



Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation: Fifth Interim Report - Year 6



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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Executive Summary

Introduction

E1. The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was launched in February 2015 with the strategic aim of ‘closing the poverty-related attainment gap between children and young people from the least and most disadvantaged communities’. The Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) prioritises improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing of those children adversely affected by poverty in Scotland’s schools. Achieving excellence and equity in education are the key aims.

E2. A programme of evaluation of the ASF is ongoing. The evaluation aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the ASF and to assess progress towards the following long-term outcomes:

1. Embedded and sustained practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap.
2. All children and young people are achieving the expected or excellent educational outcomes, regardless of their background.
3. An education system which is aspirational, inclusive in practice and approaches for all including teachers, parents and carers, children and young people.
4. Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.

E3. This report focuses on the Year 6 (2020/21) evaluation of ASF across Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), Challenge Authority and Schools Programme Funding streams. The refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge, launched on 30 March 2022, has a new funding structure which will be taken account of in a revised evaluation strategy for 2022 onwards.

E4. The report provides a narrative on progress from a range of evidence sources including:

- Administrative data on Challenge Authority, Schools Programme and PEF allocations and spend;
- National Improvement Framework (NIF) quantitative measures on attainment and wellbeing;
- Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports;
- Surveys of headteachers and local authorities undertaken on an annual basis to explore perspectives on ASF.

Key findings

E5. It is apparent from the evidence considered in the evaluation that the impact of COVID-19 on the 2020/21 year was considerable. This included operational challenges such as staff recruitment and challenges associated with staff absences; negative impacts on staff wellbeing; pupil absences; and impacts on delivery of initiatives with some paused. COVID-19 and the resulting impact on education was

the key factor influencing perceived progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

E6. However, despite the considerable impact of COVID-19 across the 2020/21 academic year, the evidence presented for the Year 6 report continues to indicate positive progress towards the long term outcome of closing the poverty related attainment gap. This is, in large part, due to the response of schools and local authorities in adapting and responding to the challenges posed by COVID-19, and the role of ASF funding and flexibilities to support this response.

E7. This evaluation shows the continuation of key trends from previous years – such as the focus on collaboration, use of data and evidence, and the recognition of the role of Attainment Advisors – as well as developing trends such as the increasingly evident focus on engaging families and communities. The evidence shows that approaches are increasingly embedded, underpinned by understanding of the challenges facing pupils and their families, and supported by a positive culture and ethos in schools.

E8. The quantitative measures on attainment show a generally positive, but varied, picture of progress with the impact of COVID-19 affecting both the measures and what the measures report. Data from Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) in primary schools showed an increasing level of pupils meeting expected levels in both literacy and numeracy until 2020/21, a period of school building closures and other disruptions, when these figures decreased and the gap between pupils from most and least deprived areas widened. Across school leaver attainment measures, the proportion of school leavers attaining one pass or more increased in 2020/21, while the gap between school leavers from the most and least deprived areas reduced. However, care must be taken when interpreting 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leaver attainment figures due to the changed SQA approach to certification as a result of the pandemic, which affects comparability.

E9. Views on progress from schools and local authorities remain positive. Despite the impact of the pandemic, almost 9 out of 10 headteachers reported seeing improvements in closing the poverty related attainment gap, while 94% indicated that they expect to see improvements in the next five years.

E10. This report outlines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools; the response of schools and local authorities to address these challenges; and the progress that is being made to close the poverty-related attainment gap. Despite the impact of the pandemic, progress towards long term outcomes continues, particularly in factors such as collaboration, use of data and evidence, and positive culture and ethos. This progress is reflected in views from schools and local authorities, and in positive, although varied, attainment data. The challenge remains a long-term endeavour, particularly given the impact of the pandemic, but progress in closing the attainment gap continues to be evidenced.

The following paragraphs outline the key findings from each chapter of the report:

Governance and support (Chapter 2)

E11. There were broadly positive views of governance and support provided by Scottish Government, Attainment Advisors and wider Education Scotland teams. Calls were made for the Scottish Government to provide more opportunities for sharing learning and good practice.

E12. The Attainment Advisor role was viewed as offering strong support and challenge, bringing a national perspective, support around use of data and evidence, sharing good practice, and working directly with target schools.

E13. A range of processes and supports for schools were identified from Scottish Government, Education Scotland and local authorities, with particular recognition of the importance of the Attainment Advisor role in bringing a national perspective to support design and implementation of PEF.

E14. Headteachers responding to the 2021 survey were generally positive on Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) processes and the role of PEF in addressing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Funding (Chapter 2)

E15. Funding available to local authorities and schools has increased considerably over the duration of ASF.

E16. Challenge Authority and Schools Programme spend as a proportion of allocation have continued to broadly increase year-on-year from 2017/18 to 2020/21. PEF spend as a proportion of allocation has also increased year-on-year.

E17. There was some evidence of change of use of resources at local authority level over the previous year to focus on outcomes for the most socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people.

E18. Flexibilities in the use of ASF introduced in May 2020 to enable local authorities to respond to COVID-19 had been utilised by local authorities and by schools, for example to support access to remote learning and to address additional support for learners most impacted by COVID-19. Nearly 3 in 4 schools (73%) responding to the Headteacher Survey 2021 had used the greater flexibility, most commonly to increase staffing capacity; to provide digital resources and connectivity; to support those affected by poverty; and, to support increased family and community engagement.

Approaches to Closing the Poverty-related Attainment Gap (Chapter 3)

E19. There is continued evidence of the development of approaches to address the poverty-related attainment gap at local authority and school level.

E20. Approaches to addressing the poverty-related attainment gap had been influenced both by the first period of COVID-19 related school building closures (March to June 2020), and the second period (January to March 2021). Headteachers' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the previous school year had also contributed to their approach during 2020/21.

E21. Engaging families and communities emerged as a strong focus in local authority and school approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

E22. The importance of understanding the challenges and barriers faced by children and young people affected by poverty as key to developing appropriate approaches was highlighted.

E23. Approaches continued to include both targeted and universal approaches. There were high levels of awareness of the range of potential approaches available to schools in closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and confidence in selecting the most effective approaches, was also evidenced.

E24. New circumstances affecting families as a result of COVID-19 were apparent, with increasing mental health needs being most commonly identified. Approaches had been adapted in response to new circumstances including, for example, a greater focus on mental health and wellbeing (and to a lesser extent on physical health and wellbeing); more support for remote learning and digital connectivity; additional staffing skills and capacity; and additional support for parents and families including help with access to financial support, food, clothing etc. and initiatives to reduce the cost of the school day. Using community links and partnerships in order to help reach more families in need of support were also commonly highlighted.

Progress Towards Short- and Medium-term Outcomes (Chapter 4)

E25. Progress towards short and medium-term outcomes was considered, with factors supporting and hindering progress identified. COVID-19 was the predominant factor, and had influenced progress in a variety of ways. This included operational challenges such as staff recruitment and challenges associated with staff absences; negative impacts on staff wellbeing; pupil absences and impacts on delivery of initiatives with some paused. However, factors supporting progress were also identified and included: improved ethos, culture and understanding; headteacher empowerment/empowerment at the school level; data and evidence; effective target setting; collaboration; prioritisation given to closing the poverty-related attainment gap; support and challenge provided by local authority central teams/lead officers; Attainment Advisor support; and allocation of PEF over two years.

Engaging families and communities

E26. Key learning around engaging with families and communities in the context of COVID-19 is emerging and includes: the importance of family learning/family link workers and teams; effective links to wider partnerships; opportunities for online communication; need for meaningful engagement and challenging assumptions of what support families may need.

E27. There is emerging evidence of the impact of specific roles to support engagement with families, as well as a broader range of impacts identified by stakeholders including strengthened relationships with families and communities; increased awareness within schools of poverty and its impact on pupils and families; increased supports in place for families affected by poverty; a greater appreciation of the role schools can play; and, a greater focus on pupil attendance and engagement.

Collaboration

E28. There continues to be evidence of increased collaboration as a result of the Attainment Scotland Fund.

E29. Collaborations were evident both within local authorities and outwith local authorities, with collaborations key to supporting and enabling sharing of practice, building capacity and improvement. Changes to collaborations over the previous year were primarily related to the ongoing impact of COVID-19. There was evidence of some networks and collaborations being paused, of the impact of staff resource constraints, and the need to adapt and develop new collaborations to focus on vital support work within schools rather than wider collaborations. There was also evidence of ongoing developments to support collaborations in a number of contexts and between different levels of the education system, including strategic and more practice-oriented approaches.

E30. Benefits of collaboration continue to be identified, including supporting a focus on improving outcomes for children and young people affected by poverty through effective collaboration across services and sectors.

Use of data and evidence

E31. Indicators related to the use of data and evidence within ASF activity point to an increasingly 'data rich' environment, with a wide range of tools utilised across levels of the system and evidence of ongoing developments in the collection, collation and analysis of data, including a wider range of data and evidence being drawn on to support decision-making.

E32. Data and evidence relevant to the local context featured strongly in local authority decision-making over the previous year, from local authority-wide to the school level. At local authority level, the use of nationally available tools (e.g. Insight, BGE Toolkit) continued to be highlighted, alongside bespoke local authority tools developed to support data analysis to support decision-making.

E33. Headteachers maintained broadly positive perceptions (as measured through responses to the Headteacher Survey 2021) related to the use of data and evidence on measures such as:

- use of data and evidence to inform the development of their school's approach;
- skills in measuring the impact of their school's approaches;
- identifying the most appropriate measure(s) to assess impact;
- measuring the progress and impact of approaches;

- the extent that ASF support had helped develop staff skills and knowledge in using data and evidence.

E34. Whilst broadly positive, headteachers were less positive on some of the above measures than pre-2020 Survey findings, and there continued to be some differences in perceptions according to ASF funding stream and rurality.

E35. Data and evidence are being used to drive improvement, from strategic-decision-making through to classroom practitioner, but also to ensure support is targeted at where it is most needed, or to effectively prioritise interventions.

E36. COVID-19 has impacted on use of data and evidence. Some data collections (such as ACEL) have been impacted due to the pandemic, and there are requirements to utilise existing data and evidence, and to develop new sources of data and evidence, in order to respond appropriately to ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19.

E37. Collaboration was a driver for improvement in use of data and evidence, with examples of data-focused collaborative approaches e.g. at school cluster and neighbourhood grouping level. The role of Attainment Advisors working across a range of contexts including with local authority and individual schools, often in close collaboration with local authority leads, was a key feature.

Progress Towards Long-term Outcomes (Chapter 5)

E38. The analysis of quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing shows some positive signs in closing the attainment gap but it is a varied picture on progress depending on the measure under consideration. The impact on children and young people's learning as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic is clearly seen in the attainment statistics.

Reported evidence of impact

E39. Perceptions of progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap were gathered at both local authority and school level.

E40. At local authority level, the majority of local authorities responding to the 2021 Survey perceived they had seen improvement in their local authority towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap over the 2020/21 year as a result of ASF. There were clear indications of the impact of COVID-19. However, there was recognition amongst some local authority respondents that whilst it may not be possible to evidence progress through Curriculum for Excellence levels, and there is variability of progress across cohorts and schools, there is identified progress at school level on a number of relevant indicators indicating a positive trajectory of travel.

E41. At the school level, 87% of headteachers responding to the 2021 Headteacher Survey reported seeing an improvement in closing the poverty-related attainment gap as a result of ASF supported approaches in the previous year, a small decrease on 2020 (90%) and 2019 (91%). Headteachers who had seen 'a lot' of improvement in 2021 highlighted: school's capacity to implement approaches

relevant to local needs; teaching and staffing resources; and value of a focus on health and wellbeing.

E42. Headteachers who had not seen improvement primarily viewed adverse impact of COVID-19 as a factor, with some perceptions that PEF allocations were not sufficient for improvement to follow.

- 94% of headteachers responding to the 2021 Survey expected to see improvements in closing the poverty-related attainment gap over the next few years, an increase of six percentage points on 2020. This suggests that, after a decline in future expectations between 2019 and 2020, headteachers now feel more positive in terms of future expectations.
- There were also positive reports of improvements specifically as a result of PEF funding: 94% of headteachers in receipt of Challenge Authority or Schools Programme funding in addition to PEF who responded to the 2021 Survey reported seeing an improvement specifically as a result of PEF.

Factors influencing progress

E43. Findings from the Headteacher Survey 2021 continue to suggest a number of key factors associated with positive perceptions of progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap: change of culture or ethos such as embedding the approach to equity; tailoring use of ASF to local needs; effective use of data and evidence; and engagement with families and communities.

E44. Headteachers who were most likely to have seen progress were those who indicated PEF had been used effectively to meet local needs; those who felt the approach to achieving equity has been embedded within their school community were the second most likely group to have seen such progress.

COVID-19 as an influencing factor

E45. COVID-19 emerged as the key factor influencing perceptions of progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap. All local authorities responding to the 2021 survey were of the view COVID-19 had impacted on progress. The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable pupils was reinforced in responses, alongside increasing numbers of families moving into poverty.

E46. There was a continued view amongst headteachers of the impact of COVID-19 on perceived progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap, with nearly all (95%) of Headteacher Survey 2021 respondents viewing COVID-19 and school building closures as having had at least some impact on their progress, although a lower proportion in 2021 felt the impact had been significant (54%) than in 2020 (61%). Headteachers from schools with lower PEF allocations, those in rural schools and PEF-only schools were more likely to perceive the impact COVID-19 and school building closures was significant.

Embedded and sustained practices

E47. There was evidence of sustained and embedded practices as a result of the fund. Just over half (54%) of Headteacher Survey 2021 respondents expected ASF supported improvements would be sustainable, an increase on the 2020 Survey (34%). Additionally, almost two thirds (65%) expected the focus on equity would be sustainable, with headteachers responding to the 2021 survey more positively than in both the 2020 survey (58%) and the 2019 survey (42%).

E48. Headteachers who felt progress and/or focus on equity will be sustainable pointed to a range of factors in support of their view including: staff skills and capacity developed with ASF support, developing capacity to use evidence to inform approaches and embedding use of evidence in monitoring progress as part of their school culture, developing whole school approaches to equity and embedding approaches to achieving equity through improved pedagogy. Headteachers who were less positive about sustainability of progress and/or focus on equity related to concerns about staffing levels and potential loss of skills should staffing levels reduce.

E49. Local authority perspectives were broadly positive that the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap would be sustainable, with continuation of funding the primary factor associated with ensuring sustainability of focus on equity alongside a range of other factors including: ongoing professional learning; continued focus on understanding the challenges associated with poverty for children and their families; focus on data and evidence; creating a culture of embedding sustainable approaches; and, a focus on collaboration.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Methodology

Introduction

1.1 The Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) evaluation began in 2015 and follows the duration of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC). The evaluation focuses on the ASF which is the collective name for the funding strands that support the Scottish Attainment Challenge. An evaluation of the first two years of the ASF was published in [March 2018](#), with the Year 3 (2017/18) evaluation report published in [June 2019](#) the Year 4 (2018/19) report published in [October 2020](#) and the year 5 (2019/20) published in [June 2021](#).

1.2 This chapter sets the Year 6 Evaluation Report (2020/21) in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the recovery period for education and the SAC Refreshed mission and it provides detail on the aims of the evaluation, the overall approach and the structure of the Report.

Background

Context

1.3 This report covers the 2020/21 academic year, a year which saw a continued period of change as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery period for education. This academic year involved a period of school building closures in January - March 2021.

1.4 The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has continued to have an impact on the poverty-related attainment gap in 2020/21. This makes it critical that the evaluation of the ASF considers the impacts of this period on the operation and use of the fund. The [Equity Audit](#) published in January 2021 highlighted that the pandemic disruption and periods of school building closures had a disproportionate impact on children and young people impacted by poverty.

1.5 The findings reinforce the importance of focusing resources on an ongoing, long-term and system wide effort to address recovery and tackle the poverty-related attainment gap.

Scottish Attainment Challenge Context

1.6 The Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched in February 2015 to help tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. It is underpinned by the National Improvement Framework, Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child. It prioritises improvements in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing of those children adversely affected by poverty.

1.7 Achieving excellence and equity in education are the key aims as set out in the National Improvement Framework. The Scottish Attainment Challenge leads

system change through a tripartite shared leadership of national government, local government and the executive improvement agency, Education Scotland. The arrangement is designed to support and empower headteachers, schools, local authorities and their partners to develop focused and innovative approaches to improving outcomes for learners, reflecting their own local circumstances.

The current SAC has the following main strands:

- **The Challenge Authority and Schools Programmes** provide additional resource to nine local authorities, and a further 73 schools outwith those local authorities with the highest proportions of deprivation. The nine 'Challenge Authorities' are Glasgow, Dundee, Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire, North Lanarkshire, East Ayrshire and Renfrewshire.
- **Pupil Equity Funding (PEF)** provides £120m each year, directly to schools for headteachers to use at their discretion on initiatives that they consider will help close the poverty-related attainment gap. Over 97% of schools in Scotland have been allocated funding for pupils in Primary 1 through to third year of secondary school, based on the estimated numbers of pupils registered for free school meals.
- **Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP)** funding for targeted initiatives, activities, and resources, designed to improve the educational outcomes of this group. This was introduced in 2018/19 with funding allocated to all local authorities based on the number of looked after children they have in their care.
- Additionally a number of **national programmes** have been supported for targeted work to raise attainment and improve equity, including: staffing supply and capacity; professional learning and school leadership; investment in Regional Improvement Collaboratives and a number of third sector organisations.

1.8 These strands have developed over the period of the SAC. Challenge Authority and Schools Programme were the initial funding streams which commenced in 2015, followed by the introduction of PEF in 2017/18 and the CECYP in 2018/19.

Scottish Attainment Challenge Refreshed Mission

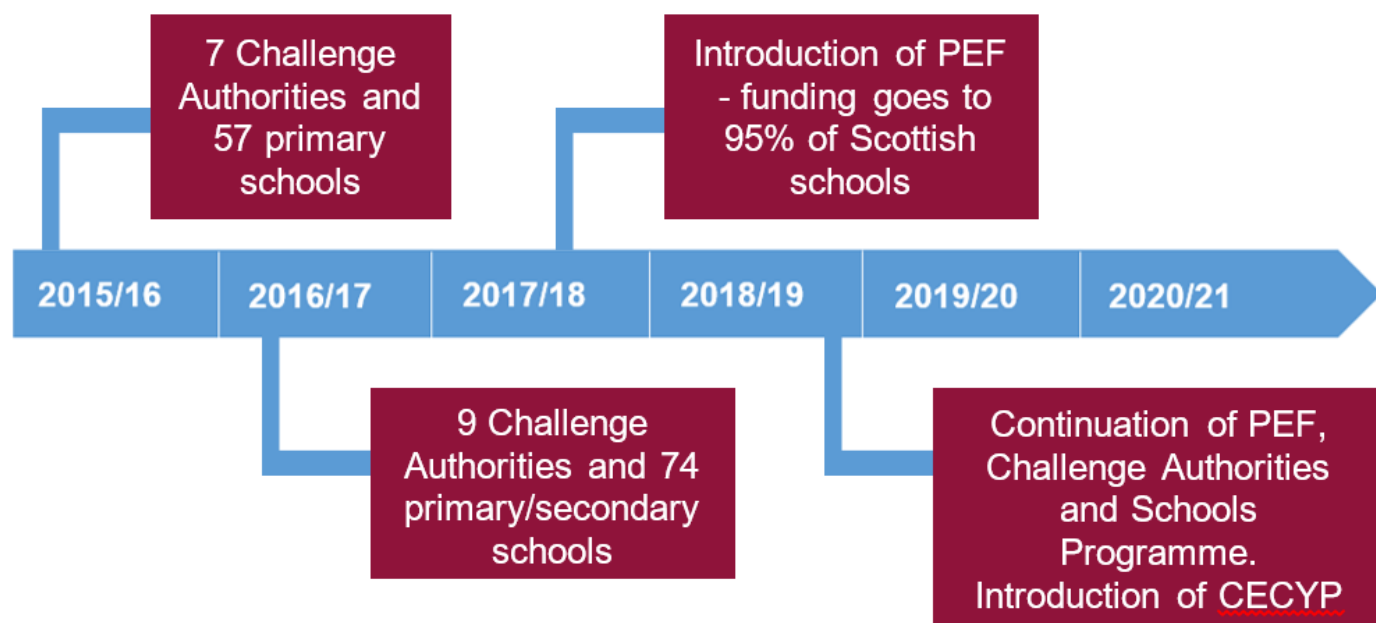
1.9 Within 2020/21 the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge mission was developed. In November 2021 the Cabinet Secretary [set out plans](#) for a refreshed mission, following a period of consultation with an Advisory Group involving key stakeholders. The refreshed mission is:

- To use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty related attainment gap.

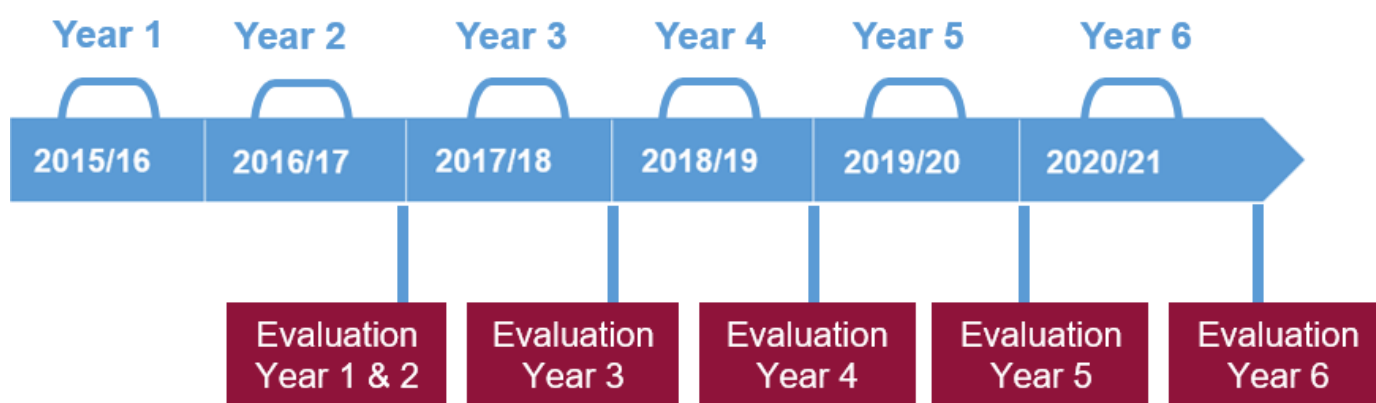
1.10 In refreshing the Scottish Attainment Challenge mission key evidence sources were drawn on including the [Closing the Poverty Related Attainment Gap: Progress Report 2016-2021](#) and the [Audit Scotland Report: Improving Outcomes for Young People Through Education](#) (also March 2021). Considerations from these reports shaped the refreshed programme and [The Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress which](#) has been developed to support the next phase of Challenge. This sets out the roles and responsibilities across the education system in the context of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and introduces a requirement for local authorities to set a series of locally identified stretch aims for progress for all pupils and for closing the poverty related attainment gap. Changes to the Attainment Scotland Fund see all 32 local authorities receiving funding from the Attainment Scotland Fund - Strategic Equity Funding. This will be distributed equitably based on Children in Low Income Families. Pupil Equity Funding will continue with allocations confirmed over the Parliamentary term, providing clarity for headteachers to make long term plans for their approaches to tackling the poverty related attainment gap.

1.11 In February and March 2022 a full review of the Logic Model¹ was undertaken in collaboration and consultation with key stakeholders. The development of a refreshed SAC Evaluation Strategy is currently in progress using the [new Programme Logic Model](#).

Figure 1.1: Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation Reporting Timeline Year 1 to Year 6



¹ A logic model is a diagrammatic planning tool that shows how a programme produces change, assisting in articulating programme goals, and helping with planning, evaluation, implementation and communication



Methodology

1.12 The evaluation aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the ASF and the extent to which the aims of the ASF have been met.

1.13 The evaluation has the following objectives:

- Assess the impact of the overall fund in improving attainment and health and wellbeing and reducing the difference between pupils from the most and least socio-economically deprived areas;
- Assess the extent to which the further aims and outcomes of the fund have been met including: promote capacity for data-based self-evaluation and improvement, encourage collaboration between schools and local authorities; embedding of equity across the education system; engagement with and support for pupils and their families living in poverty to engage with learning;
- Provide learning and increase the Scottish evidence base of what does and does not work to improve attainment and health and wellbeing, especially of pupils from the most socio-economically deprived areas;
- Provide learning on what did and did not work well in the process of implementing the fund across participating Challenge Authorities and schools and which factors helped and hindered the fund achieving its outcomes. In Year 6, to provide further learning on PEF.
- Provide learning on which factors helped and hindered the fund achieving its outcomes, with a specific focus on the impact of COVID-19.

1.14 Figure 1.2 sets out the long-term outcomes for the SAC as set out in the SAC Logic Model for the current Programme. In 2020 the SAC Logic Model was adapted to take account of COVID-19. This process was taken forward with Education Scotland and Scottish Government policy officials and analysts.

1.15 The ASF Evaluation research questions were subsequently adapted in line with the SAC Logic Model, resulting in a sub-set of COVID-19 impact evaluation questions. A further review of the ASF evaluation research objective and evaluation questions was undertaken to guide the 2020/21 evaluation, in recognition of the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and the development of the programme. The following priority areas were identified for the Year 6 Evaluation:

- Families and communities;
- Continuing focus on COVID-19 response/recovery;
- Emphasis on data and evidence for improvement;
- Collaboration;
- The importance of a greater focus on PEF; and,
- Intersection with other policy areas such as tackling child poverty.

Figure 1.2: Long-term outcomes for Scottish Attainment Challenge

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p>1. Embedded and sustained practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap</p> | <p>2. All children and young people are achieving the expected or excellent educational outcomes, regardless of their background</p> | <p>3. An education system which is aspirational, inclusive in practice and approaches for all including teachers, parents and carers, children and young people</p> | <p>4. Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people</p> |
|--|---|--|--|

1.16 Evidence in relation to the ASF aims has been gathered from a range of sources and evaluated against the research questions.

1.17 The sources used to inform progress in Year 6 of the ASF are set out below.

- **Administrative data:** Information gathered as part of the routine organisation of the ASF provides data primarily on the funding that local authorities and schools received from the different funding streams.
- **Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports:** Challenge Authorities and Schools Programme Progress Reports in March and September 2021.
- **Local Authority Survey 2021:** The Local Authority Survey was launched in mid-November 2021 and closed on 20 December 2021. In total, 26 local authorities responded to the survey (8 Challenge Authority, 10 Schools Programme, 8 PEF-only), an increase in response from the LA survey 2020 which achieved 15 responses, although fewer than the 28 responses in 2019. Analysis of the survey results have informed the findings in this overall evaluation report.

This was the fifth wave of the Local Authority survey. The first wave took place in 2016 with Challenge Authorities only and the second (2018), third (2019) and fourth (2020) waves were undertaken with all local authorities.

The third wave introduced an expanded survey format. This built on the findings of previous waves of the survey but in addition to considering existing themes (such as governance, funding, sustainability, PEF planning and implementation) also sought local authority perspectives of:

- developing approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap;
- the extent to which data and evidence featured in decision making at the local level;
- the extent to which the fund increased collaboration;
- factors supporting and mitigating progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap within local authorities.

The fifth wave covering 2020/21 maintained the expanded survey format, but also considered COVID-19 impacts for all survey questions specifically focusing on the period of school building closures between January - March 2021.

Views on planning and implementation of the CECYP Fund were also sought in the Local Authority Survey. The CECYP Fund is however outwith the scope of this evaluation report and therefore is reported on separately.

- **Headteacher Survey 2021:** The sixth wave of the Headteacher Survey 2021 was undertaken in Autumn 2021 on an externally commissioned basis. All Challenge Authority, Schools Programme and PEF-only schools were invited to respond to the survey. The survey invited responses from headteachers related to the 2020/21 academic year including the period of school building closures from January to March 2021.
- The survey sampling approach was modified from the previous survey, with a return to a 100% sample approach. As a result, the achieved sample for the present survey was around 50% larger than the 2020 achieved sample.
- The survey achieved an overall response rate of 25% (597 responses in total), slightly below the response rate for 2020 (27%; 420 responses from a sample survey approach for PEF-only schools). Survey responses have been weighted by ASF stream and urban/rural location to adjust for response bias².
- The low survey response achieved suggests the need for some caution in relation to the generalisability of survey findings to the wider population.
- **Quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing:** The report draws on available data consistent with the National Improvement Framework measures of the attainment gap. Analysis focuses on patterns of attainment across

² Survey weighting is used to re-balance survey responses to bring them more in line with the known profile of the wider population. In this instance, and consistent with previous surveys, weights were calculated to ensure response data was more consistent with the profile of all schools in receipt of ASF support, in terms of their distribution across ASF streams and urban/rural geography.

Challenge Authorities, non-Challenge Authorities and Scotland overall. The following should be noted:

- Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) - For 2020/21 data was collected for Primary school (P1, P4 and P7) pupils only. Secondary school and special school data was not collected due to other pressures on these schools including implementation of the SQA National Qualifications Alternative Certification Model which was used to award National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers in 2021.
- Health and Wellbeing - The impact of COVID-19 on data collection means there is no update available for 2020/21 for the Total Difficulties Score and the Mental Wellbeing score (SALSUS/WEMWBS). The current available date was reported on in the ASF Year 5 Report (2019/20).

1.18 It should be noted that that evaluation of specific ‘interventions’ being implemented by schools and local authorities and the outcomes of those interventions is out of scope of the evaluation.

1.19 Whilst response rates to surveys and available data (Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels) have been impacted by COVID-19, the current evaluation methodology continues to make the best use of existing data to inform our understanding of factors that support improvement in closing the attainment gap at the six year stage of the current Programme.

Table 1.1: Data Sources for the ASF Evaluation

| Data Source | Coverage | Years covered | | | | | |
|---|--|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | | Year 1 (2015/16) | Year 2 (2016/17) | Year 3 (2017/18) | Year 4 (2018/19) | Year 5 (2019/20) | Year 6 (2020/21) |
| Administrative data (financial information) | All Challenge Authorities, Schools Programme local authorities and schools receiving PEF | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Challenge Authority and Schools Progress Reports | All 9 Challenge Authorities and all Schools Programme Progress Reports | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Local Authority Survey | Year 1: Challenge Authorities only Years 3, 4, 5, 6: all local authorities surveyed | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Headteacher Survey | Years 1 and 2: (Challenge | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | <p>Authorities and Schools Programme schools)</p> <p>Year 3: (Challenge Authority, Schools Programme funding plus sample of PEF-only schools)</p> <p>Year 4: All schools in receipt of ASF funding (Challenge Authority, Schools Programme, PEF-only)</p> <p>Year 5: All schools in receipt of ASF funding (Challenge Authority, Schools Programme, (50% sample of PEF-only)</p> <p>Year 6: All schools in receipt of ASF funding (Challenge Authority, Schools Programme, PEF-only)</p> | | | | | | |
| Quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing | <p>Analysis of attainment measures set out in the 2022 National Improvement Framework.</p> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ (limited data available) | ✓ (not all data available) |

Report Structure

1.20 This report focuses on ASF in Year 6 (2020/21) of the SAC. Findings highlighted in the report seek to show changes over the duration of the fund to date encompassing changes in Year 6 from Years 1 to 5.

1.21 Similar to the Year 5 report, this evaluation report considers Challenge Authority, Schools Programme and PEF funding streams and seeks to highlight any emerging differences across the three funding streams.

1.22 The report is structured around the inputs, activities, short to medium-term outcomes and long-term impact of the ASF. This reflects the revisions made to the evaluation questions for Year 5 which have been subject to consideration and revised again for Year 6. The evaluation questions are set out in the chapter structure overview below (chapters 2-5 contain a summary of key findings box). The COVID-19 focus of the evaluation questions introduced for the Year 5 evaluation were also maintained for Year 6 and were reviewed to reflect current evaluation requirements. The Year 6 evaluation questions provided a key focus for the adaptation of survey instruments for the evaluation.

Chapter 1 Introduction, Background and Methodology

Chapter 2 Inputs: Governance and Funding

- What did and did not work well in the national and local governance and support as part of the Fund?
- How much funding did local authorities and schools receive, to what extent did they consider it adequate, supplement it with other funding sources, and use it in accordance with the fund's requirements?

COVID-19 Focus:

- What did and didn't work well in terms of changes to national organisation and governance of the Fund as a result of COVID-19: focus on funding flexibilities, how funds were used differently and how they supported the programme aims.

Chapter 3 Activities and Outputs: Approaches

- How did schools and local authorities identify, select and implement their approach for addressing the poverty-related attainment gap?
- To what extent did the selected approach aim to support pupils (and parents) from the most deprived backgrounds?

COVID-19 Focus:

- In what ways were approaches modified or identified to support pupils during the period of school building closures?

Chapter 4 Short and medium term outcomes: Perceptions of success, collaboration, use of data and evidence

- To what extent did schools and local authorities involved with the fund feel the intended outcomes of their approach had been achieved/ there had been progress towards achieving these outcomes?
- To what extent has the fund encouraged collaboration, and why?
- To what extent did schools and authorities use data, analysis and evidence to drive improvements as part of the fund?
- To what extent has the fund contributed to engagement with and support for families and communities?

COVID-19 Focus:

- How did COVID-19 impact on the outcomes that Local Authorities and schools were intending to progress? How did COVID-19 impact on collaboration? How did COVID-19 impact on use of data/analysis/evidence?

Chapter 5 Long-term outcomes: Contribution to improvement and reduction of the poverty-related attainment gap

- To what extent did the fund contribute to an improvement in attainment and health and wellbeing, and a reduction of the gap between pupils from the most and least deprived areas?
- To what extent did the fund contribute to equity becoming embedded at different levels of the education system?

COVID-19 Focus:

- Perceptions of impact of COVID-19 on existing patterns of numeracy and literacy attainment and health and wellbeing? Focus on families moving into being affected by poverty. What does this mean for our understanding of the 'target group', its size/scale/make-up? To what extent did sustainability remain a factor or replaced by immediate COVID-19 concerns?

Chapter 6 Discussion and conclusions

Chapter 2 Inputs: Governance, Support and Funding

Chapter 2 highlights

Governance and Support

- There were **broadly positive views of governance and support** provided by Scottish Government, Education Scotland and Attainment Advisors specifically. There were some calls for Scottish Government to provide more opportunities for sharing learning and good practice.
- The **Attainment Advisor role** was viewed as offering strong support and challenge, bringing a national perspective, support around use of data and evidence, sharing good practice, working directly with target schools.
- A range of processes and supports for schools in terms of **PEF** were identified from Scottish Government, Education Scotland and local authorities, with particular recognition of the importance of the Attainment Advisor role in bringing a national perspective to support design and implementation of PEF.
- Headteachers responding to the 2021 survey were generally positive on:
 - PEF processes (78% felt there was sufficient support in place to develop and implement their school plan for PEF; 71% felt timescales for planning for PEF was sufficient; 67% felt reporting requirements associated with PEF were reasonable).
 - Role of PEF in addressing poverty-related attainment gap (93% felt they had autonomy to develop PEF plans responsive to their local context and needs; 89% felt PEF provided additional resource needed to address the poverty-related attainment gap; 93% felt PEF had been used effectively to meet their school's needs).

Funding

- Funding available to local authorities and schools has **increased** considerably over the duration of ASF. In Year 6 (2020/21) a combined total of £172.5 million was distributed across Challenge Authorities (£42.9 million), Schools Programme (£7.1 million) and PEF (£122.5 million).
- Challenge Authority and Schools Programme **spend as a proportion of allocation** have continued to broadly increase year-on-year from 2017/18 to 2020/21. PEF spend as a proportion of allocation dropped slightly in 2020/21 (72%) compared to the previous two years (78%).
- **Flexibilities in the use of ASF to enable local authorities to respond to COVID-19** introduced in May 2020 had been utilised by local authorities and by schools, for example to support access to remote learning and to provide additional support for learners most impacted by COVID-19.

2.1 This chapter focuses on how the ASF was organised and supported at both a national and a local level. It also outlines the financial inputs to the programme by funding stream across Year 1 (2015/16) to Year 6 (2020/21) of ASF.

Governance and support

2.2 The evaluation considers what did and did not work well in the governance and support of the ASF at national and local level. It reviews how national and local organisation and governance and support of the fund worked across the funding strands of the ASF.

2.3 Evidence used to address this has been largely drawn from the Local Authority Survey 2021, Headteacher Survey 2021 and Challenge Authority and Schools Programme Progress reports.

National Governance and Support

2.4 National governance and support refers to the inputs and support provided by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland, including support through Attainment Advisors, and the organisation and administrative requirements of ASF.

2.5 Local authority perspectives on working with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland were gathered through the ASF Local Authority Survey 2021. Local authority respondents shared very positive perceptions around governance and support arrangements related to Scottish Government, Attainment Advisors and other Education Scotland staff, reflecting ongoing trends over the years of the evaluation.

2.6 In terms of what was working well in relation to **Scottish Government** governance, positive relationships, clear communication and guidance, flexibility and responsiveness were all mentioned in relation to what had worked well in terms of Scottish Government governance and support. Respondents to the Local Authority Survey 2021 also highlighted the ongoing and consistent focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

2.7 Areas of potential improvement to national support were suggested by some Local Authority Survey 2021 respondents. There were asks around streamlined reporting and less bureaucracy, and many respondents suggested changes in the alignment of funding to academic rather than financial year. Greater clarity on information gathering requirements/reporting with advance warning rather than short term was frequently mentioned. As one local authority respondent described, '*short term deadlines can put considerable pressure on central teams*'. More opportunities for sharing learning and good practice across local authorities was also suggested.

2.8 The Local Authority Survey 2021 continued to indicate broadly positive perspectives about the role of **Education Scotland** in terms of the fund³. Trends identified in earlier Local Authority Surveys continued to be evidenced, indicating positive relationships between local authorities and Education Scotland and the advice, guidance and support received in relation to the fund. Aspects highlighted by respondents included positive relationships with and support from Senior Regional

³ Interactions with Education Scotland through Attainment Advisors is addressed in the section on Local Governance.

Advisors, and resource provision such as the National Improvement Hub and Equity Sway⁴. Support from and engagement in **Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs)** was also highlighted.

Local Governance and Support

2.9 The **role of Attainment Advisors in respect of local governance and support** was highlighted in the Local Authority Survey 2021, and as in previous surveys perspectives remain very positive overall of the support provided by Attainment Advisors. Respondents highlighted ongoing aspects such as **strong support and challenge**, bringing a **national perspective**, support around **use of data and evidence**, **sharing good practice**, and **working directly with target schools**. The following direct quotations from survey responses illustrate aspects of the positive support received from Attainment Advisors:

'We work very closely with our Attainment Advisor ...and have found [their] support and challenge to be invaluable.' (Local authority in receipt of Schools Programme funding)

'Culture of openness, collaboration and trust.' (Local authority in receipt of Schools Programme funding)

'[Attainment Advisor] brings experience, professionalism and energy to (their) role which has resulted in really positive professional relationships being established across the authority.' (PEF-only local authority)

2.10 As in previous Local Authority Surveys, the Attainment Advisor role continued to be viewed as providing an important link between the national, regional and local levels in the 2021 survey, as illustrated by the following:

'[Attainment Advisors provide] a key link between Education Scotland, Scottish Government and (LA) with a clear focus on actions that will assist in closing the poverty related attainment gap.'

2.11 Themes highlighted in previous Local Authority Surveys regarding areas for improvement continued to feature in 2021 responses from local authorities. Issues related to **consistency**, **retention** and **availability** of Attainment Advisor resource continued to be raised by a small number of local authorities. There were also comments related to the **remit of Attainment Advisors** and whether this could be revisited, alongside **wider calls for revision and clearer definition of the role** of Attainment Advisors.

2.12 As in previous years, a number of respondents indicated there were no areas for further improvement, with continued affirmation of highly positive experiences in relation to the Attainment Advisor role.

⁴ Equity Sway is an online Education Scotland publication which signposts key publications, information and research to inform educators on themes around equity.

2.13 A number of specific suggestions were raised by individual local authority respondents in relation to the Attainment Advisor role:

- specific review meetings for different aspects of the ASF (CECYP, PEF etc.);
- creation of a network across the nine Challenge Authorities with tapering plans to support the move into SAC refresh.

PEF support and processes

2.14 Evidence on perspectives of PEF support and processes was gathered from both the Local Authority Survey 2021 and the Headteacher Survey 2021. This reflects views on support and processes around PEF made available to schools from Scottish Government, Education Scotland and local authorities.

2.15 The **important role of Attainment Advisors in terms of PEF** in bringing a national perspective to support design and implementation was also highlighted in the Local Authority Survey 2021, as illustrated by the following quotations from survey respondents:

'[Attainment Advisor is] able to bring (their) national perspective to the table and this has helped officers and headteachers with the design of and implementation of their spend'. (PEF-only local authority)

'Provision of quality support around outcomes, measures and monitoring and tracking of PEF plans and spend.' (PEF-only local authority)

2.16 Some local authority respondents highlighted the crucial nature of the support from their designated Attainment Advisor working alongside local authority colleagues, for example in translating national guidance into local guidance and the transfer of this to the headteacher level across a local authority. One local authority response provides an exemplar on how the designated Attainment Advisor worked together with local authority equity leads to support this practice:

'We have developed strong links with the Education Scotland Attainment Advisor to ensure that learning from work within these schools and from across Scotland can be used to support the work of the Pupil Equity Fund. The Attainment Advisor works closely with the Lead Education Manager. Within the Directorate, the Education Manager with the strategic overview and responsibility for Pupil Equity Funding works closely with the Education Scotland Attainment Advisor to ensure that schools and link Education Officers are kept up to date, supported and challenged with work in this area. They provide relevant information to schools through a range of vehicles that support schools in the aim to close the poverty related attainment gap. This Education Manager takes a monitoring role in the implementation of both the Schools and Pupil Equity Funding reporting at local and national levels.'
(Local Authority in receipt of Schools Programme funding)

2.17 Other aspects highlighted included, for example, developing professional learning and guidance packs for headteachers as a result of analysis of PEF plans by Attainment Advisors, as well as specific work providing advice, support and

challenge to individual headteachers, such as through drop-in sessions and bespoke coaching conversations.

2.18 Local authority perspectives of the **level and nature of support given to schools** in their local authority to aid their implementation of PEF were also provided through the Local Authority Survey 2021, as with previous versions of the survey.

Support provided to schools included:

- Mechanisms to support procurement processes, including HR and finance;
- Governance arrangements such as networks to facilitate links between schools and local/regional/national levels;
- Development of PEF guidance for schools;
- Mechanisms to support headteachers to make the best use of data sources for planning and measuring impact of PEF interventions (e.g. data visualisation tools);
- School visits, cluster meetings, and PEF clinics;
- Mechanisms to support collaboration, including co-ordination roles to support headteachers;
- Professional development opportunities for headteachers.

Headteachers' views of PEF processes

2.19 Headteachers responding to the 2021 survey were generally positive⁵ regarding PEF processes. For example:

- Eighty per cent of headteachers responding to the 2021 survey felt there was **sufficient support in place to develop and implement their school plan for PEF**, similar to 2020 (76%) and 2019 (74%) surveys.
- Headteachers remain broadly positive in relation to **timescales for planning for PEF being sufficient**, as indicated by 71% of respondents in 2021. This showed a small decrease from 2020 survey (75%) but maintained an improvement on the 2019 survey.
- Two thirds (67%) indicated that **reporting requirements associated with PEF were reasonable**, whilst 3 in 4 respondents (75%) to 2020 survey were of this view.

2.20 The great majority of headteachers felt they had **autonomy to develop PEF plans that are responsive to their local context and needs** (93%). This view was consistent across key respondent groups and was very similar to 2019 and 2020 survey findings. Headteachers responding to the 2021 survey were also highly positive on whether **PEF had provided additional resource needed to address the poverty-related attainment gap** (89%), and that **PEF had been used effectively to meet their school's needs** (93%). Views on whether PEF has provided additional resource have remained consistent over previous surveys.

⁵ The Headteacher Survey 2021 achieved a response rate of 25% and this (low) response should be taken into account when considering findings.

Funding

2.21 This section considers evidence related to funding gathered to address the following evaluation question:

How much funding did local authorities and schools receive, to what extent did they consider it adequate, supplement it with other funding sources, and use it in accordance with the fund's requirements?

2.22 Evidence on funding is drawn primarily from Scottish Government administrative data, and also draws on the Local Authority Survey 2021. The survey explored local authorities' use of resources towards improving outcomes for pupils living in the most deprived communities. Specific evidence on aspects of the above evaluation question related to *adequacy of funding, supplementation with other funding sources, and use in accordance with the Fund's requirements* gathered through qualitative research undertaken in Year 2 has not been repeated, and therefore there is limited evidence on these aspects. Evidence has however been drawn from the Local Authority Survey 2021 on the use of ASF flexibilities, introduced in May 2020 to assist local authorities in their response to COVID-19. This provides an update to the evidence from the Local Authority Survey 2020 which described flexibilities brought in during the first period of school building closures in March to May 2020.

How much funding did local authorities and schools receive?

2.23 The funding available to local authorities and schools has increased considerably over the duration of the ASF⁶. Approximately £52 million was distributed for the Challenge Authorities Programme and Schools Programme during the initial two year period (2015/16 and 2016/17). In Year 3 (2017/18), Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) was introduced, providing allocation directly to schools on the basis of the number of children and young people from Primary 1 to Secondary 3 who were estimated to be registered for free school meals. This led to a combined total of around £165.3 million distributed in Year 3 (2017/18) across Challenge Authorities, Schools Programme and PEF, £220.4 million in Year 4 (2018/19) and £210.4 million in Year 5 (2019/20).

2.24 In Year 6 (2020/21), a combined total of £172.5 million was distributed across Challenge Authorities (£42.9 million), Schools Programme (£7.1 million) and PEF (£122.5 million).

⁶ The Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP)⁶ Fund was introduced in 2018/19 to support local authorities' work related to improving the educational outcomes of care experienced children and young people. As CECYP is outwith the scope of this evaluation report, funding data on CECYP is not included.

Table 2.1: Funding allocations to Challenge Authorities⁷ Year 1 to Year 6

| Local Authority | Year 1 (2015/16) | Year 2 (2016/17) | Year 3 (2017/18) | Year 4 (2018/19) | Year 5 (2019/20) | Year 6 (2020/21) |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Clackmannanshire | £718,000 | £1,253,999 | £1,548,000 | £1,569,376 | £1,576,091 | £1,571,821 |
| Dundee | £2,145,000 | £4,041,682 | £5,582,805 | £6,224,790 | £6,323,910 | £6,223,466 |
| East Ayrshire | - | £2,037,323 | £2,760,659 | £3,762,789 | £3,762,790 | £3,762,790 |
| Glasgow | £3,030,000 | £9,107,262 | £7,665,677 | £8,049,992 | £8,050,000 | £8,050,000 |
| Inverclyde | £592,000 | £2,103,269 | £3,100,200 | £3,505,999 | £3,470,640 | £3,467,107 |
| North Ayrshire | £1,965,000 | £3,490,024 | £4,874,620 | £5,889,762 | £5,789,762 | £5,767,252 |
| North Lanarkshire | £2,241,000 | £6,897,347 | £7,274,968 | £7,478,959 | £7,578,859 | £7,478,859 |
| Renfrewshire | - | £1,711,919 | £3,531,000 | £4,658,000 | £4,558,000 | £4,558,000 |
| West Dunbartonshire | £1,024,000 | £1,850,410 | £2,013,108 | £2,043,815 | £2,043,815 | £2,043,815 |
| Total | £11,715,000 | £32,493,235 | £38,351,037 | £43,183,482 | £43,153,867 | £42,923,110 |

2.25 Table 2.1 above provides a breakdown of Challenge Authority Programme allocations by year and by individual Challenge Authority. As shown, just under £43 million was distributed in 2020/21, with funding allocations overall and to individual local authorities very consistent with the previous two years (2018/19 and 2019/20).

2.26 Funding allocations to the Schools Programme at the local authority level are provided in Table 2.2 below. As shown, approximately £7 million was distributed in 2020/21. This was consistent with the previous two years (2018/19 and 2019/20) both overall and at the individual local authority level.

⁷ The Challenge Authority Programme was extended in Year 2 to include East Ayrshire and Renfrewshire Council. No further additions to the Challenge Authority Programme have been made.

Table 2.2: Funding allocations - Schools Programme⁸ by Local Authority - Year 1 to Year 6

| Local Authority | Year 1 (2015/16) | Year 2 (2016/17) | Year 3 (2017/18) | Year 4 (2018/19) | Year 5 (2019/20) | Year 6 (2020/21) |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Aberdeen City | £157,500 | £454,565 | £597,938 | £636,133 | £632,965 | £631,766 |
| Argyll & Bute | £20,000 | £19,944 | £25,002 | £23,895 | £23,895 | £23,892 |
| Dumfries & Galloway | £45,000 | £116,533 | £139,494 | £137,376 | £137,376 | £137,343 |
| East Ayrshire | £291,470 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Edinburgh | £304,645 | £743,808 | £800,742 | £852,403 | £847,876 | £845,595 |
| Falkirk | £73,000 | £169,463 | £282,768 | £272,768 | £272,500 | £272,500 |
| Fife | £416,112 | £685,944 | £965,687 | £1,010,579 | £1,005,280 | £1,003,921 |
| Highland | £92,700 | £594,209 | £965,565 | £1,200,755 | £1,199,445 | £1,193,340 |
| Renfrewshire | £231,120 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Scottish Borders | £66,650 | £166,620 | £218,167 | £188,744 | £175,603 | £173,528 |
| South Ayrshire | £150,400 | £299,580 | £399,523 | £399,523 | £399,523 | £399,523 |
| South Lanarkshire | £548,690 | £1,619,271 | £2,019,374 | £1,980,294 | £1,963,820 | £1,963,488 |
| Stirling | £45,600 | £166,581 | £180,268 | £181,816 | £181,816 | £181,803 |
| West Lothian | £26,197 | £188,139 | £256,505 | £256,429 | £256,424 | £256,424 |
| Total | £2,469,084 | £5,224,657 | £6,851,032 | £7,140,713 | £7,096, 523 | £7,083,123 |

2.27 PEF allocations at both school level and local authority level are published by the Scottish Government annually⁹. Pupil Equity Funding is allocated to primary, secondary and special schools, as well as grant maintained schools, on the basis of the estimated number of children and young people in Primary 1 to Senior 3 registered for free school meals under the [national eligibility criteria](#). Whilst the funding is allocated on a per pupil basis, headteachers can use their judgement to use PEF in their schools as they see fit.

2.28 The £122.5 million PEF in 2020/21 included £121.1 million PEF allocation plus £1.4 million 'top up'¹⁰.

Was funding used according to requirements?

2.29 Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports continue to indicate that funding was being used according to requirements, with clear work-streams and plans in place for these respective funding streams.

⁸ There were no further allocations to either East Ayrshire or Renfrewshire Council through the Schools Programme following their introduction to the Challenge Authority Programme in Year 2 (2016/17)

⁹ Published PEF allocations data is available at [Pupil attainment: closing the gap - Schools - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot/pupil-attainment-closing-the-gap-schools)

¹⁰ Schools were protected from receiving less than 90% of their previous year's allocations (prior to any top-ups) with a £1.4 million top up.

2.30 Table 2.3 below compares spend versus allocation across the six years of ASF by funding stream. This indicates that overall Challenge Authorities spent 99% of their allocated budget in 2020/21, with some variation at the local authority level. 97% of allocated Schools Programme funding had also been spent in 2020/21. As the table shows, Challenge Authority and Schools Programme spend as a proportion of allocation have continued to broadly increase year-on-year from 2017/18 to 2020/21. PEF spend as a proportion of allocation has also increased year-on-year.

Table 2.3: Funding allocation and spend Years 1 to 6

| Year | Funding Stream | Allocation £ (Million) | Actual Spend £ (Million) | Spend vs Allocation (%) |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Year 1 (2015/16) | Challenge Authorities | 11.7 | 5.9 | 50% |
| | Schools Programme | 2.5 | 2.3 | 92% |
| | PEF | - | - | - |
| | Total | 14.2 | 8.2 | 58% |
| Year 2 (2016/17) | Challenge Authorities | 32.5 | 25 | 77% |
| | Schools Programme | 5.2 | 4 | 77% |
| | PEF | - | - | - |
| | Total | 37.7 | 29 | 77% |
| Year 3 (2017/18) | Challenge Authorities | 38.4 | 35 | 92% |
| | Schools Programme | 6.9 | 6.1 | 90% |
| | PEF | 120.2 | 72.2 | 60% |
| | Total | 165.4 | 113.5 | 69% |
| Year 4 (2018/19) | Challenge Authorities | 43.2 | 40.5 | 94% |
| | Schools Programme | 7.1 | 6.9 | 97% |
| | PEF* | 170.1 ^ | 132.3 | 78% |
| | Total | 220.4 | 179.7 | 82% |
| Year 5 (2019/20) | Challenge Authorities | 43.2 | 41.7 | 97% |
| | Schools Programme | 7.1 | 6.9 | 97% |
| | PEF | 160.2 ^^ | 125.2* | 78% |
| | Total | 210.4 | 173.8 | 83% |
| Year 6 (2020/21) | Challenge Authorities | 42.9 | 42.5 | 99% |
| | Schools Programme | 7.1 | 6.9 | 97% |
| | PEF | 157.3 ^^ | 113.8* | 72% |
| | Total | 172.5 | 163.2 | 95% |

^ Figure represents total available for PEF, including £47.9 million carry forward from 2017/18.

^^ Figure represents total available for PEF in Year 5, including £37.6 million carry forward from 2018/19.

^^^ Figure represents total available for PEF in Year 6, including £34.8 million carry forward from 2019/20

*PEF spend information for 2019/20 was published alongside PEF spend for 2020/21.

2.31 There was limited evidence regarding the extent to which ASF was supplemented by other sources.

Use of core funding towards equitable outcomes

2.32 As highlighted in the Year 5 evaluation report, there continues to be some evidence that local authorities have changed the way they use core funding as a result of the ASF.

2.33 Findings from the Local Authority Survey 2021 showed that the majority of respondents (21 of 26) perceived that there had been a change of use of resources in their local authority over the previous year to focus on outcomes for the most socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people (7 to a great extent, 14 to some extent), with a further five indicating a limited change of use of resources. This was broadly similar to 2020 survey findings, when 12 of 15 respondents indicated such a change in use of resources (one to a great extent, 11 to some extent), with a further three indicating a limited change of use of resources.

2.34 The 2021 survey continued to gather evidence of how local authorities had used resources to focus on outcomes for the most socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people during the second period of COVID-19 school building closures, from January to March 2021. This included a continued focus on targeting resources on the most vulnerable families, including those who had faced a change of circumstances as a result of COVID-19. This included support with access to food (e.g. food banks provision of food vouchers) and support to access remote learning (e.g. such as provision of digital devices, development of digital platforms and support with connectivity), and welfare and wellbeing support. There were also specific examples, such as one local authority who had developed a Community Wellbeing pilot.

2.35 One local authority respondent described the process of focusing on the most socio-economically disadvantaged learners as follows:

‘...The needs and profile of our communities and families has changed for quite a few due to the financial impact of Covid and as well as the impact to wellbeing. The increase of those living in the most deprived households has increased as has the wellbeing needs of families. Social isolation, reduced services and interruption to learning has meant our schools have had to work fast to fully understand the needs of their pupils, adapt plans and focus on interventions which have the most impact such as food, family support, welfare and wellbeing.’ (Local Authority receipt of Schools Programme funding)

2.36 In their responses, several local authorities mentioned flexibilities introduced in order to respond to the challenges associated with COVID-19. This issue is covered in the section below.

Additionality

2.37 In terms of the extent to which ASF was seen as additional, there continued to be little direct evidence gathered in terms of perceptions of additionality apart from

the inclusion of a specific question in the Headteacher Survey. At the school level, headteacher perceptions remain positive regarding additionality as a result of PEF resource. The great majority (89%) of headteachers viewed PEF as having provided additional resource to address the poverty-related attainment gap, broadly reflecting the 2019 survey findings.

Responding to COVID-19: introduction of flexibilities in the use of ASF

2.38 The Local Authority Survey 2021 invited respondents to indicate the extent to which they had used flexibilities in the use of ASF introduced in May 2020¹¹ to enable local authorities to respond to COVID-19. All but one local authority who responded indicated that ASF flexibilities had been used (nine to a great extent, 13 to some extent, and three to a limited extent). This was broadly consistent with the use of flexibilities identified in the 2020 survey.

2.39 Respondents described a broad range of ways in which flexibilities had been introduced with funding used flexibly to support responses to the challenges associated with COVID-19 including the period of school building closures. As in the 2020 survey, flexibilities continued to be used to support access to remote learning. Additionally, flexibilities were used specifically to address particular issues, such as funding to address learning loss (e.g. through supported study classes in secondary schools, joint/cluster working).

2.40 It was also acknowledged that some funding could not be spent as planned, due for example to pausing of activities as a result of COVID-19. Thus, whilst flexibilities were broadly welcomed, respondents also referenced the potential impact of redirection of funds, as illustrated in the following:

‘Some school based interventions were paused due to the absence of PEF funded staff. Many headteachers redirected PEF to support recovery and nurture. This has impacted on individual pupil progress and progress towards closing the poverty related attainment gap.’ (PEF-only local authority)

2.41 Headteachers’ perspectives on the use of flexibilities, drawn from the Headteacher Survey 2021, indicates that nearly 3 in 4 schools (73%) had used the greater flexibility in how they use ASF funds introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was most commonly used for increasing staffing capacity (82% of respondents), for provision of digital resources and connectivity (65% of respondents), for support for those affected by poverty (52% of respondents) and support for increased family and community engagement (46% of respondents).

¹¹ [Education+and+Early+Learning+and+Childcare+funding+flexibility+--+May+2020.pdf](https://www.gov.scot/Information/About-us/Other-organisations/Scottish-Government/Scottish-Education-Resources-Group/Supporting-Local-Authorities/Supporting-Local-Authorities/Local-Authorities-Survey-2021/Assets/Local-Authorities-Survey-2021-Education-and-Early-Learning-and-Childcare-funding-flexibility-May-2020.pdf)
(www.gov.scot)

Chapter 3 Activities and Outputs: Approaches

Chapter 3 highlights

- There is **continued evidence of the development of approaches** to address the poverty-related attainment gap at local authority and school level.
- Approaches to addressing the poverty-related attainment gap had been influenced both by the first period of COVID-19 related school building closures (March to June 2020), and the second period (January to March 2021).
- **Engaging families and communities emerged as a strong focus** in local authority and school approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap.
- The **importance of understanding the challenges and barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty** as key to developing appropriate approaches was highlighted.
- Approaches continued to include both **targeted** and **universal** approaches. **High levels of awareness** of the range of potential approaches available to schools in closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and **confidence in selecting the most effective approaches**, was also evidenced.
- **New circumstances affecting families as a result of COVID-19** were apparent, with **increasing mental health** needs being most commonly identified.
- **Approaches had been adapted in response to new circumstances** including a greater focus on **mental health and wellbeing** (and to a lesser extent on **physical health and wellbeing**); more support for **remote learning and digital connectivity**; **additional staffing skills and capacity**; and **additional support for parents and families** including help with **access to financial support, food, clothing** etc. and initiatives to **reduce the cost of the school day**. Using community links and partnerships in order to help **reach more families in need of support** were also commonly highlighted.

3.1 This chapter explores the development of approaches taken by schools and local authorities with regard to addressing the poverty-related attainment gap. The key aim is to consider how schools and local authorities identified, selected and implemented their approach for addressing the poverty-related attainment gap. An associated evaluation question sought to explore the extent to which the selected approach aimed to support pupils and parents from the most deprived backgrounds.

3.2 The approach for the Year 5 evaluation was to consider the overall period August 2019 and March 2020, and separately with reference to the period of school building closures between March and June 2020, in recognition of the importance of the 'story' of change and adaptation which occurred throughout the course of the 2019/20 year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3 The picture that emerged for 2019/20 was of ongoing developments in line with those seen in the previous year, followed by major changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic necessitating the period of school building closures from March

to June 2020. Reviews of planned activities followed by decisions to pause or progress work on the basis of current and emerging priorities and needs, equity audits and large-scale changes to 'pivot' to meet challenges associated with providing remote learning were all features of this period of review and adaptation. A range of responses were introduced, including the provision of physical resources such as food parcels and home-learning packs, equity-related advice and information, signposting to other support, and an increased focus on health and wellbeing. The development of collaborations with new partners, including third sector, and cross-departmental responses, were also notable across 2019/20.

3.4 For the Year 6 evaluation, in order to reflect the ongoing context of COVID-19 impacting across the academic year 2020/21, material has been gathered to reflect approaches across the year overall but with specific reference to the period of remote learning from January to March 2021. Evidence is primarily drawn from the Local Authority Survey 2021, Headteacher Survey 2021 and Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports.

Developing approaches: how did schools and local authorities identify, select and implement approaches for addressing the poverty-related attainment gap?

3.5 There is continuing evidence of the development of approaches at the local authority level. Nearly all Local Authority Survey 2021 respondents indicated their approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap had changed over the previous year, with 25 of 26 respondents indicating the approach had changed (six changed significantly, 19 changed to some extent). The remaining one local authority (a Challenge Authority) indicated a more limited change of approach. In terms of responses by funding stream, only one PEF-only local authority, of the eight PEF-only local authority respondents, indicated significant change.

3.6 At the school level, the development of approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap and addressing equity in education was explored in the Headteacher Survey 2021. The majority of headteachers who responded to the survey indicated their approach had changed from the previous school year (2019/20), with 83% indicating this. This was consistent with the 2020 survey (85%) but an increase on the 2019 survey (67%).

3.7 In addition, approximately three quarters of headteachers responding to the 2021 survey (77%) had further developed their approach to achieving equity during the January to March 2021 period of school building closures and remote learning.

Learning from periods of COVID-19 school building closures

3.8 The extent to which learning from periods of COVID-19 related school buildings closures had informed local authorities' current approaches to addressing the poverty-related attainment gap was explored in the Local Authority Survey 2021.

3.9 All but one local authority who responded to the survey (25 of 26) indicated that their approach had been influenced to a great/to some extent by the *first* period of COVID-19 related school building closures (March to June 2020), with 12 indicating this was to a great extent, and 13 to some extent. The remaining local

authority (a Challenge Authority respondent) indicated their approach had been influenced to a limited extent. In terms of the extent to which local authority approaches had been influenced by the *second* period of COVID-19 related school building closures (January to March 2021), whilst all but one local authority (25 of 26) responding to the survey indicated their approach had been influenced to a great or to some extent, this appeared to be to a lesser extent than the first period of COVID-19 related closures (nine to a great extent, 16 to some extent).

3.10 At the school level, headteachers' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the previous school year were perceived to have contributed to their approach during 2020/21. Approximately three in four respondents (77%) felt that their prior experience had helped shape their approach, of whom just under one in four (22%) indicated their prior experience had helped shape their approach to a great extent.

Approaches to engaging families and communities

3.11 There is considerable evidence of the ongoing development of approaches to engaging families and communities across evidence sources. Local authority perspectives of the development of approaches to engaging families and communities in the 2020/21 year were gathered through the Local Authority Survey 2021, with all respondents (26) indicating their local authority approach to engaging families and communities had developed over the previous year. Ten local authorities described their approach to engaging families and communities had developed to a great extent across 2020/21, with the remaining 16 respondents indicating their approach had developed to some extent across 2020/21. This is broadly consistent with the previous year, with 2020 survey evidence suggesting the majority of respondents (13 of 15) developed their approaches to engaging families and communities during the 2019/20 year.

3.12 Evidence from the Headteacher Survey 2021 indicates that the great majority of survey respondents had used engagement with families and communities as part of their school's approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. This was the case for 82% of respondents, with 47% indicating this had been 'to a great extent'. 2021 survey findings are broadly consistent with the 2020 survey.

3.13 The Headteacher Survey 2021 invited schools to describe how their approach to family and community engagement had developed in 2020/21, particularly during the period of school building closures. As with the 2020 survey, the most common way of schools developing their approach to family and community engagement was through **increased use of 'outreach' communication with families**, with increased contact with families both to build relationships and to improve their understanding and identification of circumstances and needs. The **use of digital resources and platforms** was also used as part of engagement with families by a substantial number of respondents, including digital support provision for those families with limited connectivity and/or digital literacy. This included increased use of social media for communication and engagement, as well as use of digital resources and platforms to support schools maintain frequent and more 'continuous' communication with families.

3.14 A tailored approach of engagement with and support for the most vulnerable families was also highlighted as a key aspect for some respondents. A range of communication options, including telephone, video messages and social media had been employed, and engagement approaches such as surveys and virtual sessions on a range of issues including health and wellbeing, mindfulness, family quizzes and other online social events.

To what extent did approaches selected aim to support pupils and parents from the most deprived backgrounds?

3.15 The evaluation sought to explore the extent to which selected approaches aimed to support pupils and parents from the most deprived backgrounds, with evidence sought from a range of sources.

Understandings of challenges and barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty

3.16 Understandings of the challenges and barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty are clearly central to the development of appropriate approaches. The Headteacher Survey 2021 continues to provide evidence of headteachers' perceptions, with findings suggesting headteachers have a good understanding of the challenges and barriers: nearly all (96%) per cent of respondents felt they understood the challenges and barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty, including 72% who felt they understood this 'to a great extent'. This is similar to the 2020 and 2019 Headteacher Survey findings, although there was some variation across respondent groups with PEF-only schools, primary schools, those in rural areas and those with lower PEF allocations less likely to feel they understood the challenges.

Targeted versus universal approaches

3.17 As in previous years of the evaluation, the evidence suggests some approaches focused on universal provision, whilst others were more focused on support of pupils from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

3.18 Evidence from the Headteacher Survey 2021 suggests that most schools included a targeted focus on pupils and parents experiencing socio-demographic disadvantage as part of their approach to achieving equity. Survey results show that the majority of headteachers have taken a mixed response, with 82% of respondents supporting universal approaches alongside other approaches with a focus on those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

Awareness of the range of approaches and confidence in selecting approaches

3.19 Evidence on headteachers' awareness of the range of potential approaches available to their school in closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and confidence in selecting the most effective approaches has been gathered through the Headteacher Survey, with findings suggesting continued high levels of awareness and confidence in the 2021 survey.

3.20 Nearly all (95%) headteachers responding to the survey indicated they felt aware of the range of potential approaches available to their school, including 62% who felt 'very aware'. This was very similar to findings from 2019 and 2020 surveys although some variation across respondent groups was found, with PEF-only schools, those in rural areas and those with lower PEF allocations less likely to indicate such awareness.

3.21 Additionally, the great majority of headteachers who responded to the survey felt confident selecting the most effective approach(es), with 92% of respondents indicating this, including 47% who felt confident 'to a great extent'. This was consistent with 2019 and 2020 survey findings, and once again there was a pattern of variation across respondent groups with PEF-only schools, those in rural areas and those with lower PEF allocations less likely to feel confident selecting the most effective approaches.

Changing circumstances affecting families as a result of COVID-19 and local authority and school responses

3.22 The evaluation also sought to explore how COVID-19 had impacted on the focus of approaches, on the circumstances affecting families and responses to these circumstances.

3.23 The Headteacher Survey 2021 explored these issues, with findings suggesting that headteachers have seen a range of **new circumstances affecting families as a result of COVID-19** which may need to be taken into account in terms of closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Nearly all (99%) headteacher respondents felt that pupils and/or parents in need of support with mental health and emotional wellbeing had become more common since school building closures, including 78% who felt this had become 'much more' common. Whilst other circumstances were also highlighted as affecting an increasing number of families - including difficulties accessing support services due to COVID-19, families struggling with remote learning, digital connectivity issues and pupils and/or parents needing support with physical health and wellbeing – the increase in mental health needs was the most commonly identified issue.

3.24 A wide range of adaptations to approaches in response to the new circumstances outlined above were referenced by headteachers. Consistent with the new circumstances affecting families, changes made included:

- a greater focus on mental health (87%);
- more support for remote learning (77%);
- more support with digital connectivity (76%);
- additional staffing skills and capacity (71%);
- additional support for parents and families (67%);
- helping families access financial support, help with food, clothes etc. (67%);
- using community links/partnerships to reach more families in need (61%);
- greater focus on physical health and wellbeing (59%);
- initiatives to reduce the cost of the school day (58%).

3.25 There continues to be a wealth of evidence from evidence sources including the Local Authority Survey 2021 and Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports regarding the importance of health and wellbeing within approaches, both before and during COVID-19.

Chapter 4 Short and Medium-term Outcomes: Perceptions of success, collaboration, use of data and evidence

Chapter 4 highlights

Progress towards intended outcomes

- COVID-19 was the predominant factor identified influencing progress towards intended outcomes. This included operational challenges such as staff recruitment and staff absences; negative impacts on staff wellbeing; pupil absences and impacts on delivery of initiatives, with some paused.
- Factors supporting progress identified included: improved ethos, culture and understanding; data and evidence; prioritisation given to closing the poverty-related attainment gap; empowerment at the school level; effective target setting; collaboration support and challenge provided by local authority central teams/lead officers; Attainment Advisor support; and allocation of PEF over two years.

Engaging families and communities

- Learning around engaging with families and communities in the context of COVID-19 is emerging. This includes: the importance of family learning/family link workers and teams; effective links to wider partnerships; opportunities for online communication; need for meaningful engagement and challenging assumptions of what support families may need.
- Evidence is emerging of impact of specific roles to support engagement with families, as well as a broader range of emerging impacts including: strengthened relationships with families and communities; increased awareness within schools of poverty and its impact on pupils and families; increased supports in place for families affected by poverty; a greater appreciation of the role schools can play; and a greater focus on pupil attendance and engagement.

Collaboration

- There continues to be evidence of increased collaboration as a result of the Attainment Scotland Fund.
- Changes to types of collaborations over the previous year were primarily related to the ongoing impact of COVID-19.
- Collaborations were viewed as key to support and enable sharing of practice, building capacity and improvement.
- Benefits of collaboration continue to be identified, including supporting a focus on improving outcomes for children and young people affected by poverty, through effective collaboration between services and sectors.

Use of data and evidence

- Indicators related to the use of data and evidence within ASF activity point to an increasingly 'data rich' environment, with a wide range of tools utilised across levels of the system and evidence of ongoing developments in the

collection, collation and analysis of data, including a wider range of data and evidence being drawn on to support decision-making.

- Data and evidence were being used to drive improvement, from strategic-decision-making through to classroom practitioner; to ensure support is targeted at where it is most needed; and to effectively prioritise interventions.
- COVID-19 has impacted on use of data and evidence. Some data collections (such as ACEL) have been impacted due to the pandemic, and there are requirements to develop new sources of data and evidence in order to respond appropriately to ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19.
- The role of Attainment Advisors working across a range of contexts from local authority through to individual schools, often in close collaboration with local authority leads, was a key feature.

4.1 This chapter considers the extent to which schools and local authorities perceived that there had been progress towards achieving the intended short to medium-term outcomes of their approach, and factors which were seen as supporting or hindering progress towards achieving these outcomes.

4.2 It also specifically explores a number of aspects identified within the Scottish Attainment Challenge logic model as important short and medium-term outcomes associated with the ASF which the evaluation has sought to consider:

- learning and emerging impacts associated with engaging families and communities;
- the extent to which the fund encouraged collaboration; and
- the extent to which data and evidence were used to drive improvements as part of the fund.

Perceptions of progress towards meeting short and medium-term outcomes

4.3 This section explores evidence collected in respect of schools' and local authorities' perceptions of progress, to address the following evaluation question:

'To what extent did schools and local authorities involved with the Fund feel the intended outcomes of their approach had been achieved/there had been progress towards achieving these outcomes?'

4.4 Alongside the main evaluation question, this section seeks to explore the further outcomes schools and LAs were intending to achieve; the factors stakeholders thought contributed to progress towards achieving these outcomes; and the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the outcomes local authorities and schools were intending to achieve or progress.

4.5 Evidence from the Local Authority Survey 2021 has largely informed this section, alongside evidence from Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports.

Factors contributing to progress on intended outcomes

4.6 COVID-19 continues to impact on progress towards the outcomes schools and local authorities were intending to achieve. Local authority responses to the 2021 Survey identified a continuing strong focus on improving mental health and wellbeing and on engaging families and communities as part of their intended outcomes.

4.7 A range of factors were identified by local authority respondents with regard to supporting progress in the previous year. Supporting factors highlighted included:

- Improved ethos, culture and understanding;
- Headteacher empowerment/empowerment at the school level;
- Data and evidence;
- Effective target setting;
- Collaboration;
- High level priority given to closing the poverty-related attainment gap;
- Support and challenge provided by local authority central teams/lead officers;
- Allocation of PEF over two years;
- Attainment Advisor support.

'Data for improvement and our tracker system are empowering our staff to understand gaps, data, challenges etc. and allowing early intervention to take place.'

4.8 Factors viewed as hindering progress over the previous year have also been identified. COVID-19 was clearly the predominant factor which impacted in a number of ways, with respondents to the Local Authority Survey 2021 highlighting challenges associated with remote learning and disproportionate impact on children and young people affected by poverty versus their more affluent peers. The impact of COVID-19 on already vulnerable young people and on children, young people and their families whose circumstances had changed as a result the pandemic also presenting challenges. There was also an ongoing impact on the delivery of initiatives, for example initiatives which were unable to be delivered in the context of the ongoing pandemic. This included health and wellbeing initiatives which were at times unable to go ahead. Pupil absences were also a key factor of concern. In addition to the ongoing impact of COVID-19, it was widely recognised that it is not just schools who have a key role to play in closing the poverty-related attainment gap and that the poverty-related attainment gap is impacted by wider societal issues.

4.9 There were also operational challenges in schools as a result of COVID-19, and staffing issues including recruitment challenges, staff absences and negative impacts of the pandemic on staff wellbeing. Other challenges highlighted included potentially negative impact on some Career-Long Professional Learning (CLPL) as a result of a need to deliver online, the potential for some 'missed opportunities' for schools to work collaboratively around PEF and for increased support to schools in receipt of small amounts of PEF to maximise its effectiveness.

'Continued disruption to learning, staffing levels due to absences etc. are and will continue to have a negative impact for some time.'

4.10 There were also perceptions of factors related to target setting, information gathering and reporting as potentially hindering progress. One local authority respondent suggested there was a *'need to better define what success and impact looks like across Scotland'*, and another pointed to the *'need for consistent approach to tracking and monitoring progress of individuals and cohorts'*.

4.11 A further aspect highlighted as potentially hindering progress related to the need for improved sharing of impactful approaches:

'We need to develop further sharing approaches which are impactful and could be up-scaled at system level.'

Engagement with families and communities

4.12 The section below explores one key outcome area which has emerged strongly, namely engagement with families and communities. Chapter 3 considered evidence of the ongoing development of approaches to engaging with families and communities. This section considers two further aspects of the evaluation related to families and communities, namely:

- What has been learned about engaging with families and communities through the ASF?
- Are there emerging impacts of engagement with families and communities as a result of the ASF? (e.g. improved understanding of families' circumstances and additional support needs; improved understanding of local context)

4.13 Reflections on learning about engaging with families and communities were sought in the Local Authority Survey 2021 and Headteacher Survey 2021. Headteachers were asked their views of the main learning points arising from their engagement with families and communities over the previous year. Most commonly cited was the value of proactive communication and approaches to maintain engagement with families. Headteachers' responses also suggested their experiences of family engagement had highlighted the important role of the home learning environment and parents' capacity to support pupils' learning. The importance of digital skills and connectivity - including support to families to ensure they can make effective use of digital resources - and the increased role that schools have played providing support to pupils and families, have highlighted the importance of building positive relationships built on trust. This was a factor which was suggested to have led to more families turning to schools for support.

4.14 Themes from local authority responses suggest there has been key learning around engaging with families and communities in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. These include:

- The important role of family learning and family link workers and associated teams;
- The importance of effective links with wider partners both in public and third sector;

- The importance of continuing to learn from current experiences in terms of engagement with families and communities was recognised. For example, one local authority (in receipt of Schools Programme funding) highlighted that it had established a working group to look at how better to support family engagement across the local authority using learning which had emerged from current practice;
- The options provided through digital solutions to communicate and consult with parents, with some respondents pointing to evidence suggesting that some families found online communication (including parent/carer evenings) more beneficial with the potential for increasing 'reach';
- The need for meaningful engagement with families, and for challenging assumptions around what families may need in terms of support:

'What we learned during this time was not to assume what that support was, how it was to be delivered and when it was required. A big lesson was to ensure we engaged in a meaningful way with communities and families to hear their voice in this and to give all community members the opportunity not only to say and shape what the support was but also to contribute to the provision of that support - much more about 'working with' and much less about 'doing to'.' (PEF-only local authority)

Exemplar: School and Family Development Workers in primary schools

School and Family Development Workers appointed to work in primary schools across one Challenge Authority were providing links to third sector providers and a gateway to other services and funding streams. The post-holders had engaged in many aspects of delivery such as: *'foodbanks, linked families and schools, ensured access to learning for the most vulnerable and also supported with family learners'*.

4.15 Emerging impacts of engaging with families and communities were also identified through responses to the Local Authority Survey 2021. These included the following perceptions:

- Greater appreciation of the role of schools in providing support to children, young people and their families impacted by poverty;
- Increased supports in place for families affected by poverty and improved understanding of systems/processes and of supports which can be provided to families and communities:

'...a much better understanding of what support is required, where it is required and when it is required.' (PEF-only local authority)

- Increased awareness within schools of poverty and its impact on pupils and their families, including basic needs families may have which are not being met. One local authority respondent highlighted this was associated with the development of a *'empathetic'* workforce;

- Increased understanding of the role of improved support for parents and carers in improving support for pupils;
- Strengthened relationships with families and communities and increased awareness of the importance of ongoing relationships and of mechanisms such as regular check-ins to continue to build and support relationships;
- Increased awareness of the importance of signposting to other services;
- Increased parental engagement;
- Reduction in barriers to learning through provision of direct assistance to families;
- Greater focus on pupil attendance and engagement (such as through health and wellbeing approaches) leading to improvements in attendance.

4.16 A number of local authority respondents pointed to the impact of specific roles to support engagement with families, some examples of which are provided below:

- One local authority respondent highlighted family learning assistants in primary schools leading to greater engagement of families and increased signposting to specialist services;
- Another local authority respondent pointed to the role of Pupil Support Officers (PSOs) to support mental health of families with the aim of improving engagement and attendance of pupils. This was associated with positive impacts on young people and their families and their engagement and attendance at school;
- Early successes with individual families participating in specific family centred approaches provided through partnerships between a local authority and relevant third sector organisations were also described by a local authority respondent.

Collaboration

4.17 This section considers the extent to which progress has been achieved towards the stated medium-term outcome on collaboration articulated in the SAC logic model:

‘Increased evidence of collaboration across the education system (between schools, local authorities, third sector, other delivery partners and professionals such as social work) to deliver and evaluate approaches aimed at closing the poverty-related attainment gap’.

4.18 It considers the extent to which ASF encouraged collaboration amongst those receiving funding through Challenge Authority, Schools Programme and/or PEF. It also considers:

- Who was collaborating, how and why?
- How did the level and nature of collaboration change over time?
- What factors helped and hindered increased collaboration?
- What was the impact of increased collaboration?

- To what extent has the fund encouraged collaboration across the education system (e.g. between schools, LAs, 3rd sector, other delivery partners and professionals)?

4.19 The impact of COVID-19 on collaboration was also considered, seeking to explore:

- How COVID-19 impacted both positively and negatively on existing collaborations;
- The extent to which new collaborations emerged, and if so, how and why, and whether these are anticipated to continue in the longer term;
- The extent to which existing collaborations stopped/changed, and if so why, and the impact of these changes/interruptions.

4.20 Evidence from previous years of the ASF evaluation has consistently highlighted the positive contribution of the fund to both the level and nature of collaboration.

4.21 As in previous evaluation reports, evidence sources have been explored to consider the extent to which evidence of collaboration continued in Year 6, and the impact of COVID-19 on collaborations.

To what extent did the fund encourage collaboration?

4.22 Evidence on the extent to which collaboration increased as a result of the fund continues to indicate that the fund has had a positive impact on collaboration. This has been a consistent finding across all years of the evaluation to date.

4.23 Headteachers' perceptions of the extent of collaborative working in schools as a result of the fund remain positive in Year 6, with nearly two thirds (62%) of Headteacher Survey 2021 respondents indicating they had seen an increase in collaborative working in their school as a result of ASF. Whilst the finding remains broadly similar to both the 2020 and 2019 surveys, there has been an overall fall of 15 percentage points since the 2017 survey. Variation in school experiences around collaborative working also continue to show similar patterns, with primary schools, schools with lower PEF allocations, and schools in rural areas continuing to be less likely to have seen an increase in collaborative working.

4.24 In terms of types of collaboration, at the school level, headteachers responding to the Headteacher Survey 2021 reported schools were most likely to have seen an increase in collaboration with families and communities (67% of respondents), and with other schools in their local authority (55% of respondents). Collaborations were also commonly mentioned by headteacher respondents with third sector organisations (39%) and with public sector partners (33%).

4.25 At the local authority level, positive perceptions of the extent of collaboration as a result of the fund continue to be evidenced, with responses to the 2021 Local Authority Survey reflecting trends from previous local authority surveys where the majority of respondents indicated the fund had increased collaboration to a great or some extent.

4.26 In order to explore local authority perspectives of collaboration in more granular detail than previous survey waves had allowed, the 2021 Local Authority Survey focused on exploring both within local authority collaborations and collaborations outwith the local authority¹².

4.27 The majority of local authorities who responded to the 2021 survey (24 out of 26) indicated within local authority collaborations had increased to a great (11) or to some (13) extent, with only two indicating this had been to a limited extent. Examples of within local authority collaborations provided by local authority respondents include:

- Revision of equity communication strategy as a key mechanism in sharing equity-related good practice;
- Role of key professionals such as Educational Psychology in facilitating collaborations;
- Approaches based on cluster/cross-sector collaboration at local authority level. The quote below illustrates one such approach:

*'A number of schools have worked together, sharing practice and in some cases pooling resources to meet needs within their learning community'.
(Local authority in receipt of Schools Programme funding)*

4.28 Fewer local authority respondents viewed an increase in collaborations outwith the local authority as a result of ASF. Fifteen viewed collaborations outwith the local authority as having increased as a result of ASF, including four (three of which were Challenge Authorities) who viewed this to a great extent and 11 who viewed this to some extent. The remaining 11 respondents viewed collaborations outwith the local authority as having increased to a limited extent as a result of ASF.

4.29 Local authority open responses provide further insight into their perspectives on collaboration outwith their local authority. Attainment Advisors were highlighted as key in supporting collaborations outwith local authorities by a number of respondents, as were wider Education Scotland and SAC-related activities such as SAC networking events. Specific collaborations were also identified, such as data coaches and good practice sharing.

4.30 The role of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) was also frequently mentioned, with local authorities highlighting aspects of collaboration with their RIC. For example, the SAC leads from one RIC were collaborating alongside Attainment Advisors to share good practice in relation to closing the poverty related attainment gap across the RIC. Another respondent described its collaboration with the RIC as follows: *'(RIC) has worked very well in providing a practical and trusted discussion forum for senior managers and school leaders for benchmarking, support, networks and sharing resources across schools'*.

4.31 The NHS Poverty Practice Network was viewed as another important mechanism facilitating collaboration amongst colleagues involved in equity across

¹² The 2020 survey included one overall question on perceptions of extent to which there had been an increase in collaborations.

Scotland. Other Scotland wide networks were also highlighted, including the particular role played by ADES throughout the pandemic.

4.32 However, there were some limitations experienced in terms of collaboration, with the impact of COVID-19 clearly constraining collaboration as highlighted in the following open responses:

‘(The) Equity team have reached out to other LAs but this has not been as successful as hoped.’ (Local Authority in receipt of Schools Programme funding)

‘Capacity of schools and local authority officers to collaborate out with local authority boundaries has been significantly impacted due to additional pressure within our local system created by (COVID-19) planning and response.’ (PEF-only local authority)

‘Unfortunately the period of school closure and the continuing restrictions in schools has negatively impacted on opportunities for collaboration.’ (PEF-only local authority)

‘Levels of collaboration outwith our authority as a result of ASF have diminished somewhat. This has been due to COVID restrictions and due to the fact that the landscape in schools has been extremely challenging and the priority for Head Teachers has been ensuring that work in their own establishment is progressing and that pupils and staff are safe.’ (PEF-only local authority)

4.33 Themes emerging from the Local Authority Survey 2021 in terms of local authority perspectives on collaboration with respect to the fund continued in line with those identified in previous surveys. Funding continues to be a driver for collaboration with a view to progressing the overall outcome of closing the poverty-related attainment gap:

‘There has been a very clear principle in our use of ASF resources that no single agency or service can close the attainment gap alone. At the out-set, we spent a great deal of time with HTs and schools looking at a broad set of information to identify focus pupils and it was clear very quickly that the most significant factors impacting on attainment related to social, emotional, domestic and familial/community factors and the approaches of the team would need to be holistic and include work with partner services as a given.’ (PEF-only local authority respondent)

4.34 Collaborations continue to be viewed as key to enable sharing of practice, building capacity and improvement. Whilst the pandemic undoubtedly has affected collaborations in many respects, there are also clearly ongoing developments to support collaborations between different parts of the system, including strategic and more practice-oriented approaches. There were also a number of local authorities where school clusters were collaborating specifically in terms of PEF, including the pooling of resources. Benefits of collaboration continue to be identified, including

supporting a focus on improving outcomes for children and young people affected by poverty through effective collaboration across services and sectors.

Changes in collaborations over the previous year, including the development of new collaborations

4.35 As in the Local Authority Survey 2020, the 2021 Survey invited local authorities to provide an assessment of the extent to which collaborations had changed within their local authority over the previous year. There was evidence that collaborations had changed during 2020/21, with 22 respondents stating these had changed (10 changed significantly and 12 changed to some extent). For a further three respondents, there were perceptions of limited change and for one respondent (a PEF-only local authority) a perception of no such change across the previous year. This reflects an ongoing trend from 2020 responses, where there was some evidence that collaborations had changed during 2019/20: five of 15 respondents perceived collaborations had changed significantly, eight that collaborations had changed to some extent and two of limited change.

4.36 A number of factors associated with changes in collaborations over the previous year were identified by local authorities. These were primarily related to the ongoing impact of COVID-19:

- Pausing of some networks and collaborations during school building closures which had still not fully restarted;
- Staff resource constraints;
- Requirement to focus on vital support work within schools, and adapt and develop new collaborations to support this;
- Increases in collaboration identified as being supported by the increased use of digital technology e.g. digital platforms such as MS Teams;
- The importance of developing key networks to undertake particular pieces of work.

4.37 The significant need for, and change in, collaborations as a result of COVID-19 is illustrated in the following quotation from a local authority respondent:

‘The need for collaboration to continue at a time when children and families’ vulnerability was at its greatest ensured that effective solutions were found to support established and embedded relationships between LA/schools/partners agencies/partner providers/third sector.’ (Challenge Authority)

4.38 There was also evidence of new collaborations emerging which had been established specifically during the period of school building closures in 2020/21. Sixty per cent of headteachers responding to the Headteacher Survey 2021 reported new collaborations had been established with third sector organisations and community groups during this period. This included national charities such as Barnardo’s and Action for Children, local voluntary organisations and local faith groups. In addition, almost a third of respondents (31%) reported that new collaborations had been established with public sector organisations, particularly health and social care, and mental health services.

4.39 Local authority responses also provide evidence of new collaborations resulting from the period of school building closures from January to March 2021. New partnerships established as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic were identified, both with services such as Citizens Advice Bureau, and with local organisations, and there is evidence that many such partnerships have endured. New collaborations between public services were also identified in order to drive the changes required to respond to the ongoing demands associated with responding to COVID-19. This is illustrated by the following quotation from a local authority respondent:

'The integration of staff from CLD/ HR/ Admin/Finance / Outdoor learning etc. became pivotal in securing the necessary level of community and individual supports. These teams were simply outstanding.' (Challenge Authority respondent)

4.40 Another local authority respondent (PEF-only local authority) highlighted the very effective and 'vital' collaboration with colleagues in Social Work and in the Health and Social Care Partnership working to support vulnerable families. Another pointed to the quality of collaborations which have changed as a result of COVID-19:

'Collaborations have become much more open and trusting with colleagues engaging in meaningful ways to support much needed interventions.' (PEF-only local authority).

4.41 Evidence of increasing collaboration also continued to feature strongly in Challenge Authority progress reports, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing, and with academic institutions and specialist providers.

Use of Data and Evidence

4.42 This section explores the extent to which schools and local authorities have used data, analysis and knowledge of 'what works' to monitor and inform their activity related to closing the poverty-related attainment gap in order to address the following evaluation question:

'To what extent did schools and authorities use data, analysis and evidence to drive improvements as part of the Fund?'

4.43 Evidence sources considered include Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports, Headteacher Survey 2021 and Local Authority Survey 2021 findings.

4.44 In line with the positive trends demonstrated since the inception of the ASF, there continue to be strong perceptions of data and evidence as key features of ASF activity in the Year 6 evaluation. Challenge Authority progress reports at the local authority level, and the Schools Programme progress reports at the school level, included many examples of strengthened use of data and evidence. Challenge Authority progress reports continued to outline progress in data collection, analysis and informed use at the local authority level and school level. There was a clear narrative across reports related to the central importance of data, and increasing

sophistication and complexity in considering and utilising data in order to respond to the challenges associated with COVID-19.

Data and evidence supporting decision-making

4.45 At local authority level, evidence from the Local Authority Survey 2021 suggests that data and evidence relevant to the local context continued to feature strongly in local authority decision-making with regard to the ASF. Of 26 local authority respondents, 21 local authorities indicated that data and evidence relevant to the local context featured in decision-making over the previous year to a great extent, and to some extent for a further four respondents. The remaining local authority perceived data and evidence relevant to the local context only featured in decision-making to a limited extent. These findings are broadly consistent with 2019 and 2020 surveys, when the majority of local authorities who responded similarly found data and evidence had featured to a great extent in decision-making over the previous year.

4.46 Local authorities who indicated data and evidence had featured strongly referenced a range of relevant approaches and, as in previous waves, these were evident from local authority-wide through to the school level. The use of nationally available tools such as Insight and Broad General Education (BGE) Toolkit continued to be highlighted, alongside bespoke local authority tools which had been developed to support use of data and data analysis to support decision-making.

4.47 Evidence on schools' use of data and evidence in relation to ASF supported activity was drawn from the Headteacher Survey 2021 and continued to indicate positive perspectives. The large majority (87%) of headteachers who responded to the survey in 2021 felt they are 'very good' or 'good' in using data and evidence to inform the development of their school's approach. This is broadly consistent with previous survey waves, for example 84% of headteachers reported this in 2020.

Improvements in data capability and capacity

4.48 Improved capability and capacity across the system to use data and evidence was also evident in Local Authority Survey 2021 responses. This was apparent at all levels, from local authority wide through to the classroom level. Several local authority respondents highlighted the broader range of data available to inform decision-making, described by one (Schools Programme) local authority respondent as '*invaluable in prioritising interventions*' and a more systematic approach to utilising evidence. This is illustrated by one local authority respondent, describing their overall approach as '*data rich*', who pointed to the importance of data use and analysis at all levels:

'Across the system, there is a high level of competence in the use and analysis of data; practitioners understand that data literacy delivers improvement.' (Challenge Authority respondent)

4.49 Local authority respondents to the Local Authority Survey 2021 described a range of developments such as:

- Development of a Senior Phase tracker pilot in one secondary school (Schools Programme) which was viewed as supporting practitioner engagement with the data and *'how to move learning forward in their classrooms'*;
- Development of a new local authority wide tracking system (PEF-only local authority) which facilitated the local authority Quality Improvement Team to work with schools with in-depth attainment data to provide support and challenge;
- Recent local authority level analysis in one local authority of literacy, numeracy and attendance data through 'poverty lens' from early years through to Senior Phase including positive destinations in order to inform strategic planning;
- Commissioning of a local authority wide update report on poverty and deprivation in order to support best use of evidence and targeting.

4.50 At the school level, headteacher perceptions of skills in measuring the impact of their school's approaches were measured through the Headteacher Survey 2021. The majority (81%) of 2021 Headteacher Survey respondents were positive about their ability to identify the most appropriate measure(s) to assess impact. Similarly, more than three quarters (79%) felt they were 'very good' or 'good' at measuring the progress and impact of ASF-supported approaches, similar to the 2020 survey (78%). A similar proportion of respondents (79%) were positive about their ability to measure progress and impact of approaches. As noted in the 2020 Headteacher Survey report, headteacher perceptions on some measures rating schools' approaches to use of data and evidence had decreased in 2020 in comparison to previous years, with 2021 responses remaining broadly consistent with 2020 survey results. There was also some variance in terms of funding stream on measures related to data and evidence, with schools receiving PEF-only and those with lower levels of PEF allocation less positive than other schools regarding skills at measuring the progress and impact of ASF-supported approaches.

4.51 School level evidence from Headteacher Survey 2021 indicates that just under two-thirds (61%) of schools felt that ASF support had helped to develop staff skills and knowledge in using data and evaluation, a similar proportion to 2020 survey (63%). Also consistent with the 2020 survey results, there remained variation across respondent groups, with PEF-only schools, those in rural areas and those with lower PEF allocations less positive on this measure.

The role of data and evidence in improvement and targeting support

4.52 The use of data and evidence to support decision-making to drive improvement at different levels of the education system continued to be identified, from strategic decision-making through to practitioner engagement at the classroom level. However, there was also a strong theme within local authority responses of utilisation of data in order to meet the dual requirements of improvement alongside targeting support where it is most needed. There was a clear focus both on use of data for targeting and for improvement activity across local authority responses. For example:

‘(Local Authority) is very data informed. All schools use data to identify areas for improvement and also to ensure that support is targeted where it is most needed.’ (Local Authority in receipt of Schools Programme funding)

‘...as a result of effectively interrogating the data we have around attainment and health and wellbeing, we were able to focus decisions and targeted interventions to areas of greatest need’. (Challenge Authority)

Impact of COVID-19 on use of data and evidence

4.53 The Year 6 evaluation sought to consider the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on use of data, analysis and evidence across the 2020/21 academic year. Additionally, the evaluation sought to identify the emergence of new data/new ways of using data resulting from COVID-19.

4.54 The impact of COVID-19 on use of data and evidence was identified across evidence sources considered for the Year 6 evaluation report. As identified in the Year 5 report, there continued to be a strong focus on data and evidence to drive decision-making, although some data collections had been impacted due to the pandemic. Several local authority respondents to the Local Authority Survey 2021 highlighted challenges associated with the absence of national ACEL data for 2019/20. There were also continued requirements both to utilise existing data and evidence, and to develop new sources of data and evidence in order to respond appropriately to the ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19 in the 2020/21 academic year.

4.55 In the 2021 Local Authority Survey, respondents highlighted a range of activity related to gathering, analysing and applying data in order to effectively respond to COVID-19. It was clear that data was an important tool for many local authorities in order to make effective decisions about resourcing and priorities in the ongoing context of COVID-19. For example, one local authority (in receipt of Schools Programme funding) had gathered predictions for ACEL levels in November 2020 and February 2021 in order to ensure targeted support was made available to identified schools. There were frequent mentions of utilisation and analysis of vulnerable pupil engagement data, as well as surveys of pupils and parents. A number of Challenge Authorities outlined specific data-focused actions in order to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on pupil learning with a targeted focus on improvement. For example a *‘deep dive’* had been undertaken in one Challenge Authority with the Attainment Advisor and senior management and leadership to *‘review emerging data and evidence and ensure that interventions which are making the biggest impact in improving children’s progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing are strengthened’*.

Exemplar: Utilising local data to provide focused support for families disproportionately impacted by COVID-19

Evidence gathered by one Challenge Authority between 2020 and 2021 into the impacts of COVID-19 on the attainment gap and educational outcomes identified a disproportionate impact for some families. This resulted in reshaping and strengthening existing family learning provision across the local authority to ensure the approach was available to more targeted families.

Promoting collaboration and use of data and evidence

4.56 The importance of collaboration as a driver for improvements in use of data and evidence continued to be identified across evidence sources. The role of Attainment Advisors was a key feature, working across a range of contexts including local authority and individual schools, often in close collaboration with local authority leads. As one local authority respondent to the Local Authority Survey 2021 described, this role was important in *'supporting staff at all levels to make sense of data'*.

Exemplar: Data-focused collaborative approaches

One Local Authority (in receipt of Schools Programme funding) had established 'neighbourhood groups' alongside cluster groups and improvement groups which allowed schools to *'share, collaborate and plan based on evidence, similar data sets and statistics'*.

Chapter 5 Long-term Outcomes: Contribution to improvement and reduction of the poverty-related attainment gap

Chapter 5 highlights

Quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing

- The analysis of quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing shows some positive signs in closing the attainment gap but the impact of the pandemic on children and young peoples' learning is clear, and it is a varied picture on progress depending on the measure under consideration.
- This is illustrated by data from Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) in primary schools, where the proportion of pupils achieving expected levels in both literacy and numeracy increased steadily until 2020/21, including a period of school building closures, when these figures decreased and the gap between pupils from most and least deprived areas widened.
- Data on school leaver attainment (SCQF levels) shows a clearer picture in terms of positive trends, although these figures are affected by the changed SQA approach to certification as a result of the pandemic, which affects comparability. The proportion of school leavers attaining one pass or more increased in 2020/21, while the gap between school leavers from the most and least deprived areas reduced.
- Measures of participation and positive destinations are consistently positive, with the proportion of 16-19 year olds participating in education, training or employment (the 'Participation Measure'), increasing year on year with the exception of a slight drop in 2019, and reaching its highest ever levels in 2021. The participation gap between those living in the most deprived areas and those in the least deprived areas continues to show narrowing year on year. Looking specifically at the participation rate in the Challenge Authorities, all nine authorities recorded an increase between 2016 and 2021.

Reported evidence of impact

- Perceptions of progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap were identified at both local authority and school level.
- At the local authority level, the majority of local authorities responding to the 2021 Survey perceived they had seen improvement towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap over the 2020/21 year as a result of ASF although there were clear indications of the impact of COVID-19.
- At the school level, of 597 headteachers responding to the 2021 Headteacher Survey:

- 87% reported seeing an improvement in closing the poverty-related attainment gap as a result of ASF supported approaches in the previous year and 94% expected to see improvements over the next few years;
- 94% of headteachers in receipt of Challenge Authority or Schools Programme funding, in addition to PEF, reported seeing an improvement specifically as a result of PEF.
- COVID-19 emerged as the key factor influencing perceptions of progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap.
- A number of factors were associated with schools' experiences and positive perceptions of progress were identified: change of culture or ethos (such as embedding the approach to equity); tailoring use of ASF to local needs; effective use of data and evidence; and engagement with families and communities.
- Sustained and embedded practices as a result of the fund included: staff skills and capacity; developing capacity to use evidence to inform approaches/embedding use of evidence; developing whole school approaches to equity; and embedding approaches to achieving equity.
- Staffing levels and the potential loss of skills should staffing levels reduce were seen as barriers to sustainability.
- Continuation of funding was the primary factor associated with ensuring sustainability of focus on equity. Other factors identified included: ongoing professional learning; continued focus on understanding the challenges associated with poverty for children and their families; focus on data and evidence; creating a culture of embedding sustainable approaches; and a focus on collaboration.

5.1 This chapter explores evidence around improvement in attainment and health and wellbeing, and the gap between pupils from the most and least deprived areas. Evidence of impact draws on both analysis of quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing, based on agreed measures for monitoring progress on closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and on reported impacts from ASF survey evidence.

5.2 The first section provides analysis of quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing based on the measures for monitoring progress on closing the poverty-related attainment gap as set out in the National Improvement Framework. For 2020/21 Achievement of the Curriculum for Excellence (ACEL) data was collected for Primary school (P1, P4 and P7) pupils only. Secondary school and special school data was not collected due to other pressures on these schools including implementation of the SQA National Qualifications Alternative Certification Model which was used to award National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers in 2021. For health and wellbeing data, the impact of COVID-19 on data collection means there is no update available for 2020/21 for the Total Difficulties Score and the Mental Wellbeing score (SALSUS/WEMWBS). The current available data was reported on in the ASF Year 5 Report (2019/20).

5.3 The second section explores reported impact provided by local authorities and schools, based primarily on survey data drawn from the Headteacher Survey 2021 and the Local Authority Survey 2021. This is followed by consideration of evidence around sustainability.

Evidence of impact: attainment and wellbeing

5.4 Evidence of impact draws on analysis of quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing based on the agreed measures for monitoring progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap set out in the National Improvement Framework. This sets out a basket of key measures and sub-measures to assess progress. The measures with available data for this (and previous) reporting periods are shown in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: National Improvement Framework Measures

| | | | Pre ASF 2014/15 | Year 1 (2015/16) | Year 2 (2016/17) | Year 3 (2017/18) | Year 4 (2018/19) | Year 5 (2019/20) | Year 6 (2020/21) |
|-------------------------------|---|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Attainment | Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels | P1, P4 and P7 S3 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ (P1,P4,P7 only) |
| | School leaver attainment in National Qualifications – SCQF Level 5 and 6 or better* | School leavers | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Annual Participation Measure | 16-19 year olds | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Health & Wellbeing | Attendance rates | Primary, Secondary | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | Exclusion rates | Primary, Secondary | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | Total difficulties score | Primary, Secondary | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| | Mental Wellbeing Score (SALSUS) | Primary, Secondary | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |

* Level 4 is not included within the attainment related measures – see Evaluation Strategy for Year 3 and 4 Table 2.1.

5.5 All of the measures are available at both Scotland and local authority level. Patterns of attainment in Challenge Authorities, who have been involved with ASF since 2015¹³, and non-Challenge Authorities are outlined in this analysis.

5.6 To address the research questions, each of the measures outlined in the above table are considered in terms of:

- Overall attainment
- Attainment for pupils from most and least deprived SIMD quintiles
- Percentage point gap between the most and least deprived

5.7 In addition, data for the following groups will be shown:

- Each of the nine Challenge Authorities and Challenge Authority total
- Non-Challenge Authorities
- Scotland Level

5.8 It is important to note that the evaluation is retrospective, in that data reported has been collected for the previous year. Whilst the refreshed SAC Programme has an allocation to all 32 local authorities through the Strategic Equity Fund, given that this report is focused on a retrospective evaluation of 2020/21 the consideration of NIF measures focuses on the funding structure that was previously in place for the SAC Programme i.e. nine Challenge Authorities and the Schools Programme.

Primary school attainment

5.9 The attainment of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined) for literacy and numeracy is outlined below, based on analysis of [Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence \(CfE\) Levels 2020/21](#) data. When considering the data it is important to note that the Scottish Government did not collect Achievement of CfE Levels data for any pupils in 2019/20; schools were closed in Scotland between March 2020 and the end of the academic year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic meaning that they were closed on the planned ACEL census date of 8th June 2020. It was concluded that it would not be possible to collect consistent data that was fit for purpose and that any attempt to do so would add considerably to other pressures on school and education authority staff. The decision was therefore taken to suspend the data collection. For 2020/21 data was collected for Primary school (P1, P4 and P7) pupils only. Secondary school and special school data was not collected due to other pressures on these schools including implementation of the SQA National Qualifications Alternative Certification Model which was used to award National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers in 2021.

5.10 In terms of primary school pupils' literacy and numeracy performance, Table 5.2 presents data for Challenge Authorities (Challenge Authorities combined and Scotland overall), from 2016/17 to 2020/21. As Table 5.2 shows, the proportion of primary pupils achieving the expected level in literacy steadily increased until 2020/21 where it decreased.

¹³ East Ayrshire Council and Renfrewshire Council were added as Challenge Authorities in 2016.

- In Challenge Authorities, the proportion increased from 67.5 per cent in 2016/17 to 69.1 per cent in 2017/18, and 70.8 per cent in 2018/19, dropping to 65.1 per cent in 2020/21.
- Over the same period of time, there has been a similar pattern in non-Challenge Authorities (70.1 per cent in 2016/17 to 73.0 per cent in 2018/19, 67.7 per cent in 2020/21) and Scotland overall (69.2 per cent in 2016/17 to 72.3 per cent in 2018/19 and 66.9 per cent in 2020/21).

For numeracy the proportion of primary pupils achieving the expected level steadily increased until 2020/21 where it decreased:

- In Challenge Authorities the proportion increased from 74.8 per cent in 2016/17, to 76.8 per cent in 2017/18, 78.2 per cent in 2018/19 before decreasing to 73.5 per cent in 2020/21. A similar pattern was seen in Scotland overall (76.4 per cent in 2016/17 to 79.1 per cent in 2018/19 and 74.7 per cent in 2020/21).
- There was also an increase in non-Challenge Authorities between 2016/17 and 2018/19 followed by a decrease in 2020/21 (77.1 per cent in 2016/17 to 79.5 per cent in 2018/19 and 75.2 per cent in 2020/21).

Table 5.2: Challenge Authorities - Percentage of primary pupils achieving the expected level in literacy and numeracy, 2016/17 – 2020/21

| Local Authority | Literacy | | | | | Numeracy | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---|
| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | Percentage point change between 2016/17 and 2020/21 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | Percentage point change between 2016/17 and 2020/21 |
| Clackmannanshire | 56.8 | 72.1 | 71.2 | 59.6 | 2.8 | 64.0 | 77.0 | 76.8 | 68.6 | 4.6 |
| Dundee | 64.6 | 65.5 | 71.8 | 68.0 | 3.4 | 70.2 | 73.8 | 77.7 | 76.8 | 6.6 |
| East Ayrshire | 61.3 | 58.6 | 65.0 | 52.4 | -8.9 | 67.3 | 68.0 | 72.5 | 61.7 | -5.7 |
| Glasgow | 68.4 | 68.8 | 68.9 | 65.5 | -2.9 | 76.8 | 77.8 | 77.1 | 73.4 | -3.5 |
| Inverclyde | 72.3 | 73.5 | 75.7 | 67.9 | -4.4 | 79.0 | 80.0 | 82.2 | 74.5 | -4.5 |
| North Ayrshire | 69.5 | 72.4 | 73.8 | 58.6 | -10.9 | 77.2 | 79.5 | 79.4 | 67.4 | -9.8 |
| North Lanarkshire | 67.6 | 69.0 | 71.1 | 68.6 | 1.0 | 74.0 | 75.8 | 78.7 | 76.1 | 2.1 |
| Renfrewshire | 72.7 | 76.4 | 76.1 | 69.6 | -3.1 | 79.7 | 82.8 | 83.7 | 80.2 | 0.5 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 63.7 | 66.8 | 68.2 | 62.4 | -1.3 | 72.1 | 74.0 | 76.2 | 71.8 | -0.3 |
| Challenge Authorities | 67.5 | 69.1 | 70.8 | 65.1 | -2.4 | 74.8 | 76.8 | 78.2 | 73.5 | -1.3 |
| Non-Challenge | 70.1 | 72.5 | 73.0 | 67.7 | -2.4 | 77.1 | 79.1 | 79.5 | 75.2 | -1.8 |
| Scotland | 69.2 | 71.4 | 72.3 | 66.9 | -2.4 | 76.4 | 78.4 | 79.1 | 74.7 | -1.7 |

The robustness and consistency of these statistics have increased over time. This should be kept in mind when making comparisons between years.

Secondary school and special school data were not collected for 2020/21 and data was not collected for any pupils in 2019/20.

5.11 Tables 5.3 and 5.4 below show the size of the gap between the proportion of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined) from the most and least deprived areas that have achieved the expected level in literacy and numeracy.

For literacy:

- For Challenge Authorities overall, the gap in literacy fluctuated between 2016/17 and 2020/21.

- At Scotland level, the gap narrowed between 2016/17 and 2018/19 and widened again in 2020/21 to 24.7 per cent.
- The literacy attainment gap for non-Challenge Authorities decreased year on year before widening to 27.0 per cent in 2020/21.

For numeracy:

- The gap widened slightly for Challenge Authorities each year with the largest increase between 2018/19 and 2020/21.
- Similarly, at Scotland level the gap reduced between 2016/17 to 2018/19 before widening again in 2020/21.
- For non-Challenge Authorities the numeracy attainment gap fluctuated between 2016/17 and 2018/19 before increasing to 23.4 per cent in 2020/21.

Table 5.3: Challenge Authorities - Percentage of primary pupils achieving the expected level in literacy, by local authority and deprivation, 2016/17 to 2020/21

| | Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD) | | | | Least deprived (top 20% SIMD) | | | | Percentage point gap | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 20/1617 | 20/1718 | 20/1819 | 2020/21 |
| Clackmannanshire | 47.5 | 63.3 | 62.4 | 53.3 | 65.3 | 78.4 | 84.8 | 73.9 | 17.8 | 15.0 | 22.4 | 20.7 |
| Dundee | 58.1 | 58.9 | 65.5 | 61.6 | 75.0 | 79.8 | 84.5 | 82.0 | 16.9 | 20.8 | 19.2 | 20.4 |
| East Ayrshire | 49.8 | 47.4 | 54.6 | 42.3 | 77.1 | 77.1 | 77.2 | 72.4 | 27.3 | 29.7 | 22.6 | 30.1 |
| Glasgow | 64.1 | 64.5 | 64.5 | 60.7 | 86.5 | 84.9 | 85.4 | 85.8 | 22.3 | 20.3 | 20.9 | 25.1 |
| Inverclyde | 64.8 | 62.6 | 67.4 | 55.0 | 86.4 | 88.9 | 88.1 | 82.6 | 21.6 | 26.3 | 20.7 | 27.5 |
| North Ayrshire | 62.6 | 65.5 | 67.6 | 49.2 | 82.1 | 83.2 | 89.6 | 70.7 | 19.5 | 17.6 | 22.0 | 21.5 |
| North Lanarkshire | 57.7 | 59.8 | 63.0 | 59.9 | 78.2 | 83.1 | 81.7 | 82.3 | 20.5 | 23.3 | 18.7 | 22.4 |
| Renfrewshire | 62.7 | 67.6 | 66.2 | 56.2 | 84.6 | 85.6 | 86.7 | 84.8 | 21.9 | 18.1 | 20.4 | 28.5 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 59.2 | 60.3 | 62.2 | 56.5 | 71.8 | 81.4 | 75 | 74.4 | 12.5 | 21.1 | 12.8 | 17.9 |
| Challenge Authorities | 61.0 | 62.2 | 64.1 | 57.6 | 80.8 | 83.1 | 84.3 | 81.5 | 19.8 | 20.9 | 20.2 | 23.9 |
| Non-Challenge Authorities | 56.8 | 60.7 | 61.4 | 53.5 | 81.5 | 83.3 | 83.6 | 80.5 | 24.7 | 22.6 | 22.2 | 27.0 |
| Scotland | 59.3 | 61.6 | 63.1 | 56.0 | 81.4 | 83.3 | 83.7 | 80.7 | 22.1 | 21.6 | 20.7 | 24.7 |

The robustness and consistency of these statistics have increased over time. This should be kept in mind when making comparisons between years. Secondary school and special school data were not collected for 2020/21 and data was not collected for any pupils in 2019/20.

Table 5.4: Challenge Authorities Percentage of primary pupils achieving the expected level in numeracy, by local authority and deprivation, 2016/17 to 2020/21

| | Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD) | | | | Least deprived (top 20% SIMD) | | | | Percentage point gap | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 |
| Clackmannanshire | 51.9 | 69.1 | 68.2 | 64.3 | 75.3 | 81.8 | 85.9 | 77.3 | 23.4 | 12.7 | 17.7 | 13.0 |
| Dundee | 65.7 | 68.7 | 71.8 | 71.0 | 76.6 | 85.3 | 88.0 | 88.2 | 10.9 | 16.6 | 16.2 | 17.3 |
| East Ayrshire | 56.8 | 58.8 | 62.7 | 50.1 | 78.4 | 81.7 | 84.1 | 80.6 | 21.6 | 22.8 | 21.4 | 30.5 |
| Glasgow | 74.0 | 75.0 | 73.7 | 69.6 | 91.4 | 88.9 | 88.6 | 88.0 | 17.4 | 13.9 | 14.9 | 18.4 |
| Inverclyde | 70.4 | 70.7 | 75.7 | 62.9 | 91.5 | 94.5 | 93.2 | 91.4 | 21.0 | 23.8 | 17.5 | 28.6 |
| North Ayrshire | 72.4 | 74.7 | 74.5 | 58.4 | 84.7 | 88.6 | 91.6 | 82.0 | 12.3 | 13.9 | 17.1 | 23.6 |
| North Lanarkshire | 66.0 | 68.3 | 72.2 | 67.6 | 85.0 | 87.8 | 87.2 | 88.3 | 18.9 | 19.4 | 15.0 | 20.7 |
| Renfrewshire | 70.3 | 75.0 | 75.7 | 68.3 | 89.4 | 90.4 | 92.9 | 91.6 | 19.1 | 15.4 | 17.3 | 23.3 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 68.0 | 67.4 | 71.1 | 65.2 | 83.1 | 87.6 | 88.0 | 82.0 | 15.1 | 20.3 | 16.9 | 16.7 |
| Challenge Authorities | 68.7 | 71.7 | 72.7 | 66.5 | 85.5 | 87.9 | 89.1 | 87.6 | 15.8 | 16.2 | 16.4 | 21.0 |
| Non-Challenge Authorities | 67.3 | 69.8 | 70.1 | 62.8 | 86.4 | 87.7 | 88.4 | 86.2 | 19.2 | 17.9 | 18.3 | 23.4 |
| Scotland | 68.7 | 70.9 | 71.7 | 65.0 | 86.3 | 87.7 | 88.5 | 86.5 | 17.6 | 16.8 | 16.8 | 21.4 |

The robustness and consistency of these statistics have increased over time. This should be kept in mind when making comparisons between years. Secondary school and special school data were not collected for 2020/21 and data was not collected for any pupils in 2019/20.

School leaver attainment: percentage of school leavers achieving awards by Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level

5.12 The attainment of school leavers in Scotland is based on the [Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations, No. 4: 2022](#) Edition published 22 February 2022.

5.13 When considering the school leaver attainment data it is important to be aware of the underlying National Qualification certification. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to the cancellation of 2020 and 2021 National 5 (SCQF Level 5), Higher (SCQF Level 6) and Advanced Higher (SCQF Level 7) external assessment and exams and alternative approaches were taken to determine attainment. This will have affected the attainment of many 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers.

5.14 A dashed line break in the series has been placed between 2018/19 and 2019/20. This indicates that care must be taken when comparing attainment of school leavers in 2018/19 and before, with that of school leavers in 2019/20 and beyond. In addition, care should also be taken when comparing the attainment of 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers.

5.15 Interpretation of changes must take full account of the different certification methods used in different years, and changes in the attainment levels in 2019/20 and 2020/21 should not be seen as an indication that performance has improved or worsened, without further evidence.

5.16 This section will consider the proportion of school leavers attaining one or more pass at SCQF Level 5 to 7 or better in Challenge Authorities (combined), non-Challenge Authorities (combined) and Scotland overall, from 2016/17 to 2020/21.

5.17 As seen in Table 5.5:

- The proportion of school leavers attaining one pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better for Challenge Authorities (combined) has generally shown a downward trend until 2019/20 and 2020/21.
- Similarly, at Scotland level there was a slight decrease year on year from 2016/17 to 2018/19 before increasing in 2019/20 and 2020/21.
- Non-Challenge Authorities saw fluctuations with an increase in 2017/18, a slight decrease 2018/19 before increasing again in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Table 5.5: Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more passes at SCQF Level 5 or better, 2016/17 to 2020/21

| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Clackmannanshire | 79.4 | 76.1 | 78.8 | 77.1 | 84.7 |
| Dundee | 82.7 | 76.8 | 78.8 | 80.1 | 81.9 |
| East Ayrshire | 83.4 | 82.4 | 80.0 | 83.0 | 85.0 |
| Glasgow | 83.2 | 83.8 | 83.2 | 82.0 | 85.5 |
| Inverclyde | 88.9 | 89.1 | 89.5 | 89.3 | 91.7 |
| North Ayrshire | 84.7 | 86.2 | 83.3 | 89.4 | 87.3 |
| North Lanarkshire | 85.5 | 85.2 | 84.4 | 85.2 | 87.1 |
| Renfrewshire | 88.3 | 88.2 | 88.2 | 89.7 | 92.3 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 87.9 | 83.1 | 85.6 | 85.6 | 85.9 |
| Challenge Authorities | 84.8 | 84.2 | 83.7 | 84.2 | 86.7 |
| Non-Challenge Authorities | 86.6 | 86.7 | 85.6 | 86.4 | 88.1 |
| Scotland | 86.1 | 85.9 | 85.1 | 85.7 | 87.7 |

Note: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leaver attainment. It indicates that care must be taken when comparing attainment of school leavers in 2018/19 and before, with that of school leavers in 2019/20 and beyond. In addition, care should also be taken when comparing the attainment of 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers.

5.18 Table 5.6 shows the proportion of school leavers attaining one or more pass at SCQF Level 6 or better has seen a similar trend across Challenge Authorities (combined), and Scotland overall, from 2016/17 to 2020/21; there has been a general upward trend with the exception of a drop in 2018/19.

Table 5.6: Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more passes at SCQF Level 6 or better, 2016/17 to 2020/21

| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Clackmannanshire | 53.5 | 49.7 | 54.4 | 53.2 | 60.5 |
| Dundee | 58.1 | 48.9 | 53.6 | 58.0 | 56.2 |
| East Ayrshire | 58.4 | 60.5 | 58.1 | 59.2 | 60.3 |
| Glasgow | 55.9 | 59.6 | 58.5 | 60.6 | 64.3 |
| Inverclyde | 64.8 | 68.0 | 67.4 | 70.3 | 70.6 |
| North Ayrshire | 57.6 | 59.9 | 56.6 | 61.4 | 64.3 |
| North Lanarkshire | 59.3 | 60.7 | 59.0 | 63.5 | 64.7 |
| Renfrewshire | 65.6 | 65.7 | 63.1 | 66.5 | 73.1 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 64.2 | 57.6 | 58.1 | 59.9 | 62.2 |
| Challenge Authorities | 59.1 | 59.8 | 58.7 | 61.9 | 64.5 |
| Non-Challenge Authorities | 62.1 | 63.1 | 61.3 | 64.7 | 66.6 |
| Scotland | 61.2 | 62.2 | 60.5 | 63.9 | 66.0 |

Note: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leaver attainment. It indicates that care must be taken when comparing attainment of school leavers in 2018/19 and before, with that of school leavers in 2019/20 and beyond. In addition, care should also be taken when comparing the attainment of 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers.

5.19 As seen in Table 5.7, from 2016/17 to 2020/21, the proportion of school leavers attaining one or more passes at SCQF Level 7 for Challenge Authorities

(combined), non-Challenge authorities (combined) and Scotland have shown a general upward trend with the exception of a drop in 2018/19.

Table 5.7: Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more passes at SCQF Level 7, 2016/17 to 2020/21

| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Clackmannanshire | 13.9 | 14.9 | 19.1 | 19.1 | 25.3 |
| Dundee | 15.9 | 12.8 | 14.4 | 20.6 | 18.2 |
| East Ayrshire | 15.0 | 16.9 | 15.4 | 15.7 | 18.5 |
| Glasgow | 13.7 | 15.0 | 13.7 | 17.4 | 18.3 |
| Inverclyde | 19.1 | 19.1 | 17.9 | 22.4 | 23.7 |
| North Ayrshire | 17.1 | 17.5 | 15.5 | 21.7 | 20.6 |
| North Lanarkshire | 13.9 | 15.2 | 12.3 | 17.3 | 14.9 |
| Renfrewshire | 19.2 | 19.3 | 20.6 | 21.6 | 25.8 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 16.9 | 14.8 | 14.3 | 19.2 | 21.1 |
| Challenge Authorities | 15.4 | 15.9 | 14.8 | 18.7 | 19.1 |
| Non-Challenge Authorities | 21.0 | 22.0 | 20.9 | 25.1 | 26.4 |
| Scotland | 19.3 | 20.2 | 19.1 | 23.2 | 24.2 |

Note: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leaver attainment. It indicates that care must be taken when comparing attainment of school leavers in 2018/19 and before, with that of school leavers in 2019/20 and beyond. In addition, care should also be taken when comparing the attainment of 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers.

5.20 At SCQF Level 5 or better (Table 5.8), the percentage point gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most and least deprived areas attaining one or more pass has reduced for Challenge Authorities, non-Challenge Authorities and at Scotland level between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

5.21 The gap at SCQF Level 5 widened for Challenge Authorities (combined) from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (18.3 to 18.8 percentage points) before decreasing again slightly in 2018/19 (18.5 percentage points) widening to 19.4 percentage points in 2019/20 and reducing to 17.3 percentage points in 2020/21. A similar pattern is seen at Scotland level.

5.22 In non-Challenge authorities (combined), the gap at SCQF Level 5 has increased slightly year on year between 2016/17 and 2019/20 from 21.7 percentage points in 2016/17, to 22.7 percentage points in 2017/18, 22.9 percentage points in 2018/19 and 23.2 percentage points in 2019/20 before reducing to 21.2 percentage points in 2020/21.

5.23 At SCQF Level 6 or better (Table 5.9), the gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most and least deprived areas that have attained one pass or more narrowed across Challenge Authorities (combined) every year between 2016/17 and 2020/21. The gap declined steadily from 2016/17 (37.9 percentage points), 2017/18 (36.3 percentage points), 2018/19 (35.2 percentage points) to 2019/20 (35.1 percentage points), reducing again to 32.4 per cent in 2020/21. At Scotland level there was a similar pattern between 2016/17 and 2018/19: the gap narrowed slightly each year from 2016/17 to 2018/19 but widened slightly in 2019/20 before reducing again to 34.4 per cent in 2020/21.

5.24 The gap at SCQF Level 6 widened in non-Challenge Authorities (combined) from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (40.3 to 41.1 percentage points), and subsequently decreased in 2018/19 (39.6 percentage points) and again in 2019/20 (39.5 percentage points) and in 2020/21 (38.6 per cent).

5.25 At SCQF Level 7 (table 5.10), across Challenge Authorities, non-Challenge Authorities and Scotland in 2020/21 there has been a slight increase in the gap from the 2019/20 figures.

5.26 The gap at SCQF Level 7 (Table 5.10) narrowed for Challenge Authorities (combined) from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (20.9 to 20.4 percentage points), and decreased again in 2018/19 (18.8 percentage points), rising to 23.4 percentage points in 2019/20 and rising again to 24.9 percentage points in 2020/21. A similar pattern was seen at Scotland level between 2017/18 and 2020/21. In non-Challenge Authorities (combined), the gap widened very slightly from 26.5 percentage points in 2016/17, to 26.6 per cent in 2017/18 before narrowing to 24.3 percentage points in 2018/19 before increasing to 28.6 percentage points in 2019/20 and increasing again to 29.9 per cent in 2020/21.

5.27 The time period covered by these statistics means that the results will be affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In particular, the cancellation of exams and external assessment of coursework in 2020, and the use of the Alternative Certification Model in 2021, will have affected the attainment of many 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers.

Table 5.8: Challenge Authorities - Percentage of pupils achieving SCQF Level 5, by local authority and deprivation, 2016/17 to 2020/21

| | Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD) | | | | | Least deprived (top 20% SIMD) | | | | | Percentage point gap | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
| Clackmannanshire | 63.6 | 64.0 | 64.2 | 60.1 | 74.1 | 96.6 | 95.0 | 94.5 | * | * | 33.0 | 31.0 | 30.4 | * | * |
| Dundee | 71.7 | 65.0 | 68.0 | 67.4 | 73.8 | 94.8 | 93.0 | 93.5 | 92.1 | 95.1 | 23.2 | 28.0 | 25.4 | 24.7 | 21.3 |
| East Ayrshire | 72.1 | 69.9 | 64.7 | 71.8 | 77.9 | 96.6 | 94.5 | 96.2 | 95.7 | * | 24.5 | 24.6 | 31.6 | 23.8 | * |
| Glasgow | 79.6 | 79.3 | 79.4 | 78.0 | 81.2 | 93.8 | 94.9 | 94.8 | 95.3 | * | 14.2 | 15.5 | 15.4 | 17.2 | * |
| Inverclyde | 83.6 | 83.4 | 82.3 | 83.6 | 87.6 | 94.9 | 95.4 | 96.3 | * | * | 11.4 | 12.0 | 14.1 | * | * |
| North Ayrshire | 76.1 | 79.8 | 74.6 | 77.0 | 81.1 | 96.1 | 97.7 | 95.5 | 95.3 | 95.7 | 20.0 | 17.9 | 20.9 | 18.3 | 14.7 |
| North Lanarkshire | 76.5 | 74.7 | 75.2 | 73.7 | 79.5 | 96.1 | 95.9 | 93.4 | 95.3 | 97.2 | 19.6 | 21.2 | 18.2 | 21.6 | 17.7 |
| Renfrewshire | 75.2 | 79.5 | 79.5 | 79.4 | 80.1 | 96.0 | 96.8 | 95.5 | 97.8 | 98.1 | 20.9 | 17.3 | 16.0 | 18.4 | 18.0 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 80.7 | 77.4 | 80.4 | 78.3 | 78.0 | 98.1 | 95.6 | 94.2 | * | * | 17.4 | 18.2 | 13.8 | * | * |
| Challenge Authorities | 77.3 | 76.7 | 76.2 | 76.1 | 80.1 | 95.6 | 95.5 | 94.7 | 95.5 | 97.3 | 18.3 | 18.8 | 18.5 | 19.4 | 17.3 |
| Non-Challenge Authorities | 72.8 | 72.6 | 71.6 | 72.0 | 74.6 | 94.6 | 95.3 | 94.5 | 95.2 | 95.9 | 21.7 | 22.7 | 22.9 | 23.2 | 21.2 |
| Scotland | 75.5 | 75.0 | 74.4 | 74.5 | 77.9 | 94.8 | 95.4 | 94.6 | 95.3 | 96.1 | 19.3 | 20.3 | 20.2 | 20.8 | 18.2 |

Note: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leaver attainment. It indicates that care must be taken when comparing attainment of school leavers in 2018/19 and before, with that of school leavers in 2019/20 and beyond. In addition, care should also be taken when comparing the attainment of 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers.

Table 5.9: Challenge Authorities - Percentage of pupils achieving SCQF Level 6, by local authority and deprivation, 2016/17 to 2020/21

| | Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD) | | | | | Least deprived (top 20% SIMD) | | | | | Percentage point gap | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
| Clackmannanshire | 36.4 | 33.6 | 36.6 | 36.2 | 43.5 | 77.6 | 77.5 | 76.4 | 79.6 | 74.1 | 41.2 | 43.9 | 39.8 | 43.4 | 30.6 |
| Dundee | 42.3 | 33.3 | 39.0 | 39.3 | 41.3 | 82.0 | 75.5 | 75.7 | 81.8 | 80.5 | 39.7 | 42.2 | 36.7 | 42.4 | 39.2 |
| East Ayrshire | 38.2 | 45.3 | 39.5 | 41.6 | 50.6 | 84.2 | 82.8 | 80.6 | 82.0 | 83.7 | 46.0 | 37.5 | 41.2 | 40.4 | 33.1 |
| Glasgow | 48.6 | 51.3 | 51.7 | 52.7 | 55.4 | 82.2 | 87.4 | 83.3 | 84.5 | 91.7 | 33.6 | 36.1 | 31.6 | 31.9 | 36.3 |
| Inverclyde | 47.9 | 53.8 | 53.6 | 58.8 | 59.5 | 83.5 | 89.7 | 85.4 | 87.5 | 87.1 | 35.7 | 35.8 | 31.8 | 28.7 | 27.6 |
| North Ayrshire | 40.3 | 46.0 | 43.2 | 46.7 | 54.2 | 83.8 | 86.3 | 81.8 | 79.8 | 81.6 | 43.5 | 40.2 | 38.6 | 33.1 | 27.4 |
| North Lanarkshire | 43.5 | 45.0 | 42.7 | 48.7 | 50.6 | 82.8 | 83.1 | 83.2 | 84.6 | 82.1 | 39.3 | 38.1 | 40.5 | 36.0 | 31.6 |
| Renfrewshire | 41.0 | 47.9 | 43.6 | 46.6 | 51.5 | 84.1 | 84.4 | 82.1 | 87.7 | 86.6 | 43.1 | 36.4 | 38.5 | 41.1 | 35.1 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 53.2 | 46.9 | 46.8 | 48.3 | 48.9 | 88.5 | 80.0 | 88.5 | 84.6 | 85.3 | 35.3 | 33.1 | 41.6 | 36.3 | 36.4 |
| Challenge Authorities | 45.2 | 47.2 | 46.5 | 49.1 | 52.4 | 83.1 | 83.5 | 81.7 | 84.2 | 84.8 | 37.9 | 36.3 | 35.2 | 35.1 | 32.4 |
| Non-Challenge Authorities | 39.6 | 40.3 | 39.1 | 42.8 | 45.0 | 79.9 | 81.4 | 78.7 | 82.3 | 83.6 | 40.3 | 41.1 | 39.6 | 39.5 | 38.6 |
| Scotland | 43.0 | 44.4 | 43.5 | 46.6 | 49.5 | 80.6 | 81.8 | 79.3 | 82.7 | 83.9 | 37.6 | 37.4 | 35.8 | 36.1 | 34.4 |

Note: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leaver attainment. It indicates that care must be taken when comparing attainment of school leavers in 2018/19 and before, with that of school leavers in 2019/20 and beyond. In addition, care should also be taken when comparing the attainment of 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers.

Table 5.10: Challenge Authorities - Percentage of pupils achieving SCQF Level 7, by local authority and deprivation, 2016/17 to 2020/21

| | Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD) | | | | | Least deprived (top 20% SIMD) | | | | | Percentage point gap | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
| Clackmannanshire | 9.3 | 6.4 | 9.0 | 10.1 | 13.9 | 22.4 | 22.5 | 30.9 | 35.2 | 38.9 | 13.1 | 16.1 | 22.0 | 25.0 | 25.0 |
| Dundee | 7.7 | 7.5 | 8.4 | 10.7 | 10.9 | 27.0 | 18.0 | 19.6 | 36.4 | 38.0 | 19.3 | 10.5 | 11.2 | 25.8 | 27.2 |
| East Ayrshire | 6.4 | 8.6 | 7.3 | 8.7 | 12.1 | 25.4 | 29.7 | 27.4 | 27.3 | 32.5 | 19.0 | 21.1 | 20.1 | 18.7 | 20.4 |
| Glasgow | 9.3 | 10.4 | 9.0 | 12.1 | 12.2 | 34.2 | 34.8 | 29.6 | 39.1 | 46.7 | 24.9 | 24.4 | 20.6 | 26.9 | 34.5 |
| Inverclyde | 8.8 | 9.6 | 7.2 | 14.8 | 15.5 | 34.2 | 37.9 | 34.1 | 40.9 | 39.8 | 25.4 | 28.3 | 27.0 | 26.1 | 24.3 |
| North Ayrshire | 9.9 | 9.0 | 7.8 | 13.6 | 13.3 | 31.2 | 35.9 | 27.3 | 31.8 | 33.3 | 21.3 | 26.9 | 19.5 | 18.2 | 20.0 |
| North Lanarkshire | 8.0 | 8.1 | 8.1 | 10.6 | 8.6 | 26.6 | 24.8 | 21.1 | 35.1 | 28.6 | 18.6 | 16.8 | 13.0 | 24.5 | 19.9 |
| Renfrewshire | 9.6 | 9.9 | 10.4 | 11.1 | 13.9 | 31.8 | 33.7 | 33.2 | 34.7 | 38.7 | 22.3 | 23.8 | 22.9 | 23.6 | 24.8 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 11.9 | 10.6 | 7.9 | 13.6 | 14.4 | 38.5 | 31.1 | 34.6 | 35.9 | 36.8 | 26.6 | 20.5 | 26.7 | 22.3 | 22.4 |
| Challenge Authorities | 9.0 | 9.4 | 8.5 | 11.8 | 12.0 | 29.8 | 29.8 | 27.4 | 35.2 | 36.8 | 20.9 | 20.4 | 18.8 | 23.4 | 24.9 |
| Non-Challenge Authorities | 8.0 | 8.8 | 8.8 | 11.4 | 11.9 | 34.5 | 35.3 | 33.1 | 40.0 | 41.8 | 26.5 | 26.6 | 24.3 | 28.6 | 29.9 |
| Scotland | 8.6 | 9.1 | 8.7 | 11.7 | 12.0 | 33.8 | 34.7 | 32.4 | 39.5 | 41.2 | 25.3 | 25.5 | 23.7 | 27.8 | 29.2 |

Note: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leaver attainment. It indicates that care must be taken when comparing attainment of school leavers in 2018/19 and before, with that of school leavers in 2019/20 and beyond. In addition, care should also be taken when comparing the attainment of 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers

Annual Participation Measure

5.28 The **Annual Participation Measure (APM)** is a measure for considering progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap, as set out in the National Improvement Framework. Since August 2017 the APM has been the source of the National Performance Framework Indicator, 'Percentage of young adults (16-19 year olds) participating in education, training or employment'. It is produced by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) using a shared data set to report on the economic and employment activity of the wider 16-19 year old cohort, including those at school. A range of partners contribute to the shared dataset, including Local Authorities (schools), colleges, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and SAAS. It allows all partners to better understand the impact of interventions and the outcomes they deliver at every transition point for 16-19 year olds.

5.29 When considering the APM as a measure in the ASF Evaluation it is important to highlight that the ASF funding started in 2015, therefore a lag occurs between intervention at school level and impact on APM (mostly post school). The APM is also measured from 1st April - 31st March, as opposed to the academic year considered in the ASF evaluation. As such the figures are not considered across a directly comparable time period.

5.30 This section reports on the participation rate for Scotland overall and at local authority level. For school pupils, local authority relates to the location of the school they are attending. For those who have left school local authority continues to relate to location of their school up to 12 months after leaving, and thereafter the individual is reported against the local authority linked to their postcode.

5.31 All local authority level data disaggregated by SIMD is available [online](#); the focus in this report is specifically on the Challenge Authorities, who have been involved with the ASF for the longest period of time.

5.32 Table 5.11 below shows the proportion of 16-19 year olds participating in education, training or employment was 92.2% in 2021 which represents an increase of 0.1 percentage points compared to 92.1% in 2020 and is the highest rate since the inception of the APM. Previous figures showed a slight increase year on year from 90.4 percentage points in 2016, 91.1 percentage points in 2017, 91.8 percentage points in 2018, decreasing slightly in 2019 to 91.6 percentage points.

5.33 The participation gap between those who lived in the 20% most deprived areas and those in the 20% least deprived areas continues to show narrowing with a gap of 9.3 percentage points in 2021 (compared to 12.9 percentage points in 2016, 11.5 percentage points in 2017, 10.8 percentage points in 2018, 10.5 percentage points in 2019 and 9.9 percentage points in 2020).

5.34 Looking specifically at the participation rate in the Challenge Authorities (Table 5.11), all nine authorities recorded an increase between 2016 and 2021, however North Ayrshire Council's participation rate reduced slightly by 0.5 percentage points between 2020 and 2021.

Table 5.11: APM - Challenge Authorities Percentage of 16-19 year olds participating, by local authority, 2016 - 2021

| | Participation rate | | | | | | Percentage point change between 2016 and 2021 |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---|
| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | |
| Clackmannanshire | 88.2 | 89.7 | 89.3 | 90.1 | 89.3 | 90 | 1.8 |
| Dundee | 87.7 | 87.6 | 88.7 | 88.2 | 90 | 89.9 | 2.2 |
| East Ayrshire | 89.3 | 88.1 | 89.3 | 88.7 | 90 | 91 | 1.7 |
| Glasgow | 86.8 | 88.2 | 88.8 | 89.2 | 89.5 | 90.5 | 3.7 |
| Inverclyde | 91.2 | 91.9 | 91.6 | 91.8 | 92.9 | 93.3 | 2.1 |
| North Ayrshire | 89.9 | 90.3 | 91.1 | 90.5 | 90.6 | 90.1 | 0.2 |
| North Lanarkshire | 89.3 | 90.2 | 90.5 | 90.1 | 90.7 | 91.5 | 2.2 |
| Renfrewshire | 90.7 | 91.4 | 91.6 | 91.7 | 92.4 | 93 | 2.3 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 88.4 | 88.3 | 90.1 | 90.3 | 90.2 | 90.8 | 2.4 |
| Challenge Authorities | 89 | 89.3 | 89.9 | 89.9 | 90.6 | 91.1 | 2.1 |
| Non-Challenge Authorities | 92 | 91.9 | 92.8 | 92.4 | 93.5 | 93.2 | 1.2 |
| Scotland | 90.4 | 91.1 | 91.8 | 91.6 | 92.1 | 92.2 | 1.8 |

Source: Annual Participation Measure, Skills Development Scotland

5.35 At Scotland level, as shown in Table 5.12, between Year 4 (2019) and 5 (2020) of the ASF, there was an overall reduction in the participation gap between those living in the most deprived areas compared to those living in the least deprived areas (9.9 percentage points in 2020, 10.5 percentage points in 2019, 10.8 percentage points in 2018, 11.5 percentage points in 2017). Between 2020-2021 the participation rate increased for those living in the least deprived areas (86.6 percentage points in 2020 to 87.1 percentage points in 2021), but decreased slightly for those living in the most deprived areas (96.5 percentage points in 2020 to 96.4 percentage points in 2021). With regards Challenge Authorities Table 5.12 shows the following:

- In Year 6 of the ASF (2021), four Challenge Authorities had a smaller or similar participation gap compared to Scotland.

- Between Year 5 and 6 of the ASF, the participation gap narrowed in six Challenge Authorities.
- In Year 6 of the ASF, the participation rate for those living in the 20% most deprived areas was higher in three Challenge Authorities, compared to Scotland.
- Between Year 5 and 6 of the ASF, the participation rate for those living in the 20% most deprived areas increased or was maintained in eight Challenge Authorities - an increase from six in 2020.

Table 5.12: APM - Challenge Authorities percentage of 16-19 year olds participating, by local authority and deprivation, 2016 to 2021

| | Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD) | | | | | | Least deprived (top 20% SIMD) | | | | | | Gap Percentage points | | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
| Clackmannanshire | 79.1 | 82.0 | 81.6 | 84.5 | 83.9 | 85.9 | 97 | 95.6 | 93.9 | 96.6 | 96.3 | 94.8 | 17.9 | 13.6 | 12.3 | 12.1 | 12.4 | 8.9 |
| Dundee | 81.1 | 82.4 | 82.9 | 83.4 | 85.4 | 85.5 | 97.3 | 96.2 | 95.6 | 96 | 96.2 | 97 | 16.2 | 13.8 | 12.7 | 12.6 | 10.8 | 11.5 |
| East Ayrshire | 83.2 | 82.7 | 83 | 83.1 | 84.8 | 86 | 95.6 | 94.2 | 97.2 | 96.2 | 96.3 | 97.3 | 12.4 | 11.5 | 14.1 | 13.1 | 11.5 | 11.3 |
| Glasgow | 84.4 | 85.5 | 86.1 | 86.3 | 86.8 | 88.4 | 95.2 | 96.3 | 96.1 | 95.5 | 95.6 | 96.2 | 10.8 | 10.9 | 10.0 | 9.2 | 8.8 | 7.8 |
| Inverclyde | 86.9 | 88.2 | 87.4 | 88.3 | 89.9 | 90.8 | 97.2 | 96.4 | 96.3 | 96.3 | 96.3 | 97.6 | 10.3 | 8.2 | 8.9 | 8.1* | 6.4 | 6.8 |
| North Ayrshire | 85.6 | 85.9 | 87.6 | 87.8 | 86.9 | 85.3 | 97.7 | 97.5 | 96.4 | 94.7 | 96.7 | 96.1 | 12.1 | 11.6 | 8.8 | 6.9 | 9.8 | 10.8 |
| North Lanarkshire | 83.1 | 85.0 | 85.6 | 84.3 | 85.9 | 87 | 96.6 | 96.2 | 95.8 | 96.7 | 96.5 | 96.5 | 13.5 | 11.2 | 10.2 | 12.4 | 10.6 | 9.5 |
| Renfrewshire | 83.6 | 85.5 | 86.6 | 85.1 | 87.3 | 87.9 | 96.9 | 96.5 | 96.9 | 97.3 | 97.6 | 97.6 | 13.3 | 11.0 | 10.3 | 12.1* | 10.3 | 9.7 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 83.7 | 84.8 | 85.7 | 85.7 | 85.4 | 86.9 | 98.4 | 95.5 | 96.9 | 98.9 | 95.3 | 95.5 | 14.7 | 10.7 | 11.2 | 13.2 | 9.9 | 8.6 |
| Scotland | 83.3 | 84.8 | 85.7 | 85.8 | 86.6 | 87.1 | 96.2 | 96.3 | 96.5 | 96.3 | 96.5 | 96.4 | 12.9 | 11.5 | 10.8 | 10.5 | 9.9 | 9.3 |

Source: Annual Participation Measure, Skills Development Scotland (SDS). Note that 2016-19 APM uses the SIMD 2016 whereas the 2020 APM uses the SIMD 2020.

The Annual Participation Measure report may refer to a percentage point (pp) increase or decrease, which means the absolute change between two percentages e.g., the proportion of 16-19 year olds participating increased by x pp. These have been calculated using unrounded percentages. Calculating percentage point differences from the data presented in the report may differ slightly from figures cited in the text, due to rounding. Similarly, percentages within the report may not sum to 100%, due to rounding.

Health and wellbeing

5.36 This section reports on two health and wellbeing related measures: attendance and exclusions rates.

5.37 Information on attendance and exclusion from schools is collected on a biennial basis. In the first interim report, data was analysed for 2014/15 – the year prior to the ASF. In this section, consideration is given to how these figures changed between Years 1- 6 of the ASF. It is important to note that policy around exclusions changed in 2017 following Scottish Government guidance and this has resulted in a reduction in exclusions. As a result of this some local authority figures have been suppressed in the official statistics, so as not to be disclosive. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions from the exclusions data.

5.38 During 2020/21 there was disruption to school attendance caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This included:

- pupils being absent after testing positive for COVID-19 or when required to self-isolate
- school closures following local outbreaks or when there were COVID-19 related staff absences
- the closure of most school buildings between January and April 2021

5.39 During periods where school buildings were closed to pupils, education continued via home-learning for the majority of pupils. For those vulnerable pupils who would benefit from being in school, and for children of key workers, provision was made to allow them to attend school buildings. To account for these changed circumstances, new attendance and absence codes were made available to schools to allow them to capture COVID-19 related absence and home learning provision. Due to the fast pace of their introduction, it was anticipated that use of these codes may be inconsistent between different schools and local authorities.

5.40 Some of these expected inconsistencies were evident during the preparation of these statistics alongside evidence that the usage of the new codes varied over the course of the year within individual schools and authorities, including underreporting of absence from home learning. This should be borne in mind when interpreting these statistics.

5.41 There was a particularly notable decrease in exclusion between 2018/19 and 2020/21, with cases of exclusion falling 44%. This decrease is partly attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic, with many local authorities citing the lower amount of time spent in school as a reason for the reduction in their case numbers.

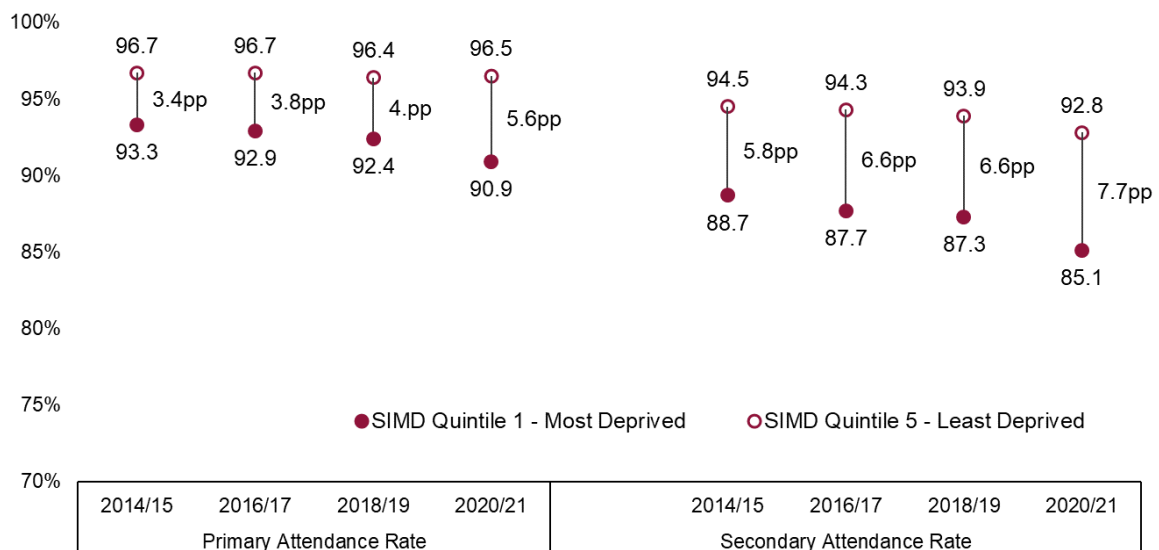
Attendance rates

5.42 Figure 5.13 shows the attendance levels for primary and secondary schools, by deprivation and by year.

5.43 As the attendance data shows, pupils from the most deprived areas had lower attendance rates; this pattern was more prominent in secondary schools.

5.44 The gap in attendance rates gradually increased over time for primary school children. The attendance of pupils from the least deprived areas remained fairly stable over time, especially in primary schools. The attendance rate of the most deprived pupils decreased in 2020/21.

Figure 5.13: Total Attendance Rates, by deprivation, 2014/15, 2016/17, 2018/19 & 2020/21



Source: Summary Statistics for Schools, Scottish Government

5.45 Table 5.14 below shows attendance rates for primary pupils, disaggregated by deprivation and Challenge Authority.

Table 5.14: Primary Attendance Rates – by local authority and deprivation, 2014/15, 2016/17, 2018/19 & 2020/21

| Primary attendance rates | Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD) % | | | | Least deprived (top 20% SIMD) % | | | | Gap Percentage points | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 |
| Clackmannanshire | 93.4 | 93.7 | 93.1 | c | 96.1 | 96.2 | 95.8 | c | 2.7 | 2.5 | 2.7 | c |
| Dundee City | 93.3 | 92.9 | 92.6 | 91.3 | 96.5 | 96.6 | 96.2 | 96.4 | 3.2 | 3.7 | 3.6 | 5.1 |
| East Ayrshire | 93.8 | 93.6 | 92.4 | 91.0 | 96.5 | 96.6 | 96.0 | 96.3 | 2.7 | 3.0 | 3.6 | 5.3 |
| Glasgow City | 93.1 | 92.8 | 92.3 | 90.2 | 96.8 | 96.5 | 96.4 | 96.2 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 4.0 | 6.0 |
| Inverclyde | 93.3 | 93.2 | 93.1 | 92.8 | 96.9 | 96.3 | 96.0 | 96.5 | 3.6 | 3.1 | 2.9 | 3.7 |
| North Ayrshire | 94.2 | 93.5 | 93.0 | 91.9 | 96.3 | 96.7 | 96.5 | 95.9 | 2.1 | 3.2 | 3.5 | 4.0 |
| North Lanarkshire | 92.8 | 92.3 | 91.9 | 90.2 | 96.7 | 96.5 | 96.4 | 95.8 | 3.9 | 4.2 | 4.5 | 5.6 |
| Renfrewshire | 94.2 | 94.0 | 93.3 | 92.2 | 97.1 | 96.8 | 96.7 | 96.9 | 2.9 | 2.8 | 3.4 | 4.7 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 94.0 | 93.3 | 93.2 | 91.6 | 97.1 | 96.5 | 96.5 | 96.4 | 3.1 | 3.2 | 3.3 | 4.8 |
| Scotland | 93.3 | 92.9 | 92.4 | 90.9 | 96.7 | 96.7 | 96.4 | 96.5 | 3.4 | 3.8 | 4.0 | 5.6 |

Source: Summary Statistics for Schools, Scottish Government
c = suppression due to small numbers

5.46 In relation to the gap in attendance rates for primary pupils:

- In Year 6 of the ASF, six Challenge Authorities had a smaller gap compared to Scotland;
- Between 2014/15 (pre-ASF) and Year 6, the gap widened in eight Challenge Authorities.

5.47 The attendance rate for primary pupils from the least deprived areas was fairly consistent across Challenge Authorities (around 96-97%).

5.48 Attendance rates for primary pupils in the most deprived areas was somewhat more varied. In 2020/21, the attendance rate of pupils from the most deprived areas was higher or similar in six Challenge Authorities compared to Scotland overall (down from 8 in Year 4).

5.49 Table 5.15 below shows the attendance rates for secondary pupils, disaggregated by deprivation and Challenge Authority.

Table 5.15: Secondary Attendance Rates – by local authority and deprivation, 2014/15, 2016/17, 2018/19 & 2020/21

| Secondary attendance rates | Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD) % | | | | Least deprived (top 20% SIMD) % | | | | Gap Percentage points | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 |
| Clackmannanshire | 88.2 | 86.8 | 88.9 | 89.7 | 94.0 | 94.4 | 94.0 | 94.5 | 5.8 | 7.6 | 5.1 | 4.8 |
| Dundee City | 87.3 | 87.1 | 86.4 | 83.4 | 93.7 | 93.9 | 93.5 | 92.5 | 6.4 | 6.8 | 7.1 | 9.1 |
| East Ayrshire | 87.7 | 87.0 | 86.0 | 82.7 | 94.5 | 93.9 | 93.3 | 92.9 | 6.8 | 6.9 | 7.3 | 10.2 |
| Glasgow City | 90.1 | 89.6 | 89.4 | 87.1 | 95.1 | 95.0 | 94.9 | 94.8 | 5.0 | 5.4 | 5.5 | 7.6 |
| Inverclyde | 88.7 | 87.7 | 87.7 | 88.1 | 94.5 | 94.3 | 92.8 | 92.5 | 5.8 | 6.6 | 5.1 | 4.4 |
| North Ayrshire | 89.1 | 87.5 | 87.6 | 86.8 | 93.9 | 93.0 | 92.6 | 91.9 | 4.8 | 5.5 | 5 | 5.1 |
| North Lanarkshire | 87.8 | 85.3 | 84.2 | 82.1 | 94.5 | 92.7 | 92.2 | 90.1 | 6.7 | 7.4 | 8 | 8.1 |
| Renfrewshire | 87.5 | 87.1 | 86.8 | 83.2 | 93.7 | 93.4 | 93.3 | 91.6 | 6.2 | 6.3 | 6.5 | 8.3 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 87.3 | 86.1 | 86.2 | 83.6 | 93.4 | 92.6 | 92.7 | 90.3 | 5.3 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 6.7 |
| Scotland | 88.7 | 87.7 | 87.3 | 85.1 | 94.5 | 94.3 | 93.9 | 92.8 | 5.8 | 6.6 | 6.6 | 7.7 |

Source: Summary Statistics for Schools, Scottish Government
c = suppression due to small numbers

5.50 In relation to the gap in attendance rates for secondary pupils:

- In Year 6 of the ASF, five Challenge Authorities had a smaller gap compared to Scotland;
- From the year prior to ASF (2014/15) to Year 6 of the ASF, the gap between attendance rates in the most deprived and the least deprived areas narrowed in two Challenge Authorities.

Exclusion rates

5.51 Full details on exclusion rates disaggregated by local authority and SIMD are available on the [National Improvement Framework Interactive Evidence Report](#).

5.52 In terms of the exclusion rates for Challenge Authorities, by deprivation and year, it is not possible to offer a full analysis of the gap in relation to exclusion rates due to disclosure control.

5.53 Overall, exclusion rates were higher for pupils from the most deprived areas compared to those from the least deprived.

5.54 From the year prior to ASF (2014/15) to Year 2 of the ASF (2016/17), the primary exclusion rate for pupils from the most deprived areas decreased for 4 Challenge Authorities (table 5.16).

Table 5.16: Primary Exclusion Rates per 1,000 pupils - by local authority and 2014/15, 2016/17, 2018/19 & 2020/21

| Primary exclusion rates per 1000 pupils | Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD) % | | | | Least deprived (top 20% SIMD) % | | | | Gap Percentage points | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|--------------------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 |
| Clackmannanshire | 68.0 | 48.5 | c | 0.0 | 5.7 | c | 0.0 | 0.0 | 62.3 | z | z | z |
| Dundee City | 29.9 | 20.4 | 9.0 | 4.7 | 2.1 | c | 7.7 | c | 27.8 | z | 1.3 | z |
| East Ayrshire | 54.2 | 52 | 37.2 | 9.4 | 3.8 | c | 0.0 | c | 50.4 | z | 37.2 | z |
| Glasgow City | 12.8 | 18.3 | 6.3 | 2.3 | 3.5 | 4.0 | c | c | 9.3 | 14.3 | z | z |
| Inverclyde | 3.9 | 3.1 | c | c | 0.0 | c | c | c | 3.9 | z | z | z |
| North Ayrshire | 8.8 | 9.1 | 10.8 | 3.0 | 0.0 | c | c | 0.0 | 8.8 | 9.1 | 10.8 | z |
| North Lanarkshire | 17.7 | 19.8 | 18.8 | 8.7 | 1.9 | 3.0 | c | c | 15.8 | 16.8 | z | z |
| Renfrewshire | 5.3 | 16.9 | 11.8 | 7.8 | 0.4 | 0.0 | c | c | 4.9 | 16.9 | 11.8 | z |
| West Dunbartonshire | 13.8 | 22.7 | 16.5 | 7.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 13.8 | 22.7 | 16.5 | z |
| Scotland | 19.0 | 22.0 | 14.4 | 6.5 | 2.1 | 3.0 | 2.36 | 1.0 | 16.9 | 19 | 12.0 | 5.5 |

Source: Summary Statistics for Schools, Scottish Government

c= suppression due to small numbers

z = unable to calculate figure due to suppression

5.55 Table 5.17 shows the secondary exclusion rates for Challenge Authorities, by deprivation and year. The gap in secondary exclusion rates narrowed in 5 of the 8 Challenge Authorities between 2014/15 and 2016/17. Due to suppression of the figures we cannot fully analyse the gap for year 6.

Table 5.17: Secondary Exclusion Rates per 1,000 pupils - by local authority and deprivation, 2014/15, 2016/17, 2018/19 & 2020/21

| Secondary exclusion rates per 1000 pupils | Most deprived (bottom 20% SIMD) % | | | | Least deprived (top 20% SIMD) % | | | | Gap Percentage points | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 | 2014/15 | 2016/17 | 2018/19 | 2020/21 |
| | Clackmannanshire | 110.3 | 42 | c | 0.0 | 36.7 | 24.1 | 0.0 | c | 73.6 | 17.9 | z |
| Dundee City | 228.1 | 123.5 | 70.2 | 38.8 | 22.8 | 32.1 | 24.0 | 12.0 | 205.3 | 91.4 | 46.2 | 26.8 |
| East Ayrshire | 131.8 | 147.1 | 21.7 | 32.2 | 26.7 | 15.5 | c | c | 105.1 | 131.6 | 21.7 | z |
| Glasgow City | 78.3 | 60.1 | 32.0 | 14.3 | 7.6 | 18.9 | 6.0 | 3.4 | 70.7 | 41.2 | 26 | 10.9 |
| Inverclyde | 61.2 | 54.7 | 51.7 | 35.7 | 9.6 | 20.9 | 13.1 | 12.6 | 51.6 | 33.8 | 38.6 | 23.1 |
| North Ayrshire | 66.4 | 57.4 | 27.9 | 27.7 | 19.9 | c | c | 7.9 | 46.5 | z | z | 19.8 |
| North Lanarkshire | 95.9 | 85.6 | 98.6 | 45.8 | 18.0 | 19.5 | 17.8 | 9.3 | 77.9 | 66.1 | 80.8 | 36.5 |
| Renfrewshire | 56.0 | 79.3 | 107.7 | 89.7 | 9.6 | 19.1 | 20.2 | 10.1 | 46.4 | 60.2 | 87.5 | 79.6 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 81.0 | 132.9 | 78.3 | 36.8 | 23.3 | 29.6 | c | c | 57.7 | 103 | z | z |
| Scotland | 95.2 | 85.0 | 64.7 | 35.1 | 15.1 | 18.0 | 15.9 | 9.6 | 80.1 | 67.0 | 48.8 | 25.5 |

Source: Summary Statistics for Schools, Scottish Government

c = suppression due to small numbers

z = unable to calculate figure due to suppression

Reported evidence of impact

Perceptions of improvement

5.56 Reported evidence of impact emerged from a variety of evidence sources. For the Year 6 evaluation, the evidence gathered on perceptions of impact also included a specific question in the Local Authority Survey 2021 on perceptions of impact for the first time, as well as additional questions in the Headteacher Survey 2021 related to perceptions of the specific impact of PEF, where their school was in receipt of Challenge Authority or Schools Programme support.

5.57 At the local authority level, responses to the 2021 Survey provide supporting evidence of reported impact of ASF. The majority of local authorities who responded to the 2021 Survey (17 of 26) were of the view that they had seen improvement in

their local authority towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap over the 2020/21 year as a result of ASF, with three indicating this to a great extent, and 17 to some extent. Conversely, eight local authority respondents viewed a limited extent of improvement, and one (Challenge Authority respondent) reported that they had seen no improvement.

5.58 The impact of COVID-19 is clear in local authorities' open responses, and will be explored further in the section below. The influence of the pandemic on availability of data was also raised in terms of perceptions of progress, including perceptions of less reliable data and more limited availability of ACEL data¹⁴:

'Due to COVID-19, no schools were able to assess the levels for Curriculum for Excellence in 2019/20. However, SNSA and TPJ (Teacher Professional Judgements) continue to provide evidence of progress on closing the gap.'
(Challenge Authority respondent)

5.59 However, there are also clearly perceptions of progress as a result of ASF, in particular in individual settings or cohorts, and some local authorities made reference to the importance of data-driven improvements:

'...Use of the authority tracker continues to be used by all primary schools which is allowing for head teachers and their senior management team to have professional dialogue around the assessment of learning, identifying learning gaps as a result of the pandemic.'
(Challenge Authority respondent)

5.60 There were also perceptions that whilst it may not be possible to evidence progress through Curriculum for Excellence levels, there is evidence of progress available at the school level on a number of relevant indicators, including softer measures, indicating a positive trajectory of travel:

'Each school has their own improvement story to tell with clear data. Not all are at the stage of being able to demonstrate this using CFE levels, however they can demonstrate this in the reduction of behavioural referrals, increase in attendance, reduction of exclusions, wellbeing support, feedback from families, families now positively working with schools and not against, greater empathy and understanding of needs from staff towards families. **All of these start to create a greater foundation to allow pupils to be in a position to learn, which in time will increase their attainment.**' (Local Authority in receipt of Schools Programme funding)

5.61 Other local authorities highlighted the introduction of specific mechanisms as instrumental in driving forward progress. For example, one Challenge Authority pointed to the introduction of 'recovery associates' as a mechanism to *'increase the capacity within establishments to identify gaps and focus on how these gaps could be addressed has ensured that almost all schools are well on their way to recovery and beyond.'*

¹⁴ As noted in Chapter 1, ACEL data was gathered for Primary 1, 4 and 7 in 2020/21

5.62 Variability of progress across cohorts and schools is a key feature highlighted in local authority responses. As one Challenge Authority commented, progress was seen in individual establishments *'where the support for individual children over a short period of time has enabled children to be on track to achieve expected levels at P1, P4 and P7 who otherwise would not have been.'* Another Challenge Authority respondent pointed to an overall picture of *'improvement with the attainment gap narrowing across some cohorts, although not all'*. Variability of progress is illustrated by the following assessment of progress by one local authority respondent:

'Whilst we have seen some improvement in attainment we recognise that this has been impacted by school closures, inconsistent attendance and school staffing/absence issues. Inevitably, this combination resulted in a lack of consistency across year groups, subject areas and school communities, and ultimately on attainment and achievement.' (Challenge Authority)

5.63 At the school level, headteachers' positive perceptions of success in meeting long term outcomes continue to be identified, remaining broadly consistent over recent years¹⁵. Amongst headteachers who responded to the 2021 Headteacher Survey, the majority (87%) reported seeing an improvement in closing the poverty-related attainment gap as a result of ASF supported approaches in the previous year (90% in 2020 survey, 91% in 2019). This included 17% who perceived 'a lot' of improvement to date.

5.64 Those headteachers who had seen 'a lot' of improvement in the previous year in the 2021 survey highlighted their schools' capacity to implement approaches relevant to local needs, teaching and staffing resources, and the value of a focus on health and wellbeing, including through external staffing to provide mental health support. Conversely, for schools where headteachers did not perceive they had seen improvement, respondent comments were primarily related to the adverse impact of COVID-19 and for some there were perceptions that PEF allocations were not sufficient for improvements to follow.

5.65 Additionally, 94% of headteachers who responded to the 2021 Survey note they expected to see improvements in closing the poverty-related attainment gap over the next few years.

5.66 For schools in receipt of Challenge Authority or Schools Programme funding in addition to PEF, the Headteacher Survey 2021 invited headteachers' perceptions of the specific impact of PEF in addition to the impact of other ASF support. The majority (94%) of headteachers who responded to the survey in receipt of PEF funding and Challenge Authority or Schools Programme support reported seeing an improvement specifically as a result of their PEF funding. This included 20% who felt they had seen 'a lot' of improvement to date as a result of PEF funding.

¹⁵ As identified elsewhere in this report, low (and diminishing) response rates to the Headteacher Survey in 2021 suggests the need for caution in generalisability of survey findings to the wider population.

Influencing Factors

5.67 Factors viewed as influencing success in progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap continued to emerge from across data sources.

5.68 Findings from the Headteacher Survey 2021 continue to suggest a number of factors associated with schools' experiences and positive perceptions of progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. This includes:

- Change of culture or ethos such as embedding the approach to equity;
- Tailoring use of ASF to local needs;
- Effective use of data and evidence;
- Engagement with families and communities.

5.69 The respondent group most likely to have seen progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap were headteachers who indicated PEF had been used effectively to meet local needs, providing evidence in support of the importance of tailoring PEF to local circumstances. Those who felt that the approach to achieving equity has been embedded within their school community were the second most likely respondent group to have seen such progress.

COVID-19 as an influencing factor

5.70 The impact of COVID-19 emerged as the key factor influencing perceptions of progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

5.71 All twenty-six local authorities who responded to the 2021 Local Authority Survey were of the view that COVID-19 had impacted on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap in their local authority. Seventeen indicated this was to a great extent, and nine to some extent. This broadly mirrors 2020 findings when similarly all respondents were of the view that COVID-19 had impacted on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

5.72 Eight Challenge Authority respondents were of the view that COVID-19 had impacted on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap to a great extent. The impact of COVID-19 is illustrated in the following from one Challenge Authority respondent to the Local Authority Survey 2021:

'In short there was definite and sustained improvement prior to the pandemic but there are long term implications as result of the continued difficulties.'
(Challenge Authority respondent)

5.73 The unequal impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable pupils was reinforced across responses to the Local Authority Survey 2021. However, respondents also pointed to increasing numbers of families moving into poverty, as illustrated below:

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our progress in closing learning gaps. The pandemic has reinforced inequalities in society with the most vulnerable suffering the greatest impact throughout this time across all

societal measures of lifestyle and wellbeing. In addition to our existing vulnerable families, we now have a greater number of families moving into poverty and experiencing the impact of poverty on their wellbeing. (Challenge Authority respondent)

5.74 The depth of impact of COVID-19 was highlighted by respondents, some of whom suggested the need for ‘a reset’ in terms of measures and outcomes. Other key points highlighted by respondents included:

- Equity related staff covering staff absences leading to *‘less time to focus on supporting outcomes and measures in plans’*;
- Ongoing impact on pupils at key transition points;
- Ongoing impact on children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing;
- Ongoing impact of school interruptions, and pupil absences;
- Ongoing impact of reduction in support services.

5.75 There was also a continued perception amongst headteachers of the impact of COVID-19 on perceived progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. As in 2020, nearly all (95%) Headteacher Survey 2021 respondents viewed COVID-19 and school building closures as having had at least some impact on their progress, although a lower proportion in 2021 felt that COVID-19 and school building closures had a ‘significant impact’ on their progress (54% in 2021 compared with 61% in 2020). There was some variation across key respondent groups, with headteachers from schools with lower PEF allocations, those in rural areas and PEF-only schools more likely to feel significant impact of COVID-19 and school building closures.

Embedded and sustained practices

5.76 Sustained and embedded practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap remains one of the high level long term outcomes for the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The Year 6 evaluation considered the following evaluation question:

‘To what extent did the fund contribute to equity becoming embedded at different levels of the education system?’

5.77 The section below considers stakeholder perceptions of the extent to which improvements achieved as a result of ASF are likely to be sustainable, and of the extent to which the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap is likely to be sustainable. Considerations of sustainability in the context of COVID-19 were also sought. In a change from previous years, sustainability was considered in a broader sense rather than specifically linked to considering sustainability beyond the years of funding, in light of the commitment to refresh the Scottish Attainment Challenge for a further parliamentary term.

Sustainability of improvements

5.78 At the school level, headteachers’ reported perceptions of the extent to which improvements achieved as a result of ASF are likely to be sustainable have increased when compared to 2020. Just over half (54%) of 2021 survey respondents

indicated they expected ASF supported improvements would be sustainable, compared to approximately one third (34%) of those responding to the 2020 survey. 2021 survey findings are more aligned to 2019 findings on headteacher perceptions of sustainability of improvements, although changes to question structures mean any direct comparison over time is not possible and as highlighted elsewhere there are caveats regarding the extent to which findings from the Headteacher Survey 2021 are generalisable to the wider population as a result of low response.

Sustainability of focus

5.79 At the local authority level, there continue to be broadly positive expectations that the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap will be sustainable. Nearly all respondents to the Local Authority Survey 2021 (25 of 26) indicated they viewed the focus would be sustainable to a great or to some extent. The remaining respondent viewed the focus would be sustainable to only a limited extent.

5.80 Continuation of funding was the primary factor associated with ensuring a sustainability of focus on equity from the perspective of local authorities. Changes to funding distribution which will be introduced with the refreshed SAC were key, with local authority responses reflecting the specific circumstances of how the refreshed SAC would affect allocations.

5.81 Local authority responses also made reference to a range of other factors associated with the sustainability of focus:

- ongoing professional learning;
- continued focus on understanding the challenges associated with poverty for children and their families (and associated understanding of the need for a focus on equity);
- focus on data and evidence;
- creating a culture of embedding sustainable approaches; and
- focus on collaboration.

5.82 The importance of strategic planning in promoting a sustainable focus towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap remained evident in local authority responses.

5.83 However, there was widespread acknowledgement that COVID-19 has had, and will continue to, impact on sustainability of focus to some extent. Nearly all respondents to the Local Authority Survey 2021 (25 of 26) were of the view that COVID-19 has impacted on their focus on sustainability. Six respondents viewed COVID-19 had impacted to a great extent on their focus on sustainability, and 19 reported the pandemic had impacted to some extent. The remaining one respondent viewed COVID-19 to have impacted on their focus on sustainability to a limited extent. Local authority perspectives reflected on the need to ensure a continued focus on sustainability.

5.84 Headteacher perspectives on the extent to which the focus on equity will be sustainable were more positive than views on sustainability of improvements. Almost two thirds (65%) of headteachers responding to the 2021 survey were of the view that the focus on equity will be sustainable. This represents an increase of seven

percentage points on the 2020 survey (58%) and twenty-three percentage points on the 2019 survey (42%).

5.85 Headteachers who felt progress to date and/or the focus on equity will be sustainable provided a range of reasons in support of their view, most commonly suggesting staff skills and capacity developed with ASF support, developing capacity to use evidence to inform approaches and embedding use of evidence in monitoring progress as part of school culture, developing whole school approaches to equity, and embedding approaches to achieving equity through improved pedagogy. Headteachers who were less positive in terms of sustainability of progress and/or focus on equity highlighted concerns about staffing levels related to sustainability of initiatives and approaches, and potential loss of skills should staffing levels reduce.

Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusions

6.1 The Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) evaluation aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the ASF and the extent to which the aims of ASF are being met in terms of closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

6.2 The current evaluation continues to make the best use of existing data to inform our understanding of factors that support improvement in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. It builds upon the five year impact report [Closing the Poverty Related Attainment Gap: Progress Report 2016-2021](#) published in March 2021. A key difference from the Year 5 (2019/20) report is that in order to reflect the ongoing context of COVID-19 impacting across the academic year 2020/21, material has been gathered to reflect approaches across the year overall and with specific reference to the period of remote learning from January to March 2021. It is important to note that response rates to the Headteacher Survey 2021 were lower than usual, most likely impacted by COVID-19, and therefore the evidence gathered should be interpreted with some caution in terms of generalisability across the wider population.

6.3 This concluding section draws together key findings across the report to assess the extent to which there has been progress towards to overall aims of ASF across 2020/21.

Key findings

6.4 The overall findings presented in this report for Year 6 point to the continuation of many key trends in the evidence which have emerged over the previous years of the evaluation. This includes, for example, trends around collaborations, the use of data and evidence and the ongoing recognition of the important role of Attainment Advisors.

6.5 Where patterns of variability have previously emerged, this continued to be identified in evidence considered for Year 6. For example, headteachers from PEF-only schools, from schools with lower PEF allocation and from rural schools continued to report less positive perceptions of their experience of the ASF on some measures.

6.6 Approaches continued to adapt and respond, not least to the impact of COVID-19 which, as identified in the Year 5 report, remained the key factor influencing perceived progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. There was an ongoing focus on health and wellbeing, reflecting the importance of addressing increasingly prevalent mental health concerns impacting on children and young people as a result of COVID-19.

6.7 There was an increasingly evident focus on engaging families and communities with key learning and emerging outcomes identified.

6.8 The evidence shows that approaches are increasingly embedded, underpinned by understanding of the challenges facing pupils and their families, and supported by a positive culture and ethos in schools.

6.9 It is apparent from the evidence considered in the evaluation that the impact of COVID-19 on the 2020/21 year was considerable. However, despite the impact, the evidence continues to indicate positive progress towards the outcomes the SAC. This is, in large part, due to the response of schools and local authorities in adapting and responding to the challenges posed by COVID-19, and the role of ASF funding and flexibilities to support this response.

6.10 The analysis presented in Chapter 5, and previous analysis of quantitative data on attainment, indicates that on a number of measures, there is positive signs on closing the attainment gap, but the impact on children and young people's learning as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic is clear, although this is a varied picture on progress depending on the measure under consideration. Availability and comparability of data must be borne in mind, particularly with availability of ACEL data and the changed SQA approach to certification as a result of the pandemic, which affects comparability for school leaver attainment.

6.11 This is illustrated by data from Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) in primary schools, where the proportion of pupils achieving expected levels in both literacy and numeracy increased steadily until 2020/21, the period of school building closures, when these figures decreased and the gap between pupils from most and least deprived areas widened.

6.12 Across SCQF NIF measures, the proportion of school leaver attaining one pass or more increased in 2020/21, while the gap between school leavers from the most and least deprived areas reduced.

6.13 Whilst measures of participation and positive destinations are consistently positive, with the proportion of 16-19 year olds participating in education, training or employment (the 'Participation Measure'), increasing year on year, with the exception of a slight drop in 2019, and reaching its highest ever levels in 2021. The participation gap between those who lived in the most deprived areas and those in the least deprived areas continues to show narrowing year on year, with the participation rate in the Challenge Authorities showing all nine authorities recording an increase between 2016 and 2021.

6.14 Whilst 87% of headteachers surveyed in 2021 perceived improvements in closing the poverty-related attainment gap as a result of ASF, this was slightly lower than in 2020 (90%) and 2019 (91%). Views on future expected improvements were rather more positive than in 2020, with 94% of headteachers indicating that they expected to see improvements over the next five years. This compared with 88% in 2020, although was still lower than the 98% who expected to see such future improvements identified in 2019.

6.15 The majority of local authorities who responded to the 2021 Local Authority Survey indicated positive perceptions of progress in the previous year as a result of ASF support. In addition, the Headteacher Survey 2021 impact of PEF was included

in the Headteacher Survey 2021, which reflected highly positive perceptions of the specific impact of PEF amongst headteacher respondents who were also in receipt of Challenge Authority or Schools Programme funding.

6.16 There are ongoing differences between attainment data and perceptions of progress, with perceptions tending to be more positive.

6.17 Findings from the Headteacher Survey 2021 continue to suggest a number of factors associated with schools' experiences and positive perceptions of progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. This includes:

- Change of culture or ethos such as embedding the approach to equity;
- Tailoring use of ASF to local needs;
- Effective use of data and evidence;
- Engagement with families and communities.

6.18 The impact of COVID-19 continues to be evidenced across all aspects of the evaluation. As in Year 5, COVID-19 is considered as a theme throughout the report reflecting the inclusion of COVID-19 sub-evaluation questions underneath each main evaluation question (as indicated in Chapter 1). This has led to a fairly in-depth consideration of the impact of COVID-19 overall and specifically in terms of, for example, the impact of COVID-19 on use of data and evidence, and on collaboration in terms of the ASF.

Reflections on progress to date

6.19 The strategic aim of the Scottish Attainment Challenge is 'closing the poverty-related attainment gap between children and young people from the least and most disadvantaged communities'. This links to the National Performance Framework shared aim of improving outcomes for children and young people.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge logic model articulates four long-term outcomes:

Long Term Outcome 1: Embedded and sustained practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap

Long Term Outcome 2: All children and young people are achieving the expected or excellent educational outcomes, regardless of their background

Long Term Outcome 3: An education system which is aspirational, inclusive in practice and approaches for all including teachers, parents and carers, children and young people

Long Term Outcome 4: Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged young people

6.20 As identified in the Year 5 report, despite the considerable impact of COVID-19 across the 2020/21 academic year, the evidence presented for the Year 6 report continues to indicate positive progress towards the above long term outcomes particularly in terms of:

- Long Term Outcome 1 (*embedded and sustained practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap*); and,
- Long Term Outcome 3 (*an education system which is aspirational, inclusive in practice and approaches for all including teachers, parents and carers, children and young people*).

6.21 The assessment provided in the Year 5 report pointed to the ‘*ongoing and long-term challenge which remains*’ in closing the poverty-related attainment gap between the most and least socio-economically disadvantaged pupils, suggesting that ‘*whilst the evidence suggests COVID-19 will impact on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap, progress towards the long-term outcomes as the education system level continues*’. The evidence considered for Year 6 points to a very similar overall assessment regarding the ongoing challenge which remains and the long-term nature of the challenge. It is apparent from the evidence considered that the impact of COVID-19 on the 2020/21 year was considerable. However, the ongoing progress in terms of understanding of the challenges facing pupils affected by poverty, embedding approaches to equity, and adapting approaches to respond to emerging evidence are all indicative of the extent to which there has been progress on a number of important aspects to date.

Evaluation and further research: reflections and future direction

6.22 While the initial impact of COVID-19 and school closures may be behind us, the full impact and effects of the pandemic on pupils – in terms of attainment, health and wellbeing, and many other fundamental areas, will continue to emerge and be felt for some time. Equally, the responses to this impact will continue to develop and evolve to meet the needs of pupils.

6.23 Evidence from Scotland and internationally shows that pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be disproportionately impacted by the pandemic in their learning and wellbeing. Work to close the poverty-related attainment gap will need to address this impact, while continuing to make progress across the programme activities.

6.24 As a result of the above, there is an ongoing need to consider the impact of COVID-19 in the ASF Evaluation, both in terms of its continuing impact as well as the approaches that are developed to mitigate the effects. The impact of COVID-19, and education recovery policies, will be features of the evaluation in years to come.

6.25 On 30 March 2022, the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge mission was launched, including changes to funding, a Framework for Accelerating Progress (including Stretch Aims), and an updated SAC Programme Logic Model. The refresh of the SAC Programme was underpinned by findings from the ASF Evaluation thus far.

6.26 The Refresh of the SAC Programme will necessitate a refocused ASF Evaluation Strategy, to ensure that progress in implementing the changes are evaluated, that we understand what is working and what is different in the programme, and ensure that we monitor progress towards the refreshed mission.

However, we will continue to link between the existing evaluation evidence and any new approach to evaluation, ensuring continuity of learning.



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