



Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy



Date:	August 2025
Lead Officer:	Bernadette Martin-Scott
Designation:	Chief Officer – Primary & Early Years
Next review:	August 2026

Contents

Aims	Page 3
Our Approach	Page 3
Our Journey	Page 4
Our Local Context	Page 6
National Context	Page 6
Appendix 1: Governance of the RAAS	Page 8
Appendix 2: Improvement Methodology	Page 10
Appendix 3: Stretch Aims	Page 12

Aims

The overall aim of the Highland Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy is to set out our shared vision, priorities, and expectations in relation to raising attainment and achievement for every child and young person to achieve the national ambition of:

- excellence through raising attainment, ensuring that every child achieves:
 - the highest standards in literacy and numeracy,
 - the right range of skills, qualifications, and achievements to succeed.
- improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.

This strategy reflects our unwavering commitment to achieving the highest outcomes for all, especially those most disadvantaged by poverty. It provides an opportunity to focus on the local and national context; outline the Highland approach and details what we will do to measure success.

Our Approach

In Highland, we take a holistic view of attainment, tracking the learning journey from early years into a sustained positive destination for all children and young people, with a particular focus on those who face disadvantage and barriers to learning. These are informed by The Council values of Ambitious, Sustainable and Connected.

We are improving our use of data to ensure it is used effectively to make sound decisions about allocation of resources and ensure a consistent approach in all sectors to maximise the attainment, achievement and life chances for all Highland's children and young people.

Following the formation of the Raising Attainment Reference Group including Assistant Chief Executive – People; Education and Learning Chief Officers; and 12 Headteachers from Primary and Secondary sectors, and in consultation with all Highland Headteachers, four themes for improvement have been identified as key to raising standards across our schools.

- Leadership
- Learning and Teaching
- Curriculum
- Data Analysis.

Action in each of the areas will be implemented by central staff, school leaders and practitioners within classrooms. Education & Learning Senior Leaders, the Raising Attainment Reference Group and the Raising Attainment Board have a key role in driving forward this strategy as well as monitoring and evaluation its progress in improving outcomes for children and young people across Highland schools. More information about governance of this strategy can be found in Appendix 1.

Each school and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting prepares and publishes their individual School Standards and Quality Report describing their improvement journey over the past year. This, along with their self-evaluation activity throughout the year supports the creation of the School Improvement Plan. All schools and ELC settings will engage with the content of this strategy and ensure that the four key themes are reflected in some way within their individual School Improvement Plan outcomes.

During the period of the strategy school leaders will engage in Learning and Development activity around Improvement Methodology to build our collective ability to measure progress and evaluate the impact of our work on children, young people, and families. Further detail is provided within Appendix 2.

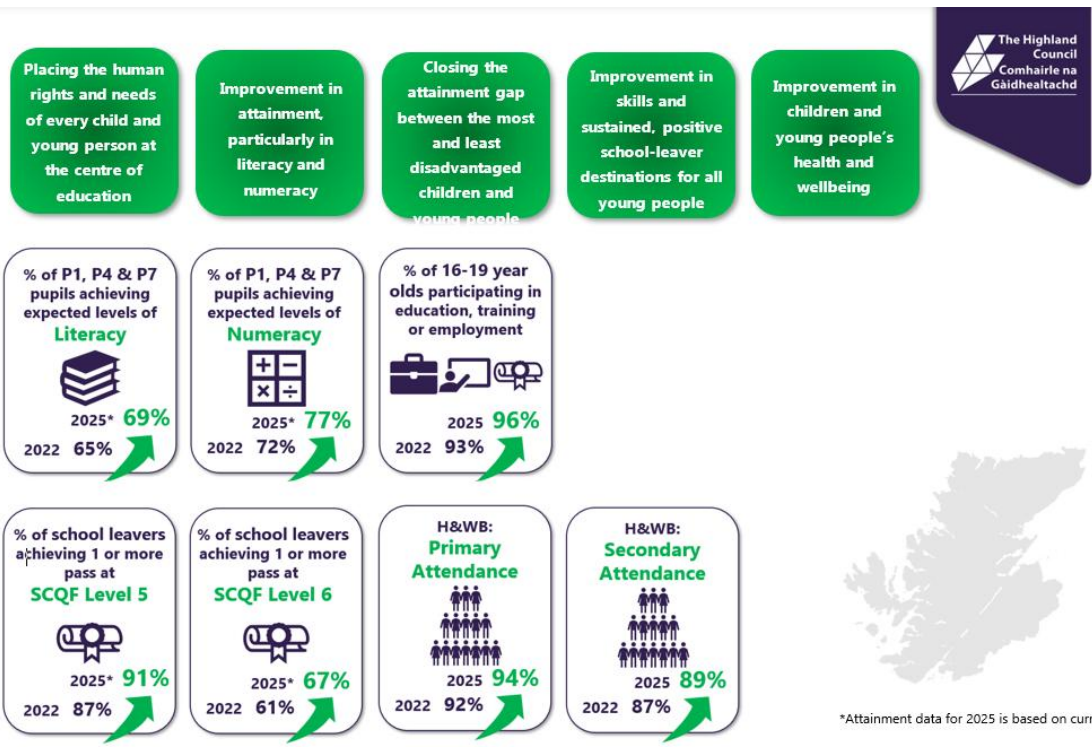
The Collaborative Improvement Framework supports Highland Council's Quality Improvement Team to engage with schools in effective evaluation, planning and reporting at establishment and department level. There is a structured model of quality assurance activity which includes data analysis, self-evaluation, professional discussion, and a planned programme of school visits. This system will allow for monitoring and evaluation of the RAAS at school level.

Our Journey

A refreshed focus on Raising Attainment has been essential following the Covid Pandemic and societal changes such as the cost-of-living crisis, impacting on employment and poverty; as well as a rise in the complexity and number of children who have an additional support need.

Over the last two years steady progress in raising attainment is evident and has to date been reviewed annually and published in the National Improvement Framework (NIF) report/plan. Moving forward this RAAS will be enacted via the Education and Learning Improvement Plan (ELIP).

The data below illustrates that Highland schools are on a journey of improvement that will now be further supported by the RAAS and ELIP.



*Attainment data for 2025 is based on current projections

This strategy supports all stakeholders* to understand the vision and participate as partners in the plan for improvement across the Highland Council Schools and can be viewed in conjunction with other important frameworks, guidance and strategies** that impact improvement and raised standards.

*Local Authority Officers including School Leaders, Teachers, ELC staff, and all support staff; Parents and Carers, Internal and External Partners and Elected Members.

**Collaborative Improvement Framework, Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework, Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy, Health, and Wellbeing Strategy (currently undergoing review and refresh).

Our Local Context



Highland is a diverse area encompassing one third of the land mass of Scotland. Whilst we have a growing city and a number of large towns, 65% of people live in very remote rural, remote rural and accessible rural areas. Using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), Highland has a significant number of children and young people who are identified as coming from families potentially affected by poverty. The numbers of families experiencing poverty has increased as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

Evidence tells us that around 20% of children and young people in our local authority are affected by poverty. Poverty is not confined to the urban areas of Highland. We know that rural poverty can be less visible, making it harder to identify. Rural deprivation can include factors such as fuel poverty, increased transport costs to access services, low-income employment, and under-employment.

The infographic above shows the challenges facing The Highland Council area that will have an impact on raising attainment and achievement.

National Context

Launched in February 2015, The Scottish Attainment Challenge was established to achieve equity in education by ensuring that every child has the same opportunity to succeed, with a particular focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. It is

underpinned by [The National Improvement Framework](#), [Curriculum for Excellence](#) and [Getting it Right for Every Child](#). It focuses on improvement activity in literacy, numeracy, health, and wellbeing and complements the broader range of initiatives and programmes to ensure that all of Scotland's children and young people reach their full potential.

The mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge is:

- to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.
- to support education recovery, to increase pace of, and reduce variation in, progress.

Initiatives to address the Scottish Attainment Challenge are supported by Attainment Scotland Funding (ASF). Funding allocated to local authorities includes Strategic Equity Funding (SEF), Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) and Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) funding.

Stretch aims were introduced through the Scottish Attainment Challenge [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#) in 2022. This development includes a requirement for local authorities to set ambitious but achievable stretch aims for progress in overall attainment and in closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

These are national measures which have been developed to mark the progress being made in addressing key priorities over time with support and challenge provided through professional dialogue with Education Scotland. The progress made in addressing our overarching aim of achieving the highest outcomes for all, especially those most disadvantaged by poverty, will be measured through our Stretch Aims (Appendix 3).

They reflect the key priorities of the National Improvement Framework which are:

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

The 2023 National Improvement Framework (NIF) and Improvement Plan has six drivers for improvement and five key priorities. These provide the framework by which we will deliver our improvement activity to be detailed in our new Education Improvement Plan previously known as the [NIF Plan](#).

Appendix 1: Governance of the RAAS

The RAAS will be realised through the new Education and Learning Improvement Plan. Progress towards the outcomes outlined within this plan will be reported on quarterly via Education and Learning Committee.

The Raising Attainment Board (RAB) will support Education and Learning Senior Leadership Team in their strategic oversight of activity targeted at raising attainment and closing the poverty-related gap. In termly meetings, the Board will review and monitor the progress being made towards strategic objectives; and by schools in meeting outcomes related to key priorities and stretch aims.

The aims and responsibilities of the Board are to:

- convey the direction of travel for raising attainment within Education and Learning.
- share expectations and levels of accountability with other strategy groups, workstreams and school leaders.
- support analysis of key data and measures to monitor school attainment and performance across the school year, through the performance management framework.
- support analysis of key data and measures to monitor ELC achievement across the year.
- have a regular overview of and report on national returns, attainment results, predicted attainment and senior phase data.
- monitor, review, and evaluate robust systems in relation to Pupil Equity Funding expenditure and track attainment.
- report to the E&L Senior Leadership Team on the progress of the RAB, including the provision of regular thematic reports to update progress and performance that are qualitative and quantitative where relevant, informing the ELIP.

Membership

The Board is made up of representatives from Education and Learning and Education Scotland. Membership is designed to be flexible in order to be both agile and responsive to national priorities and will include the roles below:

Chief Officer, Primary and Early Years (Lead/Chairperson)

Chief Officer Secondary

4 Headteachers/Members of the Raising Attainment Reference Group

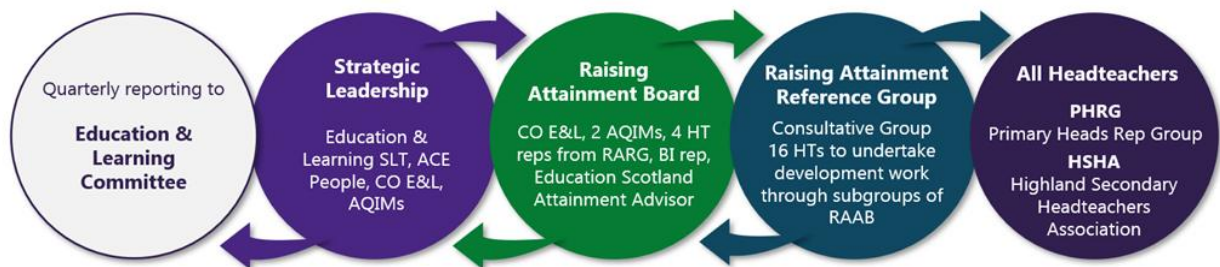
AQIMs with responsibility for Quality Improvement, Data and SEF/PEF

Education Scotland Attainment Advisor

Business Intelligence Team representative

Sub-groups of the Board are responsible for delivering actions identified within each of the four themes: Leadership; Learning and Teaching; Curriculum; and Data Analysis. Each subgroup will be led/chaired by an Area Quality Improvement Manager (AQIM).

Both the RAB and its subgroup operation will be guided by a Terms of Reference agreement, created at the first meeting to be reviewed annually.



Appendix 2: Improvement Methodology

Improvement Methodology is key to robust processes around ensuring impact on improvement outcomes. It provides simple yet powerful tools designed to accelerate improvement which are intended to complement and build on work that schools have already undertaken to raise attainment and close the poverty related gap.

Nationally, Model for Improvement approaches are extensively used in healthcare and by CYPIC (Children and Young Peoples Improvement Collaborative). This framework provides a clear structure for developing, testing, and implementing changes leading to sustainable improvement.

Improvement Methodology professional learning for senior leaders outlines the key components of the improvement journey and the roots of improvement science and includes a focus on the:

- variety of Improvement Methodology tools and how to implement these in a school setting
- Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA cycle)
- range of qualitative and quantitative data available to schools
- key steps in writing effective aims and measures within quality improvement plans
- key elements for creating the right conditions for implementing change
- spread and scale change process.

Evidence-based and data-driven improvement activity is expanding. Interventions to address the poverty related gap are increasingly well-planned and well-evaluated to show impact. School leaders are supported to use Improvement Methodology (which combines action research and Model for Improvement strategies) and tools from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to analyse school level data to identify attainment gaps, and from there to select and evaluate appropriate interventions.

It is recognised that individual schools need to respond according to their own data, current developments, and staff skill set. Highland Improvement Methodology is designed to support this. A clear evidence base exists for interventions that can support schools to close the attainment gap. The Scottish Attainment Challenge: Learning and Teaching Toolkit, the Early Years Toolkit and the Sutton Trust-EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit all provide accessible summaries of educational research which provide guidance for teachers, practitioners, schools and other settings on how to use their resources to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

Secondary schools are currently organised into Quads which promote collaboration and improvement activity. As the new structure is implemented across the eight areas, consideration will be given to how a similar model could be implemented across the Primary sector to ensure the most impact.

Specific development sessions for school leaders will be provided to ensure that Improvement Methodology is a systematic part of School Improvement Planning and Self Evaluation processes.

Schools will be supported to make best use of data to track and monitor improvement and intervention activity. Quality improvement outcomes are framed by available data, and this work is being informed by the developing approach to model for improvement. Challenge and support to schools is provided by Area Quality Improvement Managers, through the Collaborative Improvement Framework, complementing wider opportunities for teacher professional learning. This work supports raised expectations of pupil progress and is increasing practitioner confidence in learning and teaching and moderation at classroom level and in making informed judgements.

Appendix 3: Stretch Aims

Stretch Aims are national measures which have been developed to mark the progress being made in addressing key priorities over time. They set high expectations to help ensure significant progress is made in recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and in achieving the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Each school will develop their own stretch aims and will add to the overall collective improving picture across Highland schools.

Our Core Stretch Aims, which are common for all local authorities, will reflect progress in the following indicators:

- Curriculum for Excellence levels (ACEL levels) for P1, 4, 7 Literacy combined and Numeracy;
- Proportion of school leavers attaining one or more passes at SCQF level 5 based on 'Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations' publication;
- Proportion of school leavers attaining one or more passes at SCQF level 6 based on 'Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations' publication;
- Participation measure: proportion of 16-19 years olds participating in education, employment or training based on Annual Participation Measure produced by Skills Development Scotland; and
- Health and wellbeing, using data for attendance and exclusions

Over the next year consideration will be given, in consultation with Headteachers, to the addition of Core Plus Stretch aims which will measure progress against specific local priorities and could include:

- The proportion of children starting P1 who meet all expected development milestones reflecting the importance of early intervention in closing the poverty-related attainment gap.
- Average total tariff points to provide an enhanced reflection of the complexity and totality of senior phase attainment.
- Curriculum for Excellence levels (ACEL) for P1, 4, 7 Literacy and Numeracy combined for Care Experienced Young People.
- Total Tariff Points for Care Experienced School Leavers.