

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Education & Learning Report and Improvement Plan 2026-27

Raising Attainment & Achievement

Learning & Teaching



Curriculum



Leadership



Data



Health & Wellbeing



Parental Involvement & Engagement



Inclusive Practice/ASfL

Contents

1	Introduction	Page 2
1.1	National Context	Page 2
1.2	Highland Context	Page 4
2	Stretch Aims	
2.1	2024-26 Stretch Aims	Page 5
2.2	Progress towards Stretch Aims	Page 6
3	Progress during 2025-26 priorities	
3.1	Improvement Theme Leadership	Page 9
3.2	Improvement Theme Learning & Teaching	Page 12
3.3	Improvement Theme Curriculum	Page 14
3.4	Improvement Theme Data	Page 17
3.5	Improvement Theme Health & Wellbeing	Page 20
3.6	Improvement Theme Parental Involvement and Engagement	Page 22
3.7	Improvement Theme Inclusive Practice	Page 23
4	Improvement Plan 2026-27	
	Improvement Theme Leadership	Page 25
	Improvement Theme Learning and Teaching	Page 27
	Improvement Theme Curriculum	Page 30
	Improvement Theme Data	Page 32
	Improvement Theme Health and Wellbeing	Page 35
	Improvement Theme Participation and Engagement	Page 37
	Improvement Theme Inclusive Practice	Page 38
5	Monitoring and Evaluation of Progress	
	Plan for future reporting	Page 40

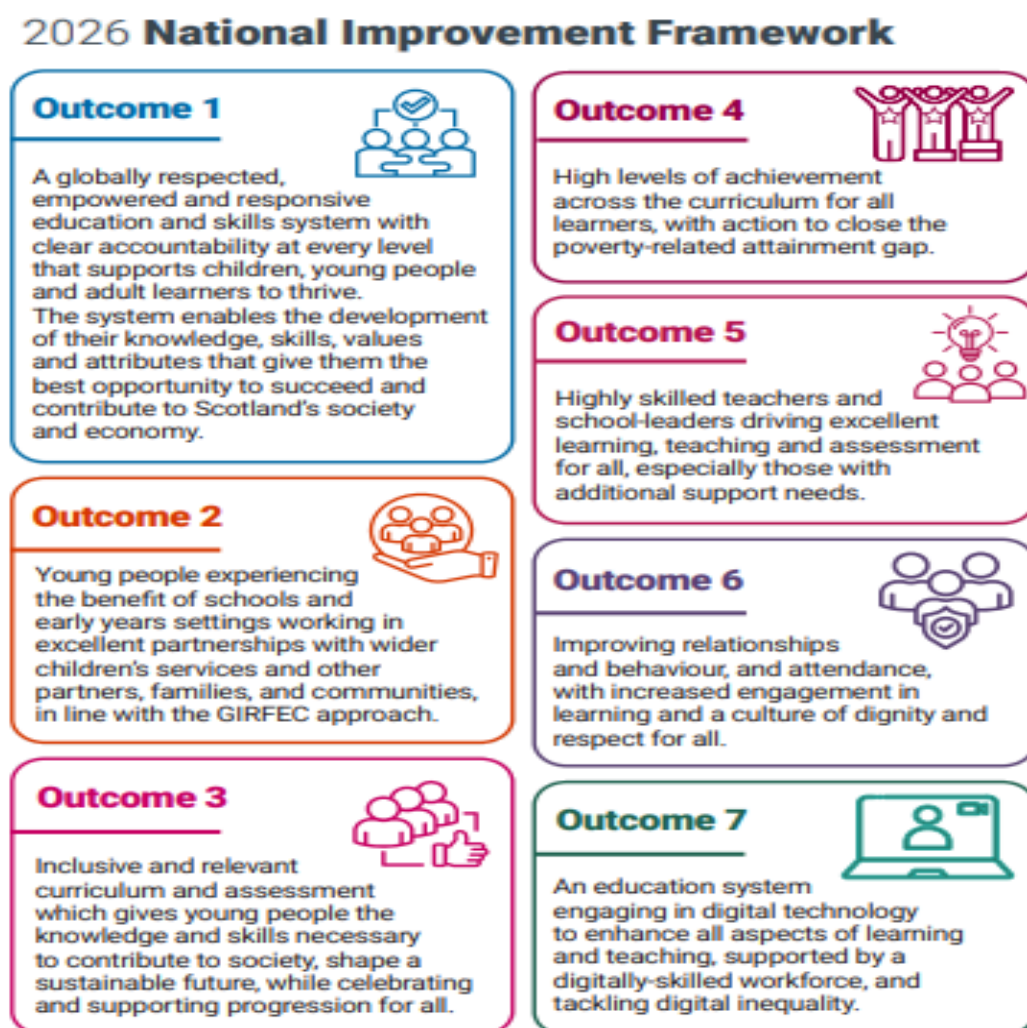
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 National Context

The statutory guidance Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000 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 and young people 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 [National Improvement Framework 2025](#) published in December 2025 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.



2026 National Improvement Framework, page 3.

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

Our annual Education & Learning Improvement Plan, reinforced by our Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy (RAAS), 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 Context

Planning for 2026/27

This refreshed 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 RAAS. Both align closely to various other plans across the Council such as The Highland Council Operational Delivery Plan, The Integrated Children's Services Plan, The Child Poverty Action Report, The Gaelic Language Plan, and My Highland Future Plan.

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

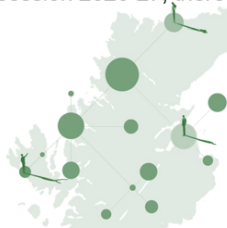
Pupils live in a rural area

65%

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

Schools

In session 2026-27, there are



195 schools

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

Free School Meals & Clothing Grants

4,612

Pupils are entitled to Free School Meals



16.35%

of pupils are entitled to claim a Clothing Grant

Care Experienced Children & Young People



There are **634** Care Experienced Children & Young People in Highland.

That's **2.2%**

Gaelic Medium Education

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

6.86%

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

2,160 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 **89.8%**

Deprivation & Poverty

2,888

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

25.1%

Pupils live in SIMD1&2.



1 in 5

Children are affected by poverty.

Additional Support for Learning

13,430

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

That's **43%**



8.2%

English as an Additional Language

Colleges & University

32.64%

of young people leave school to go into **Higher Education**



16.82%

of young people leave school to go into **Further Education**

2. PROGRESS TOWARDS STRETCH AIMS

The three-year 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.

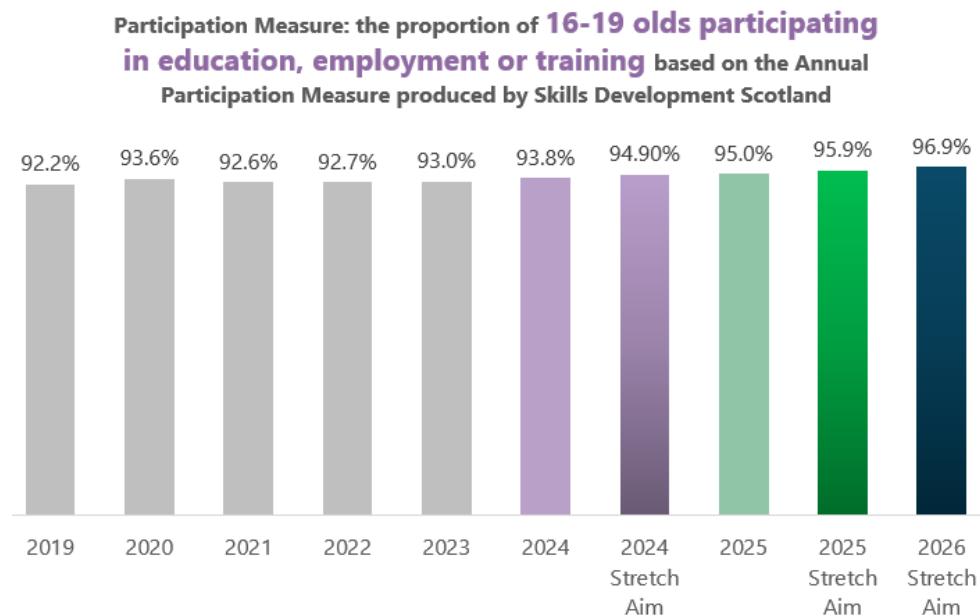
Stretch Aims Core	2024	2025	2026
ACEL Combined Data Literacy	67%	69%	71%
ACEL Combined Data Numeracy	75%	77%	79%
SCQF Level 5	90%	91%	92%
SCQF Level 6	65%	67%	68%
Participation	94.9%	95.9%	96.9%
Attendance Primary	92%	93.5%	95%
Attendance Secondary	87%	88.5%	90%

The Raising Attainment Board will scrutinise ACEL and SQA data throughout the forthcoming session to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement. As part of this process, the Board will work towards developing a new three-year plan of stretch aims. Area Quality Improvement Managers (AQIMs) will collaborate with school leaders to ensure they have a clear understanding of their school's current position and their responsibilities in contributing to and achieving the overall targets set for improvement.

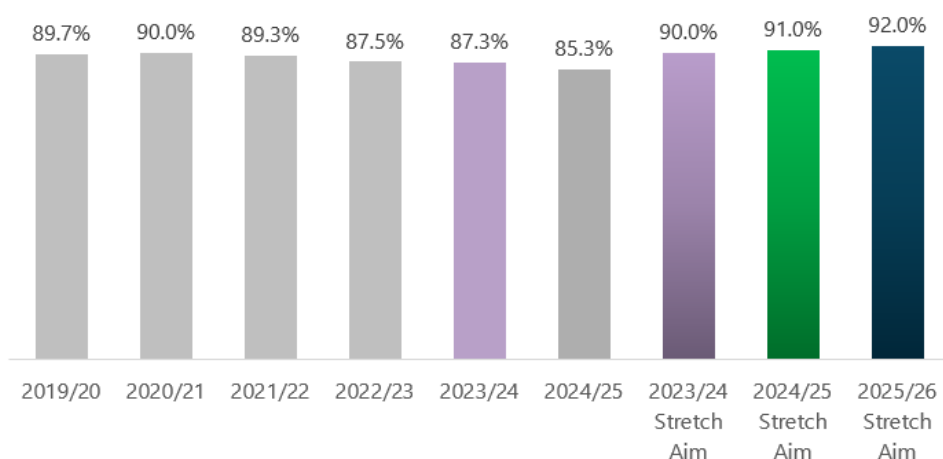
The graphs below show progress towards our 2026-27 stretch aims.



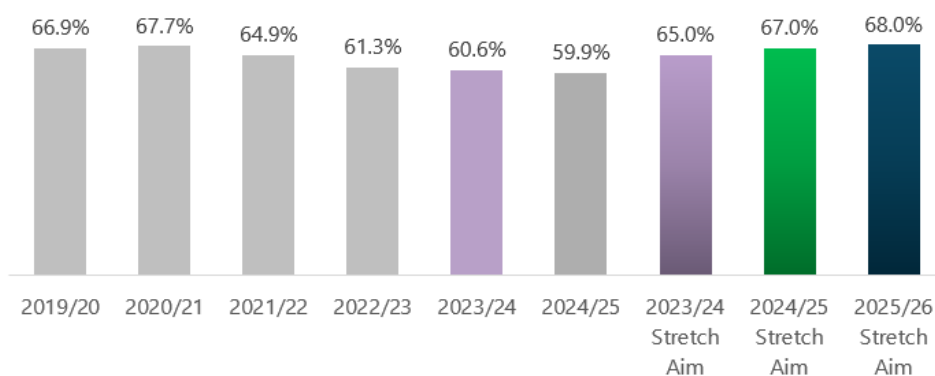
Overall attendance is 89.8%.



Senior Phase: the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more award at SCQF level 5 based on Insight (All SCQF Awards) information



Senior Phase: the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more award at SCQF level 6 based on Insight (All SCQF Awards) information



Graphs above represent actual data unless stated as stretch aim/target.

3. PROGRESS TOWARDS IMPROVEMENT PLAN OUTCOMES

Our planned outcomes in the 2025/26 Education & Learning Improvement Plan were focussed on 4 key themes and 3 underlying principles.

Key Themes:

- Leadership
- Learning and Teaching
- Curriculum
- Data

Principles:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Parental Involvement and Engagement
- Inclusive Practice

The following section illustrates significant progress made towards improvements.

Improvement Theme: Leadership

The Early Years Strategy (2025-2028) was approved by the Education Committee on 24 February 2026. A key priority within the strategy is strengthening leadership through improved communication and increased leadership capacity across Early Years settings.

During 2025/26, four in-person Early Years staff development days were delivered, alongside four online Headteacher development sessions. In partnership with Education Scotland's Senior Education Officer for Early Learning and Childcare, four face-to-face professional learning sessions on Pedagogical Leadership were also provided. This programme successfully built leadership capacity across Highland ELC settings, with 100% of participants reporting positive impact on their understanding, skills and intended practice, and overwhelmingly rating the quality of professional learning as Good, Very Good or Excellent. A recurring theme throughout all four days was the increased confidence participants felt in their leadership role. Participants described feeling:

- More confident leading ELC teams.
- Better equipped to coach and support colleagues.
- Clearer about expectations around pedagogical leadership.
- More able to lead improvement activity and self-evaluation.

A total of 40 Headteachers and Early Years managers attended these sessions and provided highly positive feedback regarding both the content and opportunities for professional dialogue. Participants reported increased confidence in leading their settings and a stronger understanding of the raised expectations around attainment at the Early Level. Due to the success of the programme, Education Scotland has committed to delivering a further series of sessions during the next academic session.



"As a relatively new headteacher this has helped me not just with ELC management but with my own self-evaluation learning journey too."

"Great take away strategies to use in meetings/directly with teams."

"Further developed my understanding of triangulation and the need for robust processes around data collection and analysis."

The Raising Attainment Board was established, bringing together Chief Officers, central staff and Headteachers to provide strategic oversight and drive improvement. Clear terms of reference were developed to guide and support the Board's work.

All schools received a Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy (RAAS) presentation delivered by their Area Quality Improvement Manager (AQIM) during an In-Service Day. This increased awareness of the strategy, its key priorities and the role of schools in delivering the identified actions.

Four strategic Headteacher meetings were held throughout the session. These meetings provided opportunities to reinforce consistent messages, support progress against the ambitions outlined in the RAAS and Education and Learning Improvement Plan (ELIP) and share effective practice across schools. A particular feature of these meetings was the inclusion of "Spotlight on Practice" sessions, where Headteachers recognised for effective practice shared their approaches and experiences with colleagues.

Feedback consistently identified these sessions as practical, relevant and inspiring, providing valuable opportunities for peer learning and professional collaboration.



To support system-wide improvement, seven Strategic Improvement Workstreams were established in the following areas:

- Staged Intervention and Assessment of Additional Support Needs (ASN)
- Realising the Ambition and Play
- Health and Wellbeing Framework
- Relationships and Behaviour
- Learning and Teaching
- Quality Assurance
- School Improvement

Each workstream includes school-based staff, is led by a Headteacher, and is supported by an AQIM link officer. This collaborative approach has strengthened

practitioner engagement and ensured that improvement activity remains closely connected to school contexts.

As a result of focused improvement activity, the Collaborative Improvement Framework has been refreshed and strengthened. In addition, a robust programme of internal scrutiny visits has been established for the next three years.

These Quality Improvement Visits will involve multidisciplinary teams comprising AQIMs, Education Support Officers (ESOs), HMIE Associate Assessors and Headteacher peers. Each visit will culminate in a written report outlining strengths and areas for improvement, which will be shared with the school community, including parents and elected members.

This approach will support greater consistency in self-evaluation, strengthen accountability and provide schools with high-quality feedback to inform continuous improvement.

New and acting Headteachers participated in the Headteacher Induction Programme, strengthening their understanding of key leadership responsibilities and supporting a successful transition into their roles.

A further cohort of teachers successfully completed the 15-month Lead On Programme, with 10 participants achieving the standard required for Professional Recognition by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) in recognition of their leadership learning and impact.

In addition, 17 Headteachers participated in the national Quality Improvement Programme. Participation has enhanced their knowledge and understanding of improvement methodology, effective improvement cycles and approaches to measuring impact, further strengthening leadership capacity across schools.

Significant progress has also been made in strengthening the professional learning offer for session 2026/27. The full programme was developed and communicated to Headteachers by the beginning of June 2026, enabling schools to align professional learning priorities with their own improvement planning processes.

This earlier planning cycle will support more strategic use of professional learning and ensure greater coherence between local authority priorities and individual school improvement plans.

Many schools involve the children and young people in Leadership Groups the following example from Drakies Primary School exemplifies the importance of this work as effective practice.



“For a third year running, all of our school aged children had the opportunity to assume leadership roles in our ‘Pupil Leadership Groups’ such as our ‘Gardening Gurus’ and ‘Digital Dynamos’. We are planning on refreshing these groups in session 2026-2027.”

“I have enjoyed using digital technologies because it’s really good for pupil profiles as it helps me record our learning in class and we can also input pictures and our own writing about what we did the day in class.”

“We have taken part in lots of sporting events this year, such as The Baillie Cup, Inter-School Sports and McRobert Cup.”

“All of the children had the opportunity to design a logo for the Month of the Military Child and one of our P7 pupils, not only won her stage event but also the overall competition. Her logo was being used across Highland Council during the month of April. Some of our children worked to produce a book to welcome children from Military families to the Highlands”.

Improvement Theme: Learning & Teaching

During session 2025/26, almost all school identified an aspect of Learning, Teaching and Assessment as a priority within their School Improvement Plan. Schools engaged in robust self-evaluation and improvement activity against Quality Indicator 2.3: Learning, Teaching and Assessment, focusing on areas such as literacy, numeracy, play pedagogy, digital learning, and outdoor learning.

A number of schools also utilised the Northern Alliance Self-Evaluation Toolkit to support improvement planning and professional reflection. While engagement has been positive, there is scope to further embed and extend the use of this resource as the Pedagogy Team increases its direct support to schools during session 2026/27.

LTA Toolkit: Improvement Cycle Guidance for schools and settings



In session 2025/26, 17 HM Inspectorate of Education inspections were undertaken across Highland schools. Of these, 70% achieved a grading of satisfactory or better for Quality Indicator 2.3, providing evidence of improving practice in learning, teaching and assessment across the authority.

To support greater consistency and clarity of expectations, a short-life working group comprising primary and secondary Headteachers was established to develop a Highland Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy. This framework will be available to all schools by August 2026, providing a shared vision and set of expectations which can then be adapted to reflect individual school contexts.

Learning, teaching and assessment has also remained a key focus within the authority's Quality Improvement Visit programme. All schools are now included within a structured three-year cycle of Quality Improvement Visits, with evaluation of Quality Indicator 2.3 forming a central component of the visit process. This provides schools with regular, rigorous feedback and supports continuous improvement through professional dialogue and challenge.

Practitioners across Highland have engaged extensively with a range of national and local professional learning opportunities designed to improve classroom practice and raise attainment. These have included:

- National Improving Writing Programme
- Numeracy Self-Evaluation Framework
- Pedagogical Leadership Programme
- Highland-wide moderation activities
- National learning and teaching offers from Education Scotland

To further strengthen the professional learning offer, the Pedagogy Team and Literacy Education Support Officer collaborated to develop a comprehensive CLPL programme for session 2026/27. From August 2026, all Highland practitioners will have access to a coherent range of professional learning opportunities aimed at promoting consistent, high-quality approaches to learning, teaching and assessment across all sectors.

The Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan includes a range of outcomes for Gaelic Medium Education (GME) that focus on community engagement and family learning as key drivers in supporting Gaelic language development, confidence and fluency. These outcomes are embedded across the themes of the Raising Attainment Strategy, recognising that language acquisition and attainment are strengthened when Gaelic is used and valued beyond the classroom. As a statutory strategic plan, the Council Gaelic Language Plan sets out operational actions that supports leadership, teachers, learners, families and communities to increase opportunities for Gaelic use, participation and achievement. By working across themes including learning and teaching, family learning, community partnerships and learner engagement, the plan contributes to improved attainment and achievement in Gaelic, while supporting the promotion, long term sustainability and growth of Gaelic Medium Education.

A growing number of Headteachers have enrolled in Leading Play Pedagogy in Primary 1, a professional learning programme delivered by Education Scotland. This reflects a strong commitment across schools to embedding play-based approaches and implementing the principles outlined within *Realising the Ambition*.

In addition, the Realising the Ambition and Play Strategic Improvement Workstream, led by a Headteacher and involving practitioners from across the authority, has been formed this session. One of its key priorities is the development of a Highland Play Pedagogy Policy, which will be launched during session 2026/27.

These developments are intended to strengthen practitioner understanding and implementation of high-quality play pedagogy, improve learner engagement and wellbeing, and support improved attainment and achievement at the Early Level. Through increased consistency of approach and enhanced professional confidence, children will benefit from richer learning experiences that promote curiosity, creativity, independence and sustained progress across the curriculum.

The role and impact of the Equity and Excellence Lead within Early Learning and Childcare will be reviewed in line with the national review commissioned by the Scottish Government. Findings from this review will be used to evaluate impact to date and inform future approaches to supporting equity, attainment and excellence within Early Years settings.

Improvement Theme: Curriculum

Throughout session 2025/26, Highland staff played a significant role in national activity relating to Scotland's Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC). This involvement has ensured that Highland is well represented within the national discussion and development of future curriculum frameworks.

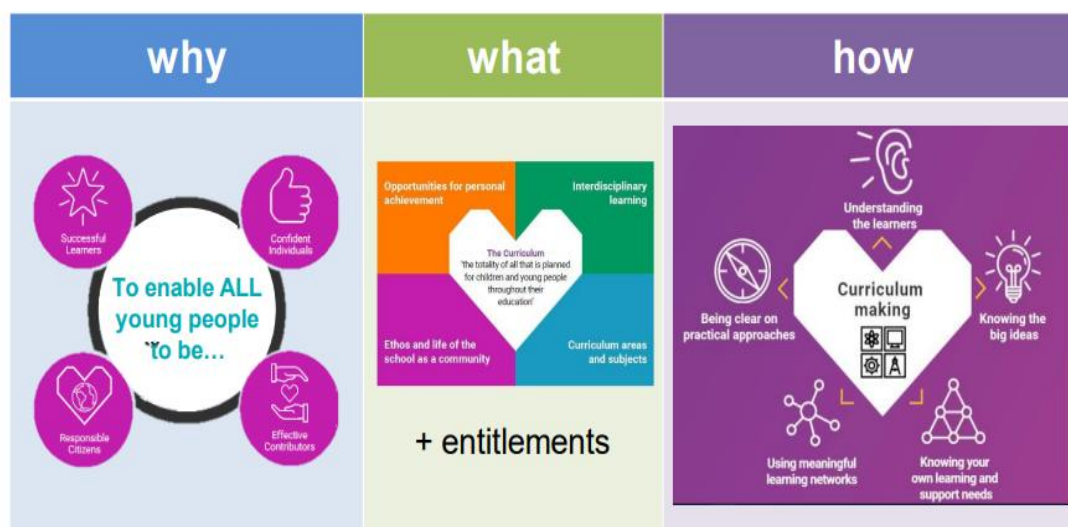
Highland representation included:

- 2 staff members on the CIC Steering Group
- 10 staff members on Core Groups
- 44 staff members on Collaboration Groups

Many colleagues contributed across multiple groups, bringing expertise and insight from Highland schools to the national curriculum reform process.

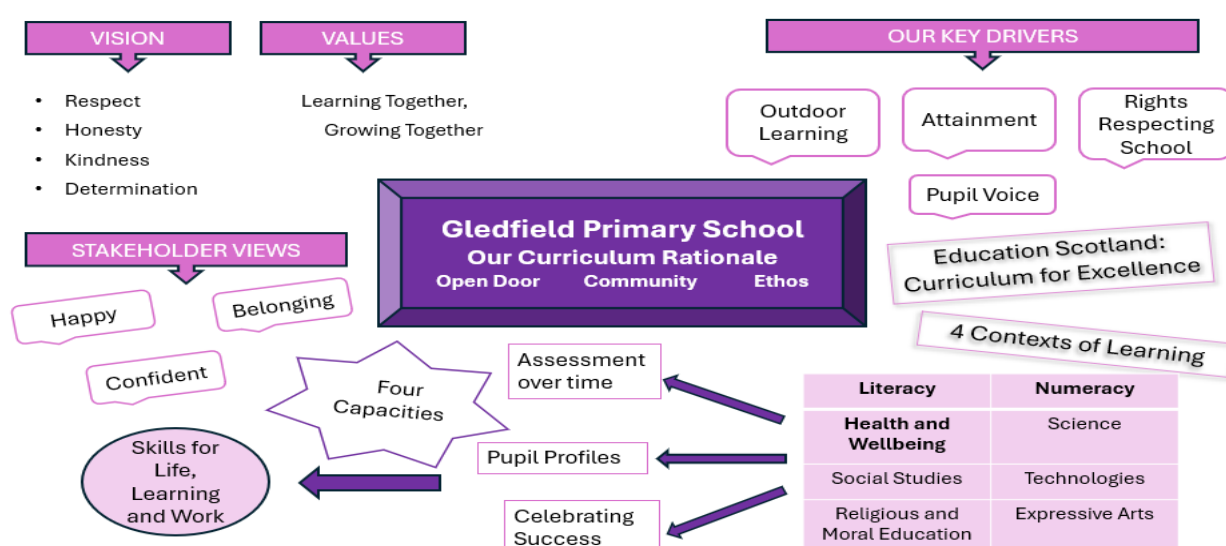
This significant level of engagement has created a strong local knowledge base and a growing network of curriculum leaders across the authority. The expertise developed through participation in the CIC will now be utilised to support understanding, implementation and professional dialogue around the emerging technical frameworks across all curriculum areas.

Scotland's Curriculum Framework



To coordinate this work locally, Steering and Core Group members have established a Highland CIC Group. The purpose of this group is to raise awareness of national developments, support engagement with school teams, and ensure Highland practitioners are well placed to contribute to and implement curriculum reform.

As part of their School Improvement Planning activity, 31 schools reviewed and refreshed their curriculum rationale during session 2025/26.



This process has enabled schools to evaluate the extent to which their curriculum reflects their unique context, values and priorities, while aligning more closely with national curriculum developments and the principles emerging through the Curriculum Improvement Cycle. Through this work, schools are developing a clearer rationale for

curriculum design, helping to ensure that learning experiences meet the needs of all learners and support improved outcomes.

All Primary and Secondary Headteachers engaged with Curriculum Improvement Cycle developments through Strategic Headteacher Meetings during the session.

In addition, 84 Headteachers attended a dedicated CIC session delivered by Education Scotland. This session was recorded and has subsequently been made available through the online Curriculum Tile, ensuring all staff can access the information and engage with key messages at a time that suits their context.

This has helped to establish a shared understanding of curriculum reform across Highland and has supported schools to begin considering the implications of the emerging frameworks for their own curriculum planning and delivery.

A hybrid Gaelic Medium Education in-service day was planned and delivered in February 2026, providing practitioners with professional learning tailored specifically to the Gaelic Medium context. The programme included presentations from Education Scotland on the Curriculum Improvement Cycle, with a focus on their work within Gaelic Medium Education. This learning was further supported through a twilight session in May 2026, enabling practitioners to reflect on progress, contribute views and help shape the review cycle. In addition, HMIE delivered input on their recently published report on Gaelic education, highlighting key findings and recommendations to support continued improvement and development across the sector.

A Playful Connections Booklet has been created to help practitioners shift the focus away from traditional “structured” play and instead focus on the importance of relationships and social and emotional growth in the early stages.

Play in the early years of primary education has been a significant focus of improvement activity during session 2025/26, in preparation for wider implementation and professional learning during the coming session.

A Realising the Ambition and Play Strategic Improvement Workstream has been established to support the development of high-quality play pedagogy across Highland schools. The workstream is exploring effective approaches to play-based learning, curriculum design, learning environments and practitioner confidence, with the aim of improving consistency and quality across settings.

This work will continue into session 2026/27, supported by the Pedagogy Team. Practitioners will engage in professional learning and practitioner enquiry activities designed to strengthen understanding of play pedagogy and evaluate its impact on learner engagement, wellbeing, achievement and attainment.

Through this collaborative approach, schools will be better equipped to provide developmentally appropriate learning experiences that promote creativity, independence, problem-solving and deeper learning in the early stages of education.

Improvement Theme: Use of Data

The Tracking and Monitoring Policy and Guidance was refreshed during session 2025/26, strengthening expectations around the use of attainment data to support improvement planning and raise achievement.

As a result, Headteachers completed a standardised attainment template following attainment meetings with staff in November. During Term 3, Area Quality Improvement Managers (AQIMs) and Education Support Officers (ESOs) met with every school to review attainment reports and discuss predicted outcomes. Individual learners and cohorts were analysed in detail, enabling Headteachers to identify attainment gaps and agree targeted interventions to accelerate progress and improve outcomes.

These robust professional discussions ensured a sustained strategic focus on raising attainment and strengthened the use of evidence-informed approaches to school improvement.

In Term 4, AQIMs and ESOs worked closely with the Data Team to monitor the progress of children and young people across Highland. Where expected progress had not been achieved, AQIMs met with Headteachers to review the progress of individual pupils and ensure that appropriate support, targeted interventions and monitoring arrangements were in place. This strengthened accountability and helped ensure that children requiring additional support were identified and assisted at the earliest opportunity.



In 2025, 2,654 pupils participated in the Highland Lifestyle Survey. The survey provides schools with a rich source of evidence on children's experiences of health and wellbeing, gathering responses across 100 questions covering a wide range of factors that influence learners' wellbeing and engagement.

Participating schools received their own data sets, enabling leaders to analyse pupil experiences within their specific contexts and use this information to inform school improvement planning.

A new online survey for school use to seek feedback from children, staff and parents was introduced this session, with 121 schools choosing to use it immediately. This

supportive tool will provide a systematic way of involving stakeholders in self-evaluation.

A further survey will take place in spring 2027, allowing schools and the local authority to monitor trends over time and measure improvement through the lived experiences of children and young people.

Schools preparing for inspection were provided with Data Packs to support self-evaluation and improvement planning. These packs enabled schools to analyse their context more effectively, identify strengths and areas for development, and present a clear evidence-based narrative about the impact of their work.

Feedback from schools indicated that these resources strengthened confidence in data analysis and supported a clearer understanding of how evidence can be used to demonstrate improvement and meet the needs of their school communities.

AQIMs met with the Chair of the Poverty Reduction Group to strengthen awareness of the Cost of the School Day (COSD) agenda across Highland schools. As a result, Cost of the School Day considerations have now been embedded within refreshed Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) Plans.

The impact of these actions is monitored through AQIM engagement with schools, ensuring that leaders consider barriers to participation and take practical steps to reduce the financial burden on children, young people and families. This work contributes to improved equity, inclusion and access to learning opportunities.

Working in partnership with Business Information colleagues, a new data dashboard has been developed and made available to all schools.

The dashboard provides easy access to a range of key performance indicators, including:

- Attendance data
- Exclusion data
- Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL)
- National Standardised Assessment (NSA) data

The system allows staff to analyse and interrogate data at greater depth, including the ability to filter and track priority groups and targeted cohorts. This enables school leaders and practitioners to better understand patterns, trends and emerging needs within their school communities and to plan more effectively for improvement.

The introduction of the dashboard has been widely welcomed by Headteachers as a valuable improvement tool, supporting more timely, accurate and evidence-based decision-making.

Invergordon Academy continues to invest Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) in Inclusion Support Workers (ISWs), providing targeted support to learners experiencing poverty-related barriers to attendance, wellbeing, engagement and attainment. Through close partnership working with pupils, families and support services, ISWs deliver attendance interventions, family engagement, wellbeing support, and literacy and numeracy programmes.

This relationship-based approach has strengthened engagement with school and improved outcomes for vulnerable learners, including increasing attendance from 75% to 89% for targeted English as Additional Language (EAL) learners and from 78% to 81% for targeted ASN learners. Positive impacts have also been seen in attainment, learner engagement and feedback from pupils and parents.

In recognition of these positive outcomes, Invergordon Academy's 2026/27 PEF plan continues investment in this approach.

Key Interventions

- Home visits
- Attendance reviews
- Regular pupil support
- Family engagement
- Interpreter services
- Literacy and numeracy support

Impact

Measure	Outcome
EAL Attendance	75% → 89%
ASN Attendance	78% → 81%
Wellbeing	Improved engagement and participation
Attainment	Improved literacy and numeracy outcomes
Relationships	Stronger partnerships between school, pupils and families

Learner and Parent Voice

"Knowing she is in school makes it easier for me to come into school." - S3 Pupil

"The support provided has been invaluable. My child has always found the school environment challenging, but the consistent support offered throughout schoolwork, college opportunities and work experience has helped them remain engaged and make positive progress. We are extremely grateful for the support received." – Parent.

Improvement Theme: Health and Wellbeing

A Strategic Improvement Working Group (SIWG) for Health and Wellbeing was established during session 2025/26. The group includes representatives from Primary, Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), Secondary and 3-18 settings, ensuring a broad range of perspectives are reflected in the development of future priorities.

The SIWG has begun evaluating current strengths and identifying areas for further development across Highland. Initial work has focused on mapping existing practice and bringing together the various components of a comprehensive Health and Wellbeing Framework, including the range of universal and targeted supports provided through Psychological Services. This work will continue during Term 1 of session 2026/27, with engagement widening to include additional stakeholders to ensure the framework reflects the needs and experiences of children, young people, families and staff.

Staff across schools and ELC settings have been encouraged to strengthen and refresh their understanding of restorative approaches through professional learning opportunities delivered by Psychological Services, alongside follow-up coaching and professional dialogue.

Over the course of the session, 10 Promoting Positive Relationships training sessions were delivered, attended by 166 members of staff, including:

- 45 teachers
- 34 Education Support Staff
- 7 ELC practitioners
- Staff from a range of other educational settings and services

This professional learning has supported staff to develop consistent approaches to relationship-based practice, helping to create positive, inclusive learning environments where children and young people feel valued, supported and able to engage fully in their learning.

Training opportunities will continue throughout session 2026/27 and are included within the professional learning calendar for school staff and colleagues from partner organisations.

The Educational Psychology Service has developed the content for a dedicated Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) resource hub. This resource will provide information, guidance and practical support for schools, families and professionals working with children and young people experiencing difficulties attending school due to emotional factors.

Due to delays in the development of the website platform, publication has been postponed. This work will now be taken forward during Term 1 of session 2026/27,

providing schools with a valuable resource to support early intervention and the promotion of positive attendance.

Progress has been made in strengthening approaches to attendance across all sectors.

Refreshed Secondary Attendance Guidance was finalised and launched to schools during session 2025/26, providing greater clarity and consistency in attendance monitoring and intervention processes.

To ensure a similar approach within the primary sector, a Primary Headteacher was released for 0.2 FTE to lead the review and updating of the existing Primary Attendance Guidance. A draft version has now been shared with the wider Headteacher group for consultation and feedback, ensuring that the final guidance reflects a broad range of school contexts and experiences. The completed guidance is scheduled for launch in Term 1 of session 2026/27.

In addition, a further five Highland Council schools, representing Primary, Secondary and 3-18 sectors, participated in Cohort 3 of the National Improving Attendance Programme. This programme has enhanced staff knowledge and confidence in using attendance data, identifying barriers to attendance and implementing targeted interventions to improve outcomes for learners.

These developments are contributing to a more consistent and proactive approach to attendance across Highland, with a stronger emphasis on prevention, early intervention and partnership working.

Headteachers now have access to an enhanced School Dashboard, providing up to five years of data across a range of key indicators, including:

- Pupil characteristics and demographic information
- Attendance
- Exclusions
- Bullying and Equalities information

The dashboard also allows Headteachers to access and analyse pupil-level data within their own schools, enabling more detailed monitoring of trends, vulnerable groups and individual learners.

This tool supports timely and evidence-based decision-making, allowing schools to identify emerging concerns, evaluate the impact of interventions and plan targeted support more effectively. Feedback from school leaders has been highly positive, with the dashboard recognised as a valuable resource for improving attendance, promoting inclusion and supporting positive outcomes for children and young people.

Improvement Theme: Parental Involvement and Engagement

The Parental Involvement and Engagement (PIE) Strategy was launched with Elected Members and Headteachers during session 2025/26, establishing a renewed focus on strengthening partnership working between schools, families and communities.

Throughout the year, ongoing dialogue has taken place with the Highland Parent Council Partnership (HPCP) to develop a more systematic and sustainable approach to engagement with parents and carers across Highland. During this period, the HPCP took the decision to formally relinquish its charitable status, and this transition process is currently underway.

A strategic planning meeting has been scheduled for August 2026 to determine future arrangements for engaging with Parent Councils and parent representative groups across Highland. The outcomes of these discussions will inform the next phase of implementation of the PIE Strategy, helping to ensure regular, meaningful and inclusive engagement with parents and carers as key partners in their children's learning.

This work will support a more consistent approach to parental involvement across the authority and strengthen opportunities for family voice to influence school improvement and educational decision-making.

Highland Council continues to work proactively with Parent Councils and families who seek support and information regarding Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education. Engagement has been maintained with local Comann nam Pàrant (CnamP) groups to support the development, promotion and sustainability of Gaelic education across Highland.

During session 2025/26, engagement activity included discussion with communities in Lochaline, Lochaber and Skye, supporting localised actions around provision, learner pathways and future development opportunities.

The Gaelic Team has also continued its work to promote parental engagement in the early years, particularly with families of children aged 0-3 years who may be considering Gaelic Medium Education. Through Gaelic awareness sessions delivered within local communities, families are supported to:

- Increase their understanding of Gaelic Medium Education and its benefits
- Learn about local Gaelic education provision and learner pathways
- Explore options available for their children at an early stage
- Ask questions and receive informed advice and guidance
- Make confident and informed decisions about their child's education

This proactive engagement supports Highland Council's statutory responsibilities to promote Gaelic education while helping to raise awareness, encourage enrolment and

strengthen community understanding of the opportunities available through Gaelic Medium Education.

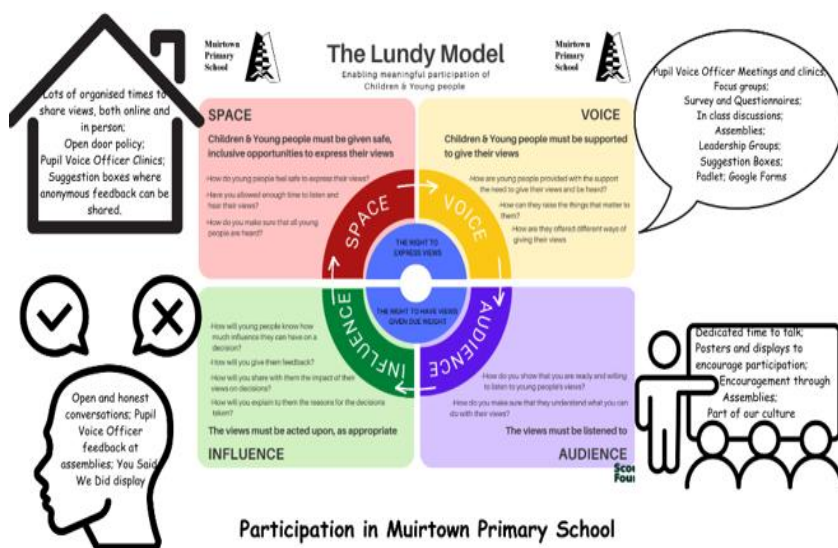


Children and young people's participation and engagement is also important and the following example from Muirtown Primary exemplifies the powerful of impact of ensuring this is alive and well schools.

The positive work of the children's leadership groups and Pupil Voice Officers has been recognised as good practice by the Scottish Government Participation Team. The Head Teacher has been invited to become a member of the International Parliament Engagement Network (IPEN) and will be working to support the development of participation opportunities for children within the Scottish Government.

'I think it is important that we have pupil voice officers because it means pupils have an extra safe place to share things they are worried about or upset about'.

'It is important that we have pupil voice officers because we can share our ideas and our thoughts about things'.



Improvement Theme: Inclusive Practice/Additional Support Needs

The review of the Pupil Support roles remit remains on track, and work to create a new three-tier structure to support greater career progression has now been completed. Following engagement with trade unions, the new remits will be launched in the new school session.

Good progress has been made in updating Relationships and Behaviour Policies in line with Scottish Government guidance. A Head Teacher Strategic Improvement Group was established in Term 3 to develop a shared understanding of expectations and review quality-assured examples of policies. The group has produced a roadmap outlining good practice and expectations, together with supporting templates to assist schools and settings in reviewing and updating their policies, including engagement with stakeholders. These resources will promote greater consistency while maintaining the flexibility for schools and settings to reflect their individual contexts.

A GIRFEC training programme has been developed to support staff in increasing their understanding of their GIRFEC responsibilities. The programme has been launched with a number of Named Persons and ELC Managers and will continue to be offered during the next session.

Progress has been made towards establishing Integrated Children's Services meetings within Associated School Groups. Terms of Reference have been developed to provide a framework for a shared purpose and approach. A three-month pilot is due to commence in the North Area in August 2026. This approach is expected to strengthen partnership working, improve coordination of support for children and families, and facilitate more timely multi-agency planning and decision-making.

The Inclusive Practice Programme, delivered by the Psychological Service, has had a positive impact on building staff capacity to deliver inclusive practice across Highland schools. Twenty-four practitioners completed the programme, with 15 Practitioner Enquiries undertaken to apply learning within school settings. Participant feedback demonstrated a significant positive impact on professional practice and confidence in supporting diverse learner needs. The success of the pilot has led to a second cohort being scheduled for September 2026, supporting the continued development of inclusive practice across the authority.

The Educational Psychology Service has delivered a range of professional learning opportunities focused on the CIRCLE Framework. In schools that have introduced the approach, staff knowledge and understanding of how to remove barriers to learning and create more inclusive learning environments has increased. Information about the framework has been shared with all Head Teachers for consideration within School Improvement Plans for Session 2026/27. The next phase will focus on gathering evidence of uptake through School Improvement Plans and identifying the number of schools implementing the CIRCLE Framework. This will provide a clearer measure of impact and help inform future support and professional learning priorities.

Education and Learning Plan 2026/27

Theme: Leadership			
Improvement Outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?	National Improvement Framework (NIF) Outcome
By June 2027, a high-quality leadership programme will be fully embedded for practitioners at all levels, from probationer teachers to senior officers. As a result, children and young people will experience consistently high-quality leadership across all Highland contexts, supported by a collective and collaborative understanding of leadership as a key driver of sustainable improvement. By June 2027, AQIM will be embedded within national peer groups to strengthen self-evaluation, professional collaboration and continuous improvement. AQIM findings will inform Head Teacher events and leadership CLPL, with a particular focus on leadership, strategic planning,	Embed the New and Acting Headteacher professional learning sessions. Strengthen the Depute Headteacher network, with a focus on Raising Attainment and Achievement and Improvement Methodology. Ensure robust, high-quality Professional Review and Development (PRD) processes, supported by a relevant CLPL offer and improved evaluation of impact. Refresh the probationer CLPL programme to include the Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy and the Education and Learning Plan. Ensure AQIM participation in relevant peer groups and	Improved recruitment and retention in HT posts. WFP numbers in July 2027. Improved QI gradings in QIV and inspection outcomes in Leadership of Change. AQIM sample QA check of PRD completion and measurement of impact. Probationer surveys and feedback from mentors. AQIM feedback and CLPL feedback. QIV outcomes. School Leader feedback. Internal and external scrutiny show improvement in Leadership of change Quality Indicators.	A globally respected, empowered and responsive education and skills 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.

and inclusive and supportive practices. By June 2027, cohesive partnership working across all sectors will support the implementation of the Highland Council Children and Young People's Participation Strategy 2024-29. As a result, children and young people will experience increased opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives, with their voices consistently informing planning, delivery and improvement across services.	contribute to work associated with <i>How Good Is Our Education Authority?</i> Ensure AQIM contributes to professional learning for leadership at all levels. Through a range of leadership forums, support school leaders to further develop skills in leading change and improvement effectively, including the use of data to drive improvement. Ensure Education and Learning representation within implementation groups to support these commitments through a coherent and joined-up approach across all sectors.	Feedback from C&YP surveys show that they are being supported to make the rights to participate real. C&YP feedback influences E&L policy and practice. Evidence of schools using the Ch Rights and Participation Strategy in their engagement with pupils. and of pupil participation in decision making recorded on the Library of Voices.	
---	--	---	--

Theme: Learning and Teaching			
Improvement outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?	National Improvement Framework (NIF) Outcome.
By June 2027, schools will strengthen learning and teaching through the consistent use of evidence-informed pedagogical approaches, effective assessment practices and high-quality professional learning. As a result, children and young people will experience greater consistency in the quality of learning, leading to improved attainment, achievement and equity across Highland.	LTA focus for Quality Improvement Visits across identified schools Establish a new Pedagogy Teacher Team and Inclusion Support Officer team to promote high-quality, inclusive learning and teaching across all schools. Ensure Pedagogy Teachers use the Northern Alliance Toolkit as a baseline prior to engagement with schools, enabling targeted support and effective measurement of impact. Finalise and implement the Highland Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy to ensure a consistent approach across all establishments. Provide practical resources, self-evaluation tools and	All schools are engaging with support from the Pedagogy Teacher Team and Inclusion Support Officers on a universal, focussed or intensive basis. Revised Highland Literacy, Numeracy and Moderation Strategies have been developed. Evidence gathered via internal and external scrutiny shows: • The Highland Learning, Teaching and Assessment policy informs practice. • Increased consistency in high quality learning, teaching, assessment and moderation. • Teachers report increased confidence in evidence-informed pedagogy, assessment and inclusive practice.	High levels of achievement across the attainment curriculum for all learners, with action to close the poverty related gap. Highly skilled teachers and school leaders driving excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all, especially those with additional support needs. An education system engaging in digital technology to enhance all aspects of learning and teaching. Supported by digitally skilled workforce.

	professional learning opportunities to support effective implementation of the policy. Refresh the Highland Literacy and Numeracy Strategies to reflect curriculum developments. Develop and implement a Highland Moderation Strategy and increase moderation activities to improve consistency in assessment and professional judgement. Embed digital learning skills and pedagogy as a core component of the Learning and Teaching Framework. Ensure all schools and settings include examples of digital learning approaches within their Learning and Teaching guidance. Provide resources, professional learning and	• Learners experience high-quality learning and teaching which leads to improved engagement, attainment and achievement. Data demonstrates improved outcomes for learners, particularly those affected by poverty and other barriers to learning. Practitioners recognise the enhancement digital technologies can provide to learning and teaching approaches. L&T policies provide guidance around expectations for digital technologies. A professional learning calendar will be available by December 2026 to support practitioners in using digital technologies to support effective learning and teaching.	
--	--	--	--

	training opportunities to increase practitioner confidence and expertise in using technology to enhance learning, teaching and assessment.		
--	--	--	--

Theme: Curriculum			
Improvement outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?	National Improvement Framework (NIF) outcome
By June 2027, all schools will engage with the implementation of the National Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) and associated technical frameworks, using these to inform curriculum review, self-evaluation and improvement planning. By June 2027, schools will demonstrate increased confidence and capability in applying national guidance to support ongoing curriculum development and improvement.	Engage with staff involved in national CIC Core and Steering Groups to support the implementation of new technical frameworks in schools. Provide regular updates through Headteacher briefings, curriculum networks and professional learning opportunities, including the sharing of reflective tools and prompts provided by Education Scotland. Support the implementation of new technical frameworks and develop strategy documents for each curricular area as frameworks are introduced, in line with the Learning and Teaching Plan.	100% of schools have engaged with professional learning on the National Curriculum Improvement Cycle. All schools have considered the implications of the technical frameworks within their improvement planning. Schools can demonstrate curriculum review activity informed by national guidance. Examples of curriculum development and redesign are evident across sectors and shared through Highland networks.	High levels of achievement across the attainment curriculum for all learners, with action to close the poverty related gap. Highly skilled teachers and school leaders driving excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all, especially those with additional support needs. Inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment which gives young people the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to society, shape a sustainable future while celebrating and supporting progression for all.

	Establish curriculum leadership networks at local authority, Associated School Group and school levels. Share emerging learning and effective practice across the authority. Ensure all schools consider Learning for Sustainability within the Curriculum Improvement Cycle and new technical frameworks. Increase participation in Eco-Schools and Climate Action Groups across Highland schools.		
--	---	--	--

Theme: Use of Data			
Improvement outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?	National Improvement Framework (NIF) priority
By December 2026, the implementation of the new Data Dashboard, alongside associated professional learning, will strengthen the effective use of data to support self-evaluation, improvement planning and evidence-informed decision-making.	Use data relating to Developmental Milestones, Curriculum for Excellence achievement levels at P1, P4, P7 and S3, and National 1-3 and SQA attainment to support schools in improving outcomes for children and young people with additional support needs. Further develop the Data Dashboard and "Data on a Page" approaches, enabling schools and ELC settings to analyse data effectively, identify gaps and monitor progress. Support schools and ELC settings to strengthen universal support through effective use of additional support needs data.	Attainment measures will show continued improvement. The gap between the most and least advantages will lessen. Positive feedback from school leaders around training and use of data dashboard to support their school improvement work. Through QIVs, it is evident that teachers and practitioners are increasingly able to talk about data relevant to their roles and responsibilities in support of the children and young people the work with. Attendance dashboard shows improvements across the session for individual children and cohorts.	High levels of achievement across the attainment curriculum for all learners, with action to close the poverty related gap.

By June 2027, attendance levels across all sectors will improve in line with the revised Highland Stretch Aims.	Ensure that the recommendations set out in <i>Call to Action: Tackling Poverty in the Highlands</i> are recognised and progressed to drive continuous improvement. Implement the refreshed 3-18 Attendance Policy. Continue to promote, monitor and embed the refreshed attendance policy, framework and resources to help children and young people overcome barriers to attendance. Ensure schools use data effectively to track attendance and implement evidence-based interventions. Target Cohort 4 of the National Attendance Improvement Programme, focusing on S3 learners and care-experienced children and young people, within identified schools.	Where attendance is lower suitable evidence-based interventions are in place and are demonstrating improvements.	
--	---	---	--

	Use family survey evidence to demonstrate improved understanding, engagement and partnership working.		
--	---	--	--

Theme: Health and Wellbeing			
Improvement outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?	National Improvement Framework (NIF) priority
By December 2026, a refreshed Health and Wellbeing Framework will be in place to support a consistent and inclusive approach to wellbeing across Highland schools and settings. By June 2027, relationships and behaviour approaches will be reviewed and strengthened to promote positive, inclusive and supportive learning environments across Highland. By June 2027 there will be a heightened awareness of Equalities work and plan for Improvement to support schools.	Complete and launch the refreshed Health and Wellbeing Framework to all schools by January 2027 through the work of the Health and Wellbeing Strategic Improvement Working Group. Finalise and launch refreshed guidance for all primary schools by October 2026. Review Highland Council local authority guidance to ensure pupil voice is captured and reflected in line with UNCRC legislation. Share the Relationships and Behaviour Roadmap and policy templates with all schools and ELC settings to strengthen consistency of	HTs will be familiar with the framework and use it to inform actions within their 27/28 SIP as appropriate (Number of SIPs referring to the framework), HTs will be familiar with the guidance and use it to support improved attendance.	Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing Inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment which gives young people the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to society, shape a sustainable future while celebrating and supporting progression for all.

	practice and ensure alignment with current guidance. Ensure the Equalities networks and associated subgroups work is available to support schools.		
--	--	--	--

Theme: Parental Involvement and Engagement			
Improvement outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?	National Improvement Framework (NIF) Outcome
By December 2026, Parent Forums will have contributed to the review of Year 1 of the Parental Involvement and Engagement (PIE) Strategy Action Plan and informed the development of refreshed priorities and targets. By June 2027, Parent Councils will be further developed and supported to strengthen meaningful parental engagement in school improvement. By June 2027, schools and AQIM cluster teams are aware of available family learning resources for their area for session 2027- 28 and can start partnership work in the new session.	Explore the establishment of Area Parent Council Forums as a replacement for the Highland Parent Council Partnership (HPCP). Identify and promote an effective online resource to support parental engagement. Promote the establishment of Parent Councils and support their effective operation. Explore opportunities to enhance family learning support for schools through existing Council and partner resources.	Survey responses from parents, HSHA and PHRG meetings Focus group feedback from HTs, PC group, HSHA, PHRG agree on identified resource. Increased number of parent councils established in school. Increase in number of schools engagement with family learning resources and supports.	Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people. Improvement in achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Theme: Inclusive Practice/Additional Support Needs			
Improvement outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?	National Improvement Framework (NIF) Outcome
By June 2027, a review of pupil support staff roles and deployment will be completed to ensure resources are aligned effectively to meet the needs of children and young people. By June 2027, GIRFEC principles will be consistently embedded across services to ensure children and young people receive the right support, at the right time, from the right people.	Review service remits to improve outcomes through enhanced and specialist support for children and young people across Highland. Appoint Lead Practitioners (Lead PSAs) with clear responsibilities for supporting staff to meet the needs of children and young people in their care. Once established, ensure Lead Practitioners promote consistency of practice across schools and settings and provide mentoring and support to colleagues as required. Ensure all Named Persons and ELC Managers complete refreshed GIRFEC training, supported by a programme of	Attendees at training sessions. Attendance data of pupils and staff. Improved Attainment data. Scrutiny of PSI data A survey will establish the number of school and settings that have updated their policy in line with National and Local guidelines and to identify any additional support required. Quality Improvement Visits – focus on safeguarding. HMI and Care Inspectorate reports. Attendance at and feedback from training sessions. Ongoing monitoring will need to be in place going forward to	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 children and young people's health and wellbeing Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing. Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.

	training sessions, targeted promotion and reminders. Maintain a focus on ensuring children's views are consistently recorded and reflected within Child's Plans. Deliver the second cohort of the Inclusive Practice Programme from September 2026 to support the continued development of inclusive practice across the authority. Implement guidance on The Use of Physical Intervention in all schools following training to support this. Continued implementation of Child Inclusion Research into Curriculum Learning and Education (CIRCLE) Framework to support inclusive classroom environments.	evidence progress towards achieving the target of 95% Attendance, Exclusion and PSI data Number of JAG referrals Number of schools/settings with CIRCLE as a SIP priority.	
--	--	--	--

In addition to the above, the Education and Learning Service will progress Scottish Government commitments as more information becomes available in areas such as Breakfast Clubs and Outdoor Residential activity.

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 2027/28 Education and Learning Improvement Plan.