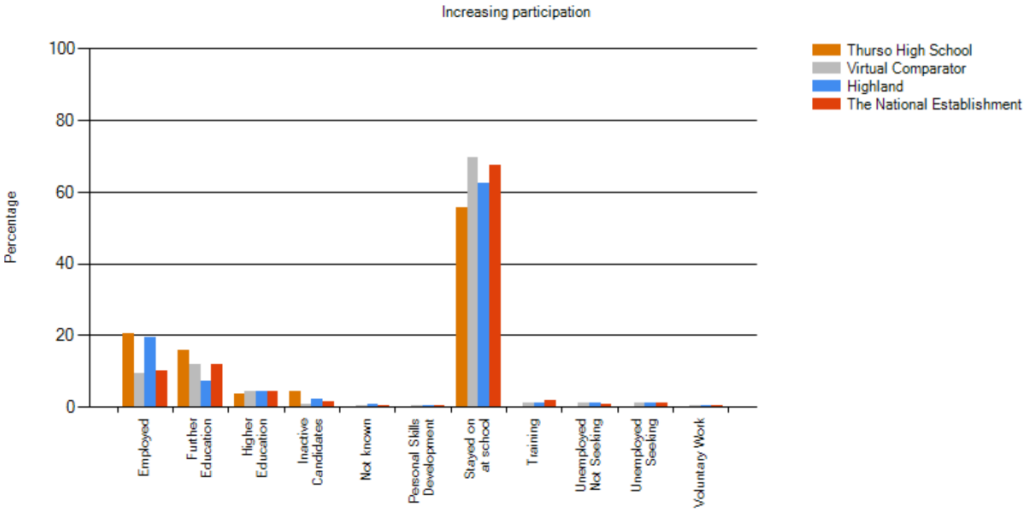


At S4 the performance of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of learners in S4 was in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25. This has shown an improving pattern from 2022/23 to 2024/25. The attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people in S4, is in line with the VC for the five-year period.

At S5, based on the S5 roll, the attainment of the lowest 20% is in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25; the middle attaining 60% of young people have attained in line with the VC. Based on the S5 roll, the highest attaining 20% of young people is in line with VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25.

At S6, based on the S6 roll, the performance of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60%, is in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2023/24 but is much lower than the VC in 2024/25. Based on S6 roll, the highest 20% is in line from 2020/21 to 2023/24 but significantly lower in 2024/25.

Destinations of School Leavers



SDS and DYW staff work very closely with school staff to monitor and support pupil forward plans from S3 onwards and to create career information and opportunities for all learners through 16+ data collections and pathway planning, meaning that almost all pupils, including our pupils with ASN and FSM move into positive destinations, in line with VC and National figures.

SMT and Guidance engage very effectively with all partners such as Airport House, Home to Highland, Employability, Primary Mental Health, etc. at all opportunities to support those at risk of not attaining or attending.

All of this partnership work has led to positive destinations for almost all of our leavers. In the past four out of five years the number of pupils moving to positive destinations is above or in line with the VC and almost all leavers since 2017 have progressed to positive destinations. ASN leavers have also almost all progressed to positive destinations, outperforming the VC in every year except 2019–20.

Senior leaders continue to broaden curriculum pathways to align with young people's intended destinations, supported by links with further and higher education, including local further and higher education establishment colleges and a very popular and well attended university visit trip taking over 50% of S6 pupils to visit over 11 Higher educational establishments and UCAS classes to support the application process.

Overall, fewer pupils progress to higher education compared to the VC, while more move into employment or further education than the VC, reflecting the school's geographical context. However, ASN pupils have entered FE at higher rates than the VC for the past five years.

School vision, values and aims

Lèirsinn, luachan agus amasan na sgoile

Vision

For every pupil to achieve their potential in a safe, happy and caring environment in which all pupils feel valued and accepted.

Values

Teamwork, **R**espect, **A**chievement, **C**ommitment and **K**indness (**TRACK**)

Aims

To create an ethos of kindness and respect so all pupils feel included, supported, resilient and valued

To set high expectations for attainment, achievement, behaviour, attendance and punctuality

To provide quality learning and teaching experiences for all

To provide an engaging, challenging and creative curriculum for all learners

To ensure all pupils leave Thurso High School to a positive and sustained destination

Review of progress of improvement plan projects for session 2025/26

Ath-sgrùdadh air adhartas airson an t-seisein

These projects are linked to the priorities for Scottish Education based on the National Improvement Framework aimed to deliver excellence and equity. Parent/Carer information is available here.

School Priority 1: Improving health and wellbeing; ensuring equality and inclusion	
School Improvement Plan Priority 1	
Summary of progress	**Next steps**
Current school practice has been combined into a Relationships and Behaviour policy in line with the national consequence guidance allowing all staff and partners to be fully aware of, and consistent in, school practice. Continued focus on *Creating a Classroom Culture* whole school professional learning has further enhanced consistency of agreed good behaviours across the school and is improving the habitual nature of these behaviours in our pupils, supporting them to move towards more intrinsic motivation to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Revision of the existing mobile phone policy to a model where use of mobile phones is not allowed at all during the school day has been effected with a high degree of success. As a result there is an improvement in face-to-face interaction at social times and a reduction in peer conflict linked to social media. Overall, the change is contributing positively to a more interactive learning environment and improved pupil wellbeing.	Working to further translate our school values into clear day to day expectations for staff and pupils through defining specific behaviours reflecting our TRACK values; ensuring expectations of meeting the values are simple, explicit and easy to follow; communicating these expectations consistently through daily interactions, assemblies, classroom discussions, school policies and parental engagements. Continued work on *Inclusive Classrooms* linking to Equality and Diversity policy development

Following the staff review of information sharing around pupil additional support needs, the identified improvements around SEEMiS and ASN spreadsheet recording have been completed. The teaching and PSA staff collaborative work on developing best practice in collaborative classroom working to effectively support ASN pupils in classrooms has been implemented. This has resulted in more current and accessible information for staff, leading to improved planning and targeted support for learners with additional needs. There is greater clarity of roles within the classroom, strengthening partnership working between teachers and PSAs and enabling more effective in-class support. As a result, ASN pupils are experiencing more consistent support across subject areas. The PSE programme is becoming increasingly relevant and aligned with local and national priorities, including Developing the Young Workforce, leading to improved learner understanding of skills for life, learning and work. The refreshed school Anti-bullying policy, developed in consultation with the school community, has strengthened consistency in approach and increased confidence among pupils and staff in addressing concerns. Early intervention through S1 settling-in interviews with their PTPS has supported transition into S1, with young people feeling more supported in their wellbeing. Enhanced pupil voice through regular wellbeing evaluations and engagement with the wellbeing indicators has led to greater ownership and understanding of their own wellbeing. Tracking through the GMWP survey is providing more robust, longitudinal data, leading to targeted interventions under key themes such as Affiliation, Agency, Autonomy, and Healthy & Safe. These interventions aim to support improved relationships, resilience, and engagement across the school. Ongoing work on equality and diversity is fostering a more inclusive and aware school ethos. Initial steps have been taken to introduce the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme to empower young people (initially S6) to challenge and prevent violence by training them as "active bystanders" to support and speak out against bullying, harassment, and all forms of abusive behaviour.	leading to greater consistency of staff practice and approaches in ensuring consideration for all pupils' needs; appropriate behaviour in classrooms and equitable learning environments; all pupils and staff feeling safe, respected and included, measured through survey and observations of all pupils as well as specific groups, eg. ASN, CEYP and wider pupil survey. Staff training regarding trauma informed practice to be refreshed. Review the *THS Attendance Support* policy with consideration of the efficacy of this system and the remit of the Attendance Lead. Continue to improve engagement of pupils with their own self-evaluation through the wellbeing indicators and in considering regularly what the wellbeing indicators mean for them in everyday life. Embed processes for tracking of pupil wellbeing over time through the GMWP survey. Prioritise actions identified from GMWP survey by offering interventions appropriate to the school around the headings of Affiliation, Agency, Autonomy, Healthy & Safe.
Impact	
As detailed above	

School Priority 2: Raising attainment

School Improvement Plan Priority 2

Summary of progress	Next steps
The structured programme of Research Lead–led CPD, aligned to the Lesson Evaluation Toolkit (LET) and supported by faculty follow-up and supportive practice, has increased staff consistency in applying approaches to meet the needs of all learners. Staff-led classroom visits and learning walks have strengthened a culture of professional collaboration and reflection, with high levels of engagement across departments. Whole-school feedback from the AQIM led VSE visit has provided insight into strengths and next steps, while targeted support has been put in place where required by FHs. The development of shared expectations for learning walks has ensured a consistent understanding of effective practice. As a result, there is growing consistency in key areas of pedagogy, including learning intentions and success criteria, more effective differentiation to both support and challenge learners, and improved use of questioning to check for understanding and promote higher order thinking. Engagement levels across lessons have improved, with more purposeful use of digital technology and more effective feedback supporting pupil progress. Overall, these developments are contributing to greater equity in the learning experience for pupils across the school, with positive trends emerging from pupil feedback, classroom observation and professional dialogue. Progress has been made in FH work around developing clear, shared guidance for support and clarification, across key areas of their remit, including arrangements for internal and external moderation of teacher judgements within Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels, and arrangements for moderation of all SP assessments and processes to support the SQA process including internal verification. This has allowed a standardising of approaches in key areas of the FH remit, particularly supportive for new middle managers. Current and ongoing good practice around raising ambition and positive presentation has been captured in a *THS Positive Presentation Policy* ensuring expectations around exam presentation are clear, consistent, and visible across the school. Progress has been made in strengthening and formalising practices linked to the options process and promotion of more ambitious learner pathways, with a particular focus on improving attainment in S6. Improvements to the *THS Options* website have increased accessibility of information for pupils and families, supporting more informed decision-making. In addition, the introduction of an information evening for parents has provided clearer guidance on the options process and National Qualifications, contributing to increased understanding.	Increased pupil involvement in discussions around effective learning and the Lesson Evaluation Toolkit will provide a clearer shared understanding of what high-quality teaching looks like and will strengthen learner voice. Review and refinement of the LET to reflect the school's improvement journey and to ensure it remains a relevant and practical tool for supporting high-quality teaching. Develop a '*Raising Attainment*' support pack for pupils and parents aimed at improving ambition. Ensure that tracking judgements are used to inform planning of learning experiences and impactful support for young people at class level in collaboration with FHs. Clarify the variety of interventions possible at class, Faculty, Guidance and whole school level to improve the consistency of support experienced by pupils in collaboration with FHs. Think we need to further develop this Ensure that the whole school tracking of the literacy and numeracy progress of different cohorts of young people is shared more effectively to allow teachers to support specific learners in their classes.

Impact

As detailed above

School Priority 3: Developing the Young Workforce	
School Improvement Plan Priority 3	
Summary of progress and impact	**Next steps**
This session a new Careers Education curriculum has been created for S1-S6 pupils which aligns with the Career Education Standards. This forms the basis for the plans for next session where impact can then be measured. Developing and reviewing our DYW curriculum at all levels will ensure an effective approach to careers education which supports our pupils into sustained positive destinations. Guidance and link Senior Management staff undertook training from Skills Development Scotland on the benefits of National Profiling as part of our Developing the Young Workforce focus. Following this, a new profiling tool will be introduced to all pupils from S1-6 as part of the revised curriculum. At this point impact can then be measured through pupil focus group feedback; pupil survey feedback on our DYW curriculum with the aim that all learners will be able to identify their personal strengths, achievements and skills which will better prepare them for post school opportunities. Thurso High School's DYW coordinator has met with all faculties this session to discuss their input from employers or other links and where they would like additional subject input. Subject speaker input has been recorded and reviewed by the link DHT and DYW Coordinator to ensure that support is offered across all subject areas and stages. Pupil feedback from DYW input within the curriculum has been very positive as obtained through House Council feedback and pupil survey feedback on individual events. Pupil comments have included: 'I thought [the STEP into STEM DYW event attended] was a good opportunity to see what will happen in the workplace, especially being in S2' 'It was very fun and exciting but educational, experience, I liked the fact that we had activities in between talks which helped people concentrate' (DYW motivational speaker workshop) 16+ meetings have been held throughout the session with a range of partners, with a particular focus on potentially more vulnerable pupils. Planning meetings were held in advance with PTPS to ensure all pupils and their pathways were considered. These approaches result in almost all young people between 2020/21 and 2024/25 progressing to a positive destination on leaving school, in line with the VC. In regard to pupils in targeted groups, our leaver destination figures are either above or in line with those of Highland region including CEYP and pupils with additional support needs.	Following the delivery of a new DYW curriculum in S1-6, pupil focus groups will be held to discuss the content and consider any other topics or forms of support they feel would be of benefit. Implement a new profiling tool as part of the DYW curriculum for all pupils from S1-6 to support them to consider strengths, skills and achievements. DHT DYW link and DYW Coordinator will use a new operational planning system this session to continue to calendar a range of DYW events for each year group and across subject areas. Our young people will be supported through a variety of experiences and events which will enable them to make informed choices about future pathways. The Depute Head Teacher DYW link and DYW Coordinator will use 16+ data gathered from S1-6 pupils throughout the session to inform DYW support through pathway planning meetings. This will include organising targeted sessions from industries and sectors identified for year group events as well as smaller group events for pupils interested in progressing on to particular professions or industries.
Impact	
As detailed above	

Attendance: 12 of the 28 pupils supported most consistently made lasting improvements in their attendance ranging from +11% to +18%.

Softstart: Almost all pupils claim to have fewer concerns and worries in their life than at the start of the session and to have greater resilience in preventing issues impacting their life. They are more likely to talk through their problems with the staff in Softstart and rate this as a key factor in their attendance.

Mentors: Of the 41 out of 50 identified S1-S3 pupils who completed the analysis using Goodman's '*Strengths and Difficulties'* questionnaire, all felt that having a mentor in school improved their school experience and wellbeing in different ways.

Wider achievements
Coileanaidhean nas fharsainge

In Thurso High School, almost all young people develop important skills for life, learning and work through engagement in a considerable offer of well-promoted wider achievement activities.

Staff across all curriculum areas provide a coherent and well-considered offer of excursions, clubs and activities that effectively extend young people's learning beyond the classroom. These experiences deepen subject knowledge, promote the application of learning in real-life contexts, and enable young people to achieve success at local and national levels. Most young people develop confidence, creativity, and performance skills through participation in a rich and broad range of craft, games, science, drama productions, reading initiatives, and debating activities. Young people apply their musical abilities through well-considered performances such as the Caithness Music Festival. Young people develop teamwork, resilience and enhanced fitness from a substantial and inclusive offer of sports activities. Through involvement in sports such as rugby and netball, young people build strong collaborative skills, learn from peers at varying levels and broaden their social networks through competition. Young people's participation in local and national competitions, such as Future Chef, enables them to achieve at high levels and make clear links to pathways into training and employment.

In addition, young people demonstrate a very well-developed sense of responsibility and citizenship through volunteering, charity initiatives and additional roles in the school and local community. This includes well established programmes such as the Youth Philanthropy Initiative, where all S3 pupils develop a range of organisation and communication skills and a strong social awareness, House council positions, committees, mentoring, subject ambassadors, prefects and peer support. These activities foster a deep sense of belonging for almost all young people, as well as strengthening their communication and interpersonal skills.

Comments from learners, families, stakeholders and staff

Beachdan bho luchd-ionnsachaidh, teaghlaichean, luchd-ùidhe is luchd-obrach

"I think transition days are perfect and very helpful, it all went really well - having the S6 helpers there as well was really good." (Parent feedback following P7 transition)

"I have just been to support the choir at the music festival and I wanted to let you know what a brilliant performance they did. From walking on, smartly dressed to an absolutely beautiful performance, they are a credit to the school!" (Parent email)

"Can you please pass on the gratitude I have for the experience Growing2gether has given (name removed), their confidence has grown so much, and to hear them come home excited to tell me positive parts of their day and about the kids and growing together staff they met, has been so wonderful. Thank you for reminding them that they can shine and will shine." (Parent email)

"*I have felt well supported in improving my T&L this session and have received regular feedback throughout the year - observations for GTCS profile, learning walks, AQIM visit, and school training have all provided useful feedback. I always received prompt support and guidance from faculty head, SMT and others who observed me."* (New member of teaching staff)

"It has made me feel a lot better about myself and it has made me overall happier. It has motivated me to come to school" (Growing2gether pupil)

"Thurso High School is a very good school with some excellent teachers who are obviously dedicated and passionate about teaching and helping the children progress successfully in life" (Parent feedback survey)

"The school is very approachable. It's easy to communicate by email or other means as necessary; meetings have been very good, well prepared and actioned." (Parent feedback comment)

"It wasn't all sports they let us use our brains and made us think but we still got to have fun running around and we got to do a lot of teamwork, and I didn't know anyone there and I got to join in and I wasn't just left out." (Pupil feedback on Activities Days)

"*Getting the [K Mackay Endeavour award] is something I will always carry with me, it meant more to me than you will probably even know*" (Pupil comment)

Capacity for continuous improvement
Comas airson leasachadh leantainneach

Using indicators from 'How Good is our School 4' together with learner, parent, carer, partner and community feedback we believe we have made progress as follows:

QI 1.3 Leadership of change	Good
QI 2.3 Learning, Teaching and Assessment	Good
QI 3.1 Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion	Good
QI 3.2 Raising attainment and Achievement/Securing children's progress	Good
Other QIs reviewed	

Our overall evaluation of our capacity for continuous improvement is:

We are confident in our capacity for continous improvement.

(As supported by the recent HMIE Summarised inspection findings for our school.)

Key priorities for improvement planning
Prìomhachasan airson planadh airson leasachadh

Improvement Priority Title
1. Improving health and wellbeing; ensuring equality and inclusion
2. Raising attainment
3. Developing the Young Workforce

Planning ahead
A' planadh air adhart

Full details of the school's 2026/27 improvement priorities and actions are detailed on the school improvement plan, which can be accessed on our website https://thursohighschool.org.uk/index.php or by contacting the school office 01847 893822.