

Achieving Excellence and Equity

2025 National Improvement Framework

Improvement Plan

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Improvement Plan

This Improvement Plan provides the full details of the actions that will be taken to deliver the seven outcomes set out in the [2025 National Improvement Framework](#), the evidence to support them, and how we will measure progress.

Outcome 1 - a globally respected, empowered and responsive education and skills system with clear accountability at every level that supports children, young people and adult learners to thrive. The system enables the development of their knowledge, skills, values and attributes that give them the best opportunity to succeed and contribute to Scotland's society and economy.

What the evidence is telling us

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Organisation (OECD) review of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in 2021 was complimentary of the Scottish education system. It highlighted the continued relevance and ambition of CfE as the right approach for Scotland and that it continues to be viewed internationally as an inspiring example of curriculum practice. However, it also highlighted opportunities for its evolution and ongoing improvement to ensure a structured and long term approach is taken.

The latest data from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows reductions in scores in Reading and Maths between 2018 and 2022. However, relatively speaking, Scottish students maintained a positive position, remaining above the OECD average for reading, and similar to the OECD average for maths and science.

Professor Muir's report, [Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education](#), advocated for placing children, young people and the teachers and practitioners who support their learning more firmly at the heart of the education system. To support these system users he set out recommendations to simplify the education landscape and ensure greater clarity as to the roles and functions of key national bodies.

The National Discussion highlighted the importance of the need to educate all learners in Scotland for an uncertain and unpredictable future. It recognised that they

will actively shape our future society and economy, and thus they must be given the tools and skills to build their own future with confidence, meaning, and kindness.

Analysis of local authority collaborative improvement programmes undertaken by Education Scotland has demonstrated that collaborative improvement activities have the potential to highlight effective approaches to improvement.

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections, tell us that the majority of schools across Scotland are adapting well to change, with senior leaders in most sectors fostering collaboration with children, parents, staff, and communities to drive improvements. However, there is room to strengthen the involvement of parents, carers, and the wider school community in shaping the vision and driving change. Senior leaders across all sectors should prioritise monitoring and evaluating the impact of improvement priorities on learners. They also need to enhance data analysis to assess the effectiveness of changes.

Qualitative evidence gathered through consultation with local authority early learning and childcare (ELC) centres highlights an ongoing need to support ELC leadership at setting level following the expansion of children's entitlement to ELC and the subsequent growth of the sector.

Analysis of national-level monitoring and evaluation approaches for ELC and education in other countries highlighted the way in which an outcomes and measurement framework (OMF) for funded ELC could be used to allow reporting against ELC delivery or outcomes.

Data shows that when young people leave school the vast majority are going on to positive destinations – with improvements to already high figures continuing to rise in recent years.

The number of pupils educated in “poor” or “bad” condition schools has fallen from 37.6% in 2007 to 8% in 2024.

What we will do to deliver

- The Education (Scotland) Bill provides the scaffolding for a more responsive, trusted and effective national education infrastructure that supports continuous improvement to meet learner and stakeholder needs in the 21st century.
- We will work with our public bodies and local government partners to ensure that there is clarity on roles and responsibilities of those responsible for delivering education in Scotland, ensuring that governance arrangements support system accountability.
- The creation of Qualifications Scotland (QS) in 2025 will lead to the re-establishment of trust and confidence in our qualifications body. The governance arrangements set out in legislation will lead to a more transparent and accountable organisation and provide a framework that ensures the involvement of teachers, lecturers, pupils and students in its running. This action will also help to deliver inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment under Outcome 3.

- The creation of His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIE), will mean the inspection function is more independent of Ministers, providing it with greater autonomy. This independence will ensure an objective, external perspective on quality across all levels of the education system, providing assurance to stakeholders and fostering trust in the education system.
- HMIE will support improvement by sharing findings and insights which could lead to better practices at local, regional and national levels.
- A refocused Education Scotland will prioritise its functions on curriculum design, delivery and improvement, including the provision of resources to support high quality learning and teaching, support a national framework for professional learning and building on national leadership programmes. It will also work with local authorities to inform approaches to wellbeing, inclusion, behaviour and enabling better support for those with additional support needs.
- We will set up the Centre for Teaching Excellence, hosted by the University of Glasgow, which, together with Education Scotland, will lead to an improvement in learning, teaching and assessment at a national level, through critical reflection and use of research.
- We will adopt a collaborative approach to working across our public bodies and they will in turn adopt a collaborative approach to engagement with practitioners, children and young people and their parents and carers.
- HMIE will conduct robust, transparent inspections across educational levels, sharing findings and insights publicly to support improvement in policies and practices.
- HMIE will create frameworks that build capacity in self-evaluation and improvement in the quality of education, in early learning and childcare and schools.
- Utilising the findings of the national thematic inspection of local authority approaches to improving schools, HM Inspectors will identify ways in which local authorities can improve the quality of provision in their area.
- Education Scotland will work with local authorities to build capacity and improve outcomes by developing clear and robust improvement projects that utilise attainment and achievement data.
- We will bring forward legislation to simplify the funding body landscape and reform the post-school education and skills landscape so that funds get to where they are needed more quickly and efficiently, take lead for Skills Planning at the national level while strengthening regional approaches so that the system can better respond to national and regional needs, and reform our apprenticeship model.

- Work to support the reform and improvement of the Scottish education system will be supported by a communications and engagement strategy and plan. This is designed to aid the understanding of what changes will come from this process, how they will be implemented, and allow stakeholders the opportunity to provide their views as appropriate.
- We will develop an outcomes and measurement framework for funded early learning and childcare, and continue to support improvement in the quality of ELC provision and to build capacity across the system.
- An improved education system will be supported through our £2bn Learning Estate Investment Programme, which is being delivered in partnership with local authorities. 33 school projects will have started construction by autumn 2025.

How we will measure progress

We will continue to use PISA assessment, and our position when compared with other developed nations as a measure of the success of our education system. This will be complemented going forward with specific data to compare in reading literacy, maths and science compared to other nations, via the TIMSS and PIRLS studies.

A monitoring and evaluation strategy for the Education Reform Programme will provide a comprehensive framework for monitoring and evaluating the progress, impact, and effectiveness of the reform programme.

The key barometer of success of the impact of the replacement of the Scottish Qualifications Authority with Qualifications Scotland is that there will be a renewed trust and confidence in the national qualifications body. Enhanced reporting requirements for Qualifications Scotland, including on how it has delivered on its Charters, will support how the organisation's performance on these issues are measured and assessed.

We will use data from the Scottish Household Survey on school and setting satisfaction levels as an indicator that the reforms we are introducing are leading to improvements. The data collected includes measuring satisfaction levels amongst the general public and more specifically, in households where a school aged child is present.

We will use the evidence from HMIE inspections to assess performance at individual, regional, and national levels, enhancing quality and supporting improvements. This aims to promote the highest standards of learning, leading to better outcomes for all learners.

We will use data on positive destinations for school leavers in assessing the extent to which our children and young people are being provided with the best opportunity to succeed and contribute to Scotland's society and economy.

We will measure the success of the £2bn Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) by delivering state-of-the-art schools which will benefit tens of thousands of pupils across Scotland. We also aim to see the percentage of pupils in "poor" or

“bad” condition schools continue to decrease each year within the school estate statistics.

Outcome 2 - young people experiencing the benefit of schools and early years settings working in excellent partnerships with wider children’s services and other partners, families, and communities, in line with the GIRFEC approach.

What the evidence is telling us

Qualitative evidence gathered at the regional headteacher events held in Autumn 2024 indicates that the workload and expectation on settings and schools, and pastoral staff in particular, is expansive and continues to grow. The events highlighted the need for a strengthening of partnership working with wider children’s services to deliver multi-agency support for children and young people.

Evidence from Public Health Scotland¹ shows that a number of cohorts of young children have been negatively affected by the Covid pandemic, with a disproportionate impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Since 2020, evidence has shown that there has been an increase in speech, language and communication (SLC) developmental concerns recorded at the 13-15 months, 27-30 month and 4-5 year child health reviews. There is evidence to suggest that the presence of known risk factors for preventable SLC needs can have a lesser impact when supportive factors, such as positive adult-child interactions and responsiveness, are in place.

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections tell us that, in the majority of schools, staff work well with partners to improve children and young people’s wellbeing. In the most effective examples, partners support the planning, implementation, and evaluation of support strategies for children and young people. In a few schools, partners would value being more involved in planning and evaluating learning targets and wellbeing interventions for children and young people. This approach would ensure that resources and workforce development are aligned most effectively to meet the bespoke needs of children and young people who require additional support. Involving partners in planning and evaluation of interventions would also strengthen partnerships and relationships across the school community to promote the values of inclusive practice.

What we will do to deliver

- The Programme for Government in September 2024 committed us to work in partnership with local authorities and wider children’s services to improve attendance, attainment and the curriculum in schools to boost standards. This work will be underpinned by the ‘Getting it right for every child’ (GIRFEC) approach as Scotland’s framework for the delivery of holistic, rights-based multi-agency support and a shared approach to planning for children and young people’s wellbeing.

¹ [Speech, language and communication development among children in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

- The learning from the most recent statutory review of Children’s Services Plans will be used by Children’s Services Planning partners to support annual reporting, development of the 2026-2029 Children’s Services Plans, and local CSPP delivery approaches. A programme of workshops for the Children’s Services Planning Strategic Leads Network, to support the sharing of good practice, and provide practical support is in development, with the first session scheduled for December 2024.
- We are investing in a programme of work to support early intervention in speech, language and communication for young children and their families.
- Education Scotland will develop and implement an enhanced leadership professional learning offer for early learning and childcare (ELC) practitioners.
- HMIE will inspect a selection of early learning and childcare settings and schools to evaluate how their practices align with the GIRFEC framework, including partnerships.
- HMIE will ensure that new quality improvement frameworks for ELC and schools embed the GIRFEC approach, fostering capacity for self-evaluation and driving improvements in quality.
- The Care Inspectorate and HMIE are developing, and will publish, a new, shared Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Quality Improvement Framework that ensures consistency and a common language for inspection of ELC services, minimises burdens on practitioners, and provides clarity around the roles and responsibilities of the inspection bodies. The Inspectorates are also continuing to work together to plan their inspection programmes, undertake shared inspections and reduce burdens on the sector wherever possible.

How we will measure progress

In the medium term, we will expect to see an improved use of data on SLC to inform local priorities and service planning. We will take forward activity to build capacity and knowledge in respect of SLC across the early years workforce.

We will use the evidence from HMIE inspections to assess how effectively schools and early learning settings build and sustain partnerships that align with the GIRFEC approach, demonstrating their impact on children’s well-being.

Children’s Services Planning Partnerships (CSPP) must publish a Children’s Services Plan every 3 years, as well as an Annual Report demonstrating what progress the CSPP has made in improving wellbeing outcomes for children, young people and families living in that area. The effectiveness of children’s services planning arrangements across Scotland are monitored through the statutory review of children’s services plans and reports, carried out by Scottish Ministers and joint inspections of children’s services. The review is based on a number of criteria, one of which is focused on how the CSPP is creating and maintaining effective ‘Getting it right for every child’ practice for individual children, young people and their families

(Criterion 8). The statutory review of Children’s Services Plans 2023-2026 will be published by the end of 2024.

Outcome 3 - inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment which gives young people the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to society, shape a sustainable future, while celebrating and supporting progression for all.

What the evidence is telling us

While the OECD review of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) published in 2021 found that “CfE continues to be a bold and widely supported initiative, and its design offers the flexibility needed to improve student learning further²” it also identified issues and made recommendations on how these could be addressed. A key recommendation as a means of tackling many of the issues identified was that: “Scotland could consider establishing a systematic curriculum review cycle³”, a recommendation further endorsed by the National Discussion on Education which took place in 2023 which stated that: “a regular curriculum review process should be established to ensure that the curriculum remains fit for purpose⁴”.

Reviewing best practice from high performing jurisdictions, and extensive engagement with stakeholders – including teachers – through a series of pilot curriculum reviews in 2023/24, have helped to test and develop a curriculum improvement cycle approach which is right for Scotland.

The OECD report and a series of other reports, including Professor Stobart’s report on upper secondary assessment in Scotland⁵, made the case that Scotland should consider adapting the pedagogy and assessment practices in the Senior Phase (S4 to S6). The purpose being to enhance young peoples’ experience of upper-secondary education and help them develop CfE’s four capacities continuously.

Angela Morgan in her review into support for learning in 2020 found that ‘the system should be set up to recognise the particular achievements of children and young people which goes beyond SQA qualifications⁶.’ The National Discussion on Education highlighted the following ask in relation to the future of qualifications and assessment: “A future education system should capitalise upon, and harness, the abilities, skills, and talents of all children and young people in Scotland⁷.”

Building on these previous reports, and wider evidence and engagement, the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment⁸ made specific recommendations to the Scottish Government on how it might reform qualifications and assessment. The [Scottish Government response to that review](#) was published in September 2024.

²[OECD, Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future \(2021\), p11](#)

³[OECD, Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future \(2021\), p14](#)

⁴[All Learners Matter: The National Discussion on Education, Final Report \(2023\), p65](#)

⁵[Upper-secondary student assessment in Scotland \(2021\)](#)

⁶[Morgan Review: Support for Learning: All Our Children and All Their Potential \(2020\), p114](#)

⁷[All Learners Matter: The National Discussion on Education, Final Report \(2023\), p69](#)

⁸[It’s Our Future – Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment](#)

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections, tell us that most primary schools and a majority of secondary schools have progressive learning pathways for all curriculum areas. HM Inspectors suggest that senior leaders should be supported to help staff develop a better understanding of national standards and progression, particularly in the BGE, while more effective use of data would allow staff across all sectors to evaluate with greater confidence.

The expertise and insights of our teachers, practitioners and subject specialists will be key in work to both improve the curriculum and reform qualifications. Reform must equip young people with the knowledge and skills required to help the economy to grow, and broader society to thrive.

What we will do to deliver – Curriculum Improvement

- Together with teachers, practitioners, delivery partners and stakeholders, we will take forward the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) which takes a systematic approach to ensuring that Scotland’s curriculum remains relevant, forward looking, clarifies the role of knowledge, and ultimately supports high quality teaching, learning, and progression. As part of this process Education Scotland will second advisors from schools to lead on specific elements of the CIC.
- While numeracy/maths has been prioritised as the first curricular area to undergo this improvement cycle in 2024, work to update all eight curricular areas will begin in this academic year (2024/2025), albeit different curricular areas will be at different stages of development at any given time.
- HMIE will continue a programme of thematic inspections of curriculum areas to inform the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.
- The evolution of Curriculum for Excellence’s technical framework, so that it better supports clarity and progression, will be taken forward as part of the CIC programme of work.
- Education Scotland will develop a coherent programme of professional learning centred around pedagogy, including evidence based resources, universal support and bespoke support for individual disciplines. The programme will be aligned to and complement the ongoing work of the CIC, with phased implementation of an updated maths/numeracy curriculum beginning from August 2026.

What we will do to deliver – reform of qualifications and assessment

- Curriculum should drive qualifications. That is why qualification content will, over time, be updated to reflect curriculum improvements, not least to ensure alignment and strong progression between the broad general education (BGE) to Senior Phase (S4 to S6) and beyond.
- The qualifications body will set out a longer-term programme of work to rebalance assessment methods, so that there is less overall reliance on high stakes exams, which will align with the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) activity where

possible, by end of the summer term (2024/25). Alternative assessment methods and approaches will be mindful of impacts on teacher workload.

- In the shorter term, written exams will be removed from some practical subjects from academic year 2025/26.
- The qualifications offer in the Senior Phase, will be rationalised starting with the Creative, Hospitality and Sport and Technology, Engineering and Construction Sectors (which represents 800 qualifications and awards). The qualifications body has conducted an initial review of low and no update qualifications, and will now establish a clear process designed to guide the future direction of the portfolio review.
- Approaches and models will be explored relating to how graded national courses such as National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher could be organised into 'modules', to allow learners maximum flexibility to build credit as they go.
- Digital onscreen assessment will be piloted across various subjects beginning in 2025/26.
- We will agree with the qualifications body, Universities Scotland and other qualifications providers how the consistent use of SCQF levels in qualification titles will be systematically implemented going forward.
- Scottish Government will work with Education Scotland, Qualifications Scotland and local government, including e-Sgoil, to explore options around timetabling and curricular design. While beneficial to a range of courses, it will act to further strengthen the uptake and award of national qualifications for GME pupils in relation to Gaelic literacy and language, across all SCQF levels.
- We will provide consistent opportunities for young people to access high quality interdisciplinary learning (IDL). Building on the existing IDL co-design group facilitated by Education Scotland, a refreshed working group, chaired by a senior secondary school teacher experienced in the delivery of IDL, will bring together relevant partners already active in this space. This group will lead a new phase of work with the objective of better determining the place of IDL in secondary schools while ensuring an equitable offer for all young people.
- To help ensure wider achievement is recognised we will support the continued development of a digital learner profile and support its effective use in schools.
- We will undertake further testing with Scotland's teaching profession directly – on the best and most appropriate route forward which may support a leaving certificate in the future.

How we will measure progress

We are developing a Monitoring & Evaluation Strategy for the Education Reform Programme, including a specific approach for evaluating the impact of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle and Qualifications Reform projects.

An evidence-based approach to evaluating provision is necessary to provide the most benefit to learners in terms of positive learning experiences, protected characteristics, attainment of qualifications, outcomes, and destinations. This supports the need for shared expectations on the use of key performance indicators and the importance of data sharing agreements.

We will also utilise international studies including PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS as set out under Outcome 1, as well as the 13 key NIF measures set out under Measuring the Attainment Gap, to assess progress towards delivering an inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment system.

Outcome 4 - high levels of achievement across the curriculum for all learners, with action to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

What the evidence is telling us – overall attainment and outcomes

Local authorities' stretch aims for 2023/24 – 2025/26 demonstrate local ambition for improvement and accelerating progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap over three years across a set of core measures (a sub-set of the 13 key NIF measures of the poverty-related attainment gap, noting that for school leaver attainment the aims are set for all SCQF awards rather than national qualifications only (i.e. in line with Insight)).

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections tell us that, in most primary and special schools and half of secondary schools, staff have a strong understanding of the social and economic context of their school and the impact of the poverty related attainment gap. The majority of schools are good or better in achieving the best possible outcomes for all children and young people. More work needs to be done to develop more robust tracking of children and young people's attainment over time. This would help staff to identify appropriate interventions and capture and measure children's and young people's emergent skills and attributes over time. There continues to be a need to improve young people's achievements and wider skills development.

For both primary school literacy and numeracy, overall attainment in 2023/24 exceeded any previous year with 74% of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected CfE levels for literacy and 80.3% of pupils doing so for numeracy.

School leaver attainment at SCQF levels 5 and 6 shows that 87.9 per cent of school leavers left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better under the All SCQF measure in 2022-23; whilst 65.6 per cent of school leavers left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better under the All SCQF measure in 2022-23. Both of these represent a decrease compared to 2021/22 but are similar to pre-pandemic levels in 2018/19.

The percentage of 16-19 year olds in employment, education or training, based on the Annual Participation Measure (APM) published in August 2024, was 92.7%. This is a greater percentage than in any year in the period 2016 to 2024.

What the evidence is telling us - the poverty-related attainment gap

For literacy the gap between the proportion of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) from the most and least deprived areas who achieved the expected level narrowed in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23 and was the narrowest on record at 20.2 percentage points. Attainment improved in both the least and most deprived areas, but by a greater amount in the most deprived areas, leading to a narrowing of the gap.

The gap between the proportion of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in numeracy widened in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23 (from 16.9 to 17.4 percentage points) due to an increase in attainment among pupils in the least deprived areas and no change in attainment for pupils in the most deprived areas.

Since 2017/18, national writing data has demonstrated a pronounced gap in attainment at First Level. In 2021/22, 30% of P4 children in Scotland did not reach their expected CfE writing outcomes. This led to the development and ongoing delivery of the Children and Young People's improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) National Improving Programme in 2022/23. This figure has now reduced to 26.5% in 2023-24.

At SCQF Level 5 or better, the poverty-related attainment gap under the All SCQF measure was 16.6 percentage points in 2022-23. This is wider than in 2021-22 (16.2 percentage points). However, over the longer term, the poverty-related attainment gap has narrowed most years, starting from 32.1 percentage points in 2009-10 and reaching its narrowest in 2020-21 (16.1 percentage points). The gap in 2022-23 was narrower than in all years other than 2020-21 and 2021-22. At SCQF Level 6 or better, the poverty-related attainment gap under the All SCQF measure was 31.5 percentage points in 2022-23. This is narrower than in 2021-22 (32.6 percentage points). Over the longer term, the poverty-related gap has narrowed most years, starting from 45.4 percentage points in 2009-10 and reaching its narrowest in 2020-21 (31.4 percentage points). The gap in 2022-23 is narrower than in all years other than 2020-21. However, there remains more to do as the narrowed gap in 2022/23 was partly due to attainment of school leavers from the least deprived areas decreasing more than those from the most deprived.

The Participation Measure showed a poverty-related participation gap of 8.2 percentage points in 2024. This is narrower than any year in the period 2015/16 – 2023/24.

There is also a link between poverty and additional support needs. Just under half (46 per cent) of pupils from the most deprived areas have identified additional support needs compared to 27 per cent in the least deprived areas.⁹

⁹ [Characteristics of pupils and their families in relative deprivation - Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation: Reporting on Wider Evidence Sources, 2024 - gov.scot](#)

What the evidence is telling us - variation in progress

Within each of these measures and sets of data, there continues to be variation in outcomes for children and young people between different local authorities. There are a number of societal and socio-economic factors which influence attainment, which can impact on learning and achievement. Local authorities face different pressures and challenges, for example due to their geography, levels of deprivation, staffing levels, funding levels, and local priorities. These factors need to be considered when comparing performance.

ACEL data

For primary school literacy in 2023-24 there was a 21 percentage point difference between the local authorities with the highest and lowest percentages of pupils achieving the CfE expected levels at P1, P4 and P7 combined (ranging from 68% to 89%). For numeracy this was 18 percentage points (ranging from 74% to 92%).

For the same data there was a 17.6 percentage point difference between local authorities with the narrowest and widest attainment gaps for literacy at primary stages (ranging from 13 percentage points to 31 percentage points); and a 15 percentage point difference for numeracy (ranging from 12 percentage points to 27 percentage points).

Leavers

In 2022-23, there was a 14.8 percentage point difference between the local authorities with the highest and lowest percentages of leavers achieving one or more award at SCQF level 5 (ranging from 82% to 97%); and 33.7 percentage point difference at SCQF level 6 (ranging from 54% to 88%).

In terms of the poverty-related attainment gap, in 2022-23 there was a 32.3 percentage point difference between the narrowest and widest attainment gaps at SCQF level 5 (ranging from 3 percentage points to 36 percentage points); and a 41.8 percentage point difference at SCQF level 6 (ranging from 12 percentage points to 53 percentage points).

Annual Participation Measure

In 2024 there was a 7.7 percentage point difference between the local authorities with the highest and lowest participation rates of 16-19 year olds (ranging from 90.1% to 97.8%).

In terms of the participation gap between the most and least deprived areas, there was a 11.1 percentage point difference between the narrowest and widest participation gap (ranging from 3.2 percentage points to 14.3 percentage points).

What the evidence is telling us – ELC

Evidence shows that universally accessible and high quality ELC provides children with skills and confidence to carry into school education and is a cornerstone for closing the poverty-related attainment gap between children from the most and least deprived communities. The latest Care Inspectorate ELC data show that the quality

of funded early learning and childcare services remains high overall, with 89.8% of funded providers found to be good or better in all quality key questions.

What we will do to deliver – overall attainment and outcomes

- As set out under Outcome 1, Education Scotland will work with local authorities to build capacity and improve outcomes by developing clear and robust improvement projects that utilise attainment and achievement data.
- HMIE will continue to engage with settings and schools where the quality of education needs to improve and share examples of effective practice to support improved outcomes.
- HMIE will publish a national report on approaches taken by local authorities to support school improvement.

What we will do to deliver – the poverty-related attainment gap

- Education Scotland will design and deliver bespoke ‘leadership for equity support across 32 local authorities to augment school approaches to improving attainment.
- We will maximise and sustain the impact of the £1 billion Scottish Attainment Challenge and intensify action to deal with the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on children’s progress. This will be achieved through the rigorous evaluation of the programme to-date, work with schools, Education Scotland, ADES and Scottish Government to identify and highlight the approaches and interventions that have had the greatest impact locally and nationally. This body of evidence on progress and impact – shared on Scotland’s Equity Toolkit, and through engagement across these key partners and schools – will help local authorities and schools to:
 - sustain the cultural focus on equity in education
 - draw on strong examples of impactful local practice
 - work as a networked learning system to learn from schools and authorities across the country where progress has been made and approaches to closing the poverty related attainment gap have been mainstreamed.
- We will provide £37m in 2025/26 to deliver the expansion of free school meals programme to those in receipt of Scottish Child Payment in Primaries 6 and 7. This support will help provide access to healthy and nutritious meals for around 25,000 children.
- We will deliver Wave 3 of The Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative National Improving Writing programme (2024/25) with five further local authorities. Plan and deliver Wave 4 (academic year 2025/26). The 12-week writing programme is designed to equip teachers with the skills to monitor progress in their classroom and collate data for improvement to guide their decision making. The programme works because it combines improvement

science skills with an evidenced based standardised approach for teaching writing.

What we will do to deliver – ELC

- We will have a continued focus on embedding quality at the heart of the delivery of funded ELC services. To support consistently high-quality experiences for children, the Scottish Government will collaborate with all relevant agencies to ensure that there is greater alignment and strategic direction for improvement work. This will include simplifying and streamlining access to guidance for the sector and continued sponsorship of the Care Inspectorate ELC Improvement Programme in 2025-26, to provide bespoke improvement support to settings at risk of failing to meet the National Standard for funded ELC.
- We will ensure that the children who will benefit most, benefit first from high quality funded ELC, by providing targeted early access to funded ELC at age two. The eligibility criteria use proxy measures for 'disadvantage', modelled on criteria for access to Free School Meals. Our aim is that by providing these children with early access to high quality ELC, they are more likely to achieve similar outcomes long-term to their peers who start funded ELC at age three.
- We will work with local authorities and the Improvement Service on a National Improvement Project focusing on boosting take up of the two-year-old offer among the families most at risk of poverty, and in areas with some of the lowest take up rates.

How we will measure progress

HMIE will monitor the percentage of schools requiring a further inspection from HM Inspectors.

The Scottish Government and Education Scotland will continue to monitor local authorities' and national attainment and participation data for the key NIF measures, and within them core stretch aims for progress by 2025/26 set by local authorities.

The Scottish Government will continue to evaluate the Attainment Scotland Fund in line with its published [evaluation strategy](#), with key intelligence on the importance of young people's readiness to learn, engagement with families and communities, progress across the range of NIF measures and long term impact of the programme to be evaluated. Evaluation outputs will be published throughout the 2025 and 2026.

The learning from the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) sampling work with over 120 schools across Scotland on how PEF is contributing towards improving the educational outcomes of children and young people/families impacted by poverty, will be shared with headteachers, local authorities and key stakeholders, as well as the evidence gathered by and professional expertise of Education Scotland, which will underpin this work.

Education Scotland will assess the impact of the Improving Writing Programme via:

- Monitoring the impact on attainment reported by teachers at class level, annual ACEL data at school and local authority level.
- Monitoring implementation of the Writing Bundle.
- Maintain connections with Local Leads delivering the programme to support / ensure fidelity of implementation.
- Teachers tracking pupil enjoyment.
- Interviews and qualitative feedback summarising impact from local leads, staff and children.

The work on improving take up rates for ELC reports through the 'Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026' progress reports.¹⁰

Outcome 5 – highly skilled teachers and school-leaders driving excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all, especially those with additional support needs.

What the evidence is telling us

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections, tell us that staff in most primary and secondary schools and the majority of special schools ensure that positive relationships between staff, children and young people are respectful and nurturing which supports children and young people to learn in purposeful learning environments. In the majority of primary and secondary classes, staff offer helpful explanations and instructions to support children and young people's understanding of the purpose of their learning. Staff in most schools use a variety of assessment approaches to check understanding and to identify where children and young people require additional support with their learning. Staff continue to build on skills and knowledge developed during periods of remote learning to integrate digital approaches skilfully into classroom routines to enrich learning opportunities. In the majority of primary and special schools, and in less than half of secondary schools, staff make effective use of digital technology to enhance and extend learning.

Overall, schools need to ensure greater consistency in the quality of learning and teaching to ensure all learners experiences high-quality learning. Schools should focus on improving pace of lessons and ensuring that tasks and activities are consistently well-matched to the diverse learning needs of all children. This includes providing appropriate support for those requiring additional support and offering sufficient challenge to extend higher-achieving learners. There is an ongoing need to continue to ensure that teachers make more effective use of assessment information to help inform learning, teaching, and assessment across all subject areas.

The number of children being identified as having additional support needs (ASN) is growing, with 40.5% of our school population now being identified as having ASN compared to 10% in 2010, and 19% of children in funded ELC. The growth in need presents a significant challenge at all levels of the system.

¹⁰ [Best Start, Bright Futures - tackling child poverty: progress report 2023 to 2024](#)

Pupils with ASN are more likely to have poorer educational experiences and outcomes against existing measures in terms of attendance, exclusions, and attainment, and less likely to progress to a positive destination. There is also a strong link between ASN and poverty - across Scotland the proportion of pupils with an additional need in Scotland's most deprived areas is almost double that in the least deprived areas. We know from qualitative evidence that children and young people and their families are in some cases struggling to navigate the system and to get the support they need.

[‘Realising the Ambition: Being Me’](#) (RtA) is our evidence based, internationally recognised practice guidance that supports the development of high-quality practice including key messages on the use of child-centred play pedagogy across the early level Curriculum for Excellence and beyond. The findings from latest His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspections show that the quality of ELC is good across ELC and nursery classes, and that progress is being made in embedding play pedagogy effectively in P1.

Recent reports on Scottish education have noted that effective professional learning, development and dedicated time for collaboration is critical to improving performance in the classroom. The International Council of Education Advisers said in its 2023 report that we need to invest in the professional learning of educational professionals to address the changing needs of the young people.

In 2023/24 Education Scotland conducted a 'listening exercise' to find out how teachers, ELC and CLD practitioners engage in impactful professional learning and the types of learning they prefer. “Teachers who are engaged in cycles of effective professional learning take greater responsibility for the learning of all students [...] as they discover that their new professional knowledge and practice are having a positive impact on their students, they begin to feel more effective as teachers” (Timperley, 2008). If we can improve the quality of professional learning delivered, this will impact on the self-efficacy and practice of teachers which in turn will impact on the learning of children and young people. We also understand that teacher learning occurs at different layers and various levels.

Teachers' perceptions and needs shift over different phases in their careers as their own professional experience, confidence and identity evolves. The Strategic Board for Teacher Education is developing a Framework for Teacher Education and Development that recognises this and identifies the specific needs, expectations and entitlements that will enrich as well as enable individuals to deepen and extend their contribution to and roles in education. In addition, it is envisaged that structured support may help to reduce early attrition and career dissatisfaction.

One of the findings from the Scottish Government's 2023 consultation on the use of data for improvement is that more needs to be done (at both national and local levels) to ensure that improvement activity is informed by the relevant data, and to support education professionals in their capacity to interpret and use data for the purpose of improvement.

Insight is the benchmarking tool for analysing attainment data in the senior phase, accessible by secondary schools and local authorities. The value of Insight and the potential to enhance it was specifically referenced in the 2021 Muir report.

Frontline support in the use of Insight (provided free of charge to schools and local authorities via the Insight Professional Advisor) receives extremely positive feedback about the support provided, and it remains in high demand. During school session 2023/24, the Advisor delivered support sessions to over 30% of Scottish secondary schools. In addition, a number of other schools will have had the opportunity to attend Local Authority based Insight support sessions.

What we will do to deliver

- We will work with local government partners and stakeholders to improve teacher recruitment and retention, offering local government £186.5m if they agree to restore and maintain teacher numbers at 2023 levels, freeze learning hours and make meaningful progress with reducing teacher class contact time
- HMIE will publish features and approaches that are highly effective to help build capacity and support improvement in practice.
- HMIE will ensure all new inspection frameworks place a strong emphasis on the quality of learning, teaching, and assessment.
- We are investing in a programme of work to support early intervention in speech, language and communication for young children and their families.
- Our commitment to an improved curriculum and reformed approach to qualifications and assessment will create a more engaging and inclusive learning experience over time helping to increase standards of attainment and achievement.
- Education Scotland will work collaboratively with partners to build capacity in the education workforce through provision of professional learning in response to key legislation, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 and the Equality Act (2010), current trends and policy development linked to rights-based approaches, gender equality and gender-based violence, LGBT inclusive education, anti-racist education, and the prevention of prejudice and hate crime.”
- Subject to the successful passage of the budget we are investing an additional £29 million in ASL from 25/26. This will include support for national and local programmes to support the retention of the ASN workforce. We will continue to implement the principles of the Morgan review. The updated ASL Action Plan and Progress report was published on 4 November 2024 and identified 3 key priorities for the next phase of work – a refresh of the ASL Code of Practice, Communications, and the National Measurement Framework.
- We are committed to updating the Code of Practice to ensure that it fully supports schools and local authorities to fulfil their duties under the 2004 Act.

- We will produce a national measurement framework to:
 - Ensure there are high aspirations and ambitions for children and young people with identified ASNs, ensuring they achieve their maximum learning potential
 - Celebrate achievement of children and young people with identified ASNs, including those with the most complex needs, and ensure visibility and parity of all achievements
 - Provide a consistent 'share and compare' approach for LAs, supporting improvement and progress within Inclusion sector
 - Provide data and evidence (moving to consistent data and evidence) to help inform decision making for LAs and nationally
 - Provide parity of supports for all education sectors across Scotland.

- The work on the Code of Practice and National Measurement Framework will be phased and iterative with phase 1 (drawing together existing data in one place) being delivered by the end of 2025. Phase 2 and 3, which will look at the more nuanced data, will be delivered after this. We will also be developing a communications strategy on ASL as part of the next phase of work.

- We are committed to reducing inequalities from the earlier years. To ensure that children's additional support needs are met and that they do not present a barrier to them accessing the full range of experiences in funded early learning and childcare, the Scottish Government will collaborate with local authorities and providers of funded ELC to develop a full understanding of how local authorities support partner providers to meet the needs of children with ASN, including children with complex needs, and consider further actions in this area. In response to the Audit Scotland report on progress of delivery of the 1,140 hours expansion of ELC, [published](#) on 1 June 2023, we will also seek to understand the extent to which children with ASN are not accessing funded ELC, the reasons for this, and the level of any unmet needs.

- We know that it is important for all children to experience high-quality play pedagogy, and we will work with Local Authorities on the alignment of RtA across the early level Curriculum for Excellence.

- Education Scotland will design and deliver cohort based national leadership professional learning programmes for educator leadership, middle leadership and system leadership continually updating and refreshing based on learning and evaluation.

- Education Scotland will support bespoke continuous improvement on leadership, professional learning, teaching and assessment, meeting learning needs and curriculum consistent with expectations of reform across 32 local authorities

- In recognising the importance of a thriving teaching profession, we are establishing a Centre for Teaching Excellence with the University of Glasgow, filling a critical gap in support for teachers linking research and evidence to their practice.
 - The Centre will enable teachers to develop their pedagogical expertise through critical reflection and research in an easily digestible format to support improvement. It will work with teachers to develop stronger coherence and connection between research and evidence, particularly as developed in an academic context, and teaching practice in Scotland.
 - It will ensure a better supported profession, armed with the latest research on teaching practices, that supports high quality teaching and helps our children and young people thrive.
- In the second half of session 24/25 joint work between the Insight Advisor and Education Scotland Attainment Advisors will look to develop awareness and usage of the Insight tool across schools. This will focus on intelligent use of the data, going beyond common accountability measures. On-line webinars and podcasts are also planned as part of a “universal offer” aimed in the first instance in enhancing data literacy amongst school leadership teams.
- Scottish Government will liaise with local government to ensure that information on Gaelic Medium Education (GME) pupils is recorded accurately, including for secondary.
- Scottish Government will work with local government and other partners to ensure that data on subject availability and pupil uptake across GME settings in Scotland is robustly captured and maintained, including for digital learning offers/platforms.
- Building on the Gaelic elements included in the Into Headship programme and the CPD in Gaelic and GME provided through Education Scotland, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Stòrlann and by individual local authorities, we will work with local government and professional learning providers to ensure that teaching staff across Scotland are supported in using Career Long Professional learning (CLPL) to access these and other resources, including to support leadership for Gaelic and Gaelic positive ethos.
- SG will work with Education Scotland and our Gaelic Bodies and partners to improve access to and uptake of Gaelic language support for teachers and CLPL for immersion techniques for working in Gaelic Medium Education settings.
- SG will work with Education Scotland, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Stòrlann and local authorities to maximise the availability and accessibility of Gaelic Medium materials and learning resources that are up to date and relevant to the needs of young people, including through GLOW and other portals used by GME and Gaelic language staff and pupils.

How we will measure progress

The University of Glasgow as the host of the Centre for Teaching Excellence will be required to carry out monitoring and evaluation work as part of its remit.

Education Scotland will track the number of participants on the Leading Professional Learning programme compared to 2023/24, and will evaluate the impact of the learning on participants and their practice.

Education Scotland will also track the number of participants engaging in cohort-based leadership learning through programmes. the number of educators engaging in open access leadership offers via Education Scotland (including webpage views and completed submissions) and will carry out an evaluation of the impact of this learning on the participants and their practice.

We will use the evidence from HMIE inspections to assess the quality of learning, teaching and assessment.

Outcome 6 - improving relationships and behaviour, and attendance, with increased engagement in learning and a culture of dignity and respect for all.

What the evidence is telling us – relationships and behaviour within a culture of dignity and respect

The Behaviour in Scottish Schools: Research report 2023 (BISSR) is the latest¹¹ in time series research established in 2006 and reporting the views of support staff, teachers, headteachers, and local authority staff on pupils' relationships and behaviour in schools. The research published in 2023 also contained a range of specific questions about the impact of COVID-19. The research found that whilst the majority of staff in 2023 still perceive that all or most pupils are generally well-behaved around the school and in the classroom, there has been a general worsening of pupil behaviour since 2016 with primary and secondary staff having experienced decreases in most positive behaviours and increases in most of the low level disruptive, disengagement and serious disruptive behaviours around the school.

In line with the broader picture, most staff reported that behaviour is worse than before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began, both in the classroom (77%) and around the school (80%). School staff considered COVID-19 to have had a negative impact on behaviour, particularly for those pupils whose transition - either between early years and primary or primary and secondary - was disrupted.

School staff viewed these pupils as showing immaturity, leading to low level disruption. COVID-19 was seen to have resulted in delays to pupils' social and communication skills, leading to disruptive behaviour related to sharing, playing together and communicating their feelings in primaries, and interpersonal relationships and group work in secondaries.

¹¹ [Behaviour in Scottish schools: research report 2023 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2023/06/behaviour-in-scottish-schools-research-report-2023.pdf)

Additional impacts of COVID-19 included disengagement with school and schoolwork, reduction in attendance for some pupils, anxiety and poorer mental wellbeing and greater reliance on mobile phones and social media. The most negative impacts of COVID-19 were considered to be felt by the most vulnerable pupils; those affected by poverty, deprivation and trauma.

What the evidence is telling us - anti-racism in education

Both formal data and lived experience continue to demonstrate that minority ethnic children, young people, teachers and school staff do not have a pro-actively anti-racist experience of school and early years settings. Data from SEEMIS captures racism and racist incidents in schools, and our annual Diversity in the Teaching Profession data report highlights the chronic under representation of minority ethnic teachers at all levels, and particularly in promoted posts. Recent work carried out on Learning Directorate's behalf by Intercultural Youth Scotland and Show Racism the Red Card, captures young people's individual experiences of racism, whether that be racist incidents perpetrated by other pupils or not seeing ethnic minority groups and individuals accurately represented in the curriculum. Anecdotally, teachers and educators continue to request resources to support them in addressing topics such as racism and religious bigotry and to address and prevent racist incidents in schools, and to improve their racial literacy and be better equipped to deliver an anti-racist curriculum and to navigate challenging conversations with confidence.

What the evidence is telling us – gender equality

Both formal data and lived experience continue to demonstrate that girls and young women do not have a gender equal experience of education aged 3-18. Reports commissioned by the Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning in 2022, carried out by the [Children's Parliament](#) and the [Scottish Youth Parliament](#) provide a snapshot of this. [The Behaviour in Scottish schools: research report 2023](#) highlighted misogyny in schools as an emerging theme of the research.

The problem is not limited to girls and young women. Female teachers and school staff report being subjected to sexist behaviour, sexual assault and harassment by male pupils as reported in the [EIS survey on pupil behaviour](#) and the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research.

Misogynistic behaviour in schools has wider impacts than sexual harassment. It has a hugely undermining impact on girls and young women which can be very pervasive and not always obvious until we see it emerging in, for example, areas such as subject choice. We know that for some girls and young women they will make the decision not to pursue subjects which have traditionally attracted boys and young men, resulting in fewer young women engaging with sectors such as STEM as a career choice. Girls regularly outperform boys when it comes to exams, however, this does not translate in to working life, with only 70% of women in Scotland in employment compared to 78% of men, not to mention the long standing gender pay gap which remains at about 15%.

What the evidence is telling us - attendance

There is a system-wide concern about reduced levels of attendance, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2023/24 the Summary statistics for schools in Scotland 2024 confirmed that attendance nationally overall was 90.3%. This is a small increase from 90.2% in 2022/23. Prior to this, from 2010/11 pupils' rate of attendance was relatively stable, increasing from 93.1% to 93.7% in 2014/15. This was followed by consecutive decreases, with the largest drop from 92.0% in 2020/21 down to 90.2% in 2022/23. Sickness without education provision was the biggest reason for absence, although the rate decreased from the previous year, from 5.0% of all openings in 2022/23 to 4.8% in 2023/24. The rate of persistent absence (pupils who were absent 10% or more of all half days) decreased from 32.5% in 2022/23 to 31.4% in 2023/24 but remains substantially higher than the pre-COVID-19 level of around 20%.

What we will do to deliver – relationships and behaviour

- The findings from the Behaviour in Scottish Schools research have informed the Joint Action Plan on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools, published in August 2024 and which sets out the strategic actions to address concerns in relation to relationships and behaviour in schools, and attendance and engagement. Work on relationships and behaviour is set in the context of school ethos and culture, which includes dignity and respect within its foundation. This three year plan is available from [Ensuring Safe and Consistent Environments in Schools – Joint Action Plan - Relationships and behaviour in schools: national action plan 2024 to 2027](#) and reflects the work of partners within the Scottish Advisory Group for Relationships and Behaviour in Schools, and other partners in order to deliver the actions within the plan.
- A number of the actions in the first implementation phase of the Joint Action Plan support increased engagement, dignity and respect.
- We have published [guidance on mobile phone use in schools](#), this aims to support schools to reduce the negative impact of distraction through mobile phone use and increase engagement in learning.
- We have also published a refreshed national approach to anti-bullying, [Respect for All](#), which supports schools to prevent and respond to bullying behaviours, including those arising from prejudice.
- We have published [new guidance on Gender-Based Violence in Schools](#), responding to concerns of increased experiences of misogyny in schools and new guidance on the appropriate and safe use of [physical intervention in schools](#).
- Education Scotland will implement and promote the 'Inclusion, Wellbeing, Equalities' professional learning framework, to support educators to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people who require additional support

- HMIE will have an increased focus on discussing and commenting on attendance, relationships and behaviour during ELC and school inspections.

What we will do to deliver – anti-racism in education

- We will progress the actions set out in the Anti-Racism in Education Programme, this includes:
 - delivering cohorts 7 and 8 of Education Scotland’s Building Racial Literacy Programme in 2025-26 (this is contingent on approx. £50k funding per annum from the budget available to support the AREP).
 - delivering year 1 of Education Scotland’s Anti-Racist Mentors project in 2025-26, building on the pilot undertaken in 2024-25 (also contingent on funding of approx. £50k per annum from the same budget).
 - working with ADES and local authorities to implement our recently published guidance for employers of teachers to support the recruitment retention and promotion of ethnic minority staff.
 - promoting our principles for an anti-racist curriculum, which provide schools with a framework for decolonising the curriculum and supporting them to understand what that means in practice.
 - developing and publishing a Whole School Approach to prevent and respond to racism and racist incidents (planned for 2025).
 - publishing the new Anti-Racist Commitment for Education Leaders, which will support leaders at all levels in the education sector, embed a range anti-racist approaches in their setting (planned for early 2025).

What we will do to deliver – gender equality

Having spent some time in 2024 re-establishing its remit and how it will go forward, the Gender Equality Taskforce in Education & Learning will:

- provide focused stakeholder groups to take a strategic view of emerging and existing education policy ambitions, and apply a gendered lens to both the high level ambitions and detailed actions within them.
- provide strategic oversight in order to embed gender equality across the education policy landscape, resulting in:
 - policy coherence across the education landscape, including but not limited to: the implementation of the Relationships and Behaviour in Schools Action Plan; Equally Safe at School; Education Scotland’s wider Equalities Work ; STEM subject choice, Mentors in Violence Prevention, LGBTI Inclusion work and the commitment from the now concluded Gender Pay Gap Action Plan to work with the Scottish Council of Deans of Education to consider how gender equality can be made more prominent within Initial Teacher Education;
 - more readily identifiable levers to tackle gender inequality.
- identify where gaps exist and where work requires to be undertaken to address those, wherever possible in the form of task and finish groups, the membership of which can be drawn from stakeholders with intersecting interests.

What we will do to deliver – attendance

- Education Scotland will work with partners, local authorities, practitioners, parents, learners, CLD and Third Sector to design and deliver support to improve attendance and engagement including:
 - evidence-based professional learning
 - increased use of robust data to inform improvement
 - practical strategies for implementation that strengthen culture, systems and practice
 - exemplification of approaches and practice that are having an impact
 - ongoing opportunities for stakeholders to co-design support, share learning and maximise impact
- This work is in addition to each local authority's stretch aims established as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.
- As part of the commitments in the relationships and behaviour action plan, we will review and update our national guidance on attendance - Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1.
- We will run a national marketing campaign to help support improving attendance and reducing absence.

What we will do to deliver – parental engagement.

- The Scottish Assembly for Parents and Carers (SAPC) was launched in September 2024, establishing a broader, more representative model to support engagement from parents and carers. To ensure meaningful engagement, the Assembly will adopt various methods of engagement with its membership such as surveys, in person-meetings and events and online webinars to accommodate all members' interests effectively.

How we will measure progress – relationships and behaviour within a culture of dignity and respect

The progress in implementing the joint [Action Plan on Relationships and Behaviour](#) will be published annually, with the first report due in Spring 2025. This will include contributions to delivery across all partners, including member of the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools, including Education Scotland

It is expected that local authorities will record and monitor all incidents in schools, including those which are [related to bullying](#) and behaviour and violence.

In addition to local monitoring and review of data, national level data will be available via the next iteration of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research. Data will also be available on the experiences of bullying via the findings of the Health Behaviour in School Age Children Study. The Health Behaviour in School Age Children Study also reports children and young people's experiences of school, including feelings of

acceptance, trust and caring from teachers and their experiences of enjoying being with their classmates, felt accepted by them, and if they were kind and helpful.

We will commission an independent review of the gender based violence in schools framework before the end of this parliamentary term.

There will be annual progress reports on the implementation of the Joint Action Plan on relationships and behaviour.

The sixth wave of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research will be carried out in 2026.

We will use the following methods to track the progression of the Scottish Government programmes of work: UNCRC, Anti-Racism in Education, LGBT Inclusive Education Implementation, Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning, Equally Safe Delivery Plan, Mentors in Violence Prevention and Hate Crime Strategy:

- Professional learning uptake and feedback.
- Website statistics
- Collaboration with stakeholders.

How we will measure progress - an anti-racist experience of early years and school education for all

Future evaluation of the Building Racial Literacy Programme (First evaluation carried out in March 2024) and the Anti-Racist Peer Mentors Pilot.

Our annual Diversity in the Teaching Profession data report will reflect any increase in the number of minority ethnic teachers in Scotland's schools, and therefore any progress being made towards meeting the 2030 target to do the same. This data is drawn directly from local authorities and we will develop measures to establish whether any increases are attributable to the implementation of our new Action Guide.

It is expected that local authorities and schools will interrogate SEEMIS data to monitor reporting of racist incidents.

Annual reporting from leaders in the education sector on the way in which they are implementing the new Anti-Racist commitment.

How we will measure progress – gender equality

Interrogation of future BISSR reports to establish whether misogynistic behaviours in schools have decreased.

Interrogation of future SCQF results to establish whether the number of girls choosing and achieving in subjects traditionally dominated by boys has increased.

In the longer term, assessing whether there is an increased uptake in STEM careers by young women, along with assessing whether they remain there.

How we will measure progress - attendance

National Statistics on Attendance and Absence published annually, containing data on local authority attendance and absence rates. This includes data on persistent absence.

This is in addition to local authorities own management information on attendance and absence which is available on an ongoing basis.

How we will measure progress – parental engagement

We welcomed the results of the first SAPC survey in December 2024, focusing on parents' and carers' understanding and awareness of the Education (Scotland) Bill and the establishment of Qualifications Scotland and His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland. There were 211 respondents from 30 different local authority areas who participated in this survey. Their next survey on parental involvement in children's education will be published in January 2025.

In the coming months, the Assembly will conduct further surveys, online meetings, in person meetings and outreach on a variety of topics of interest, with at least two more policy areas brought forward by March 2025.

Outcome 7 – an education system engaging in digital technology to enhance all aspects of learning and teaching, supported by a digitally-skilled workforce, and tackling digital inequality.

What the evidence is telling us

Recent Scottish educational reviews, including those by the OECD and ICEA, as well as the Hayward Review and the Muir Review, all highlight the critical role of digital technology in shaping the future of education in Scotland. Collectively, these reviews advocate for improvements to digital infrastructure and connectivity, appropriate access to devices and digital services, and opportunities for digital upskilling of the education workforce. Taken together, universal enhancement in these areas will lay strong digital foundations, enabling the education system to take advantage of technologies and drive improvement, from reducing administrative burdens and streamlining processes, to enhancing the educational experiences of learners.

However, we know from research undertaken by the Scottish Government in 2022 that digital provision as a whole is inconsistent across schools and local authorities.

The [third formal report from the International Council of Education Advisers](#) (ICEA) recommended that the Scottish Government should urgently explore the implications of AI for education to identify related curriculum and professional learning policy developments, and work with universities, teachers' organisations, business, parents, students and community, to support measured implementation. It also

recommended that the established policy commitment to address inequality in education should take account of the likelihood of an increasing digital divide associated with access to AI.

What we will do to deliver

- We are currently developing a new digital strategy for school education in Scotland, in partnership with COSLA and key education stakeholders. The strategy will outline the important role we believe digital tools and services play in the future of Scottish education and will highlight the key features of successful technology provision. It will consider both people and technology aspects of digital education in Scotland to help support deployment and purposeful use of technology in Scotland's schools. We continue to work with partners on development of this strategy and an initial high level document and roadmap is due for publication in 2025.
- The Scottish Government is committed to investing £10m for enhanced digital provision during the 25/26 financial year.
- The Scottish Government will work with Qualifications Scotland, HMIE and Education Scotland within the context of Scotland's AI Strategy and the work of the Scottish AI Alliance to ensure that AI can be used effectively and safely in learning, teaching and assessment.
- Education Scotland will deliver three 'thematic weeks' on digital learning and teaching, covering 'digital literacy week', 'computing science week' and 'AI in schools'
- Education Scotland will work with local authorities to develop options for the future of the Glow
- Education Scotland will continue to evolve the existing Glow service, working with local authorities, including a focus on AI tools.
- The curriculum improvement cycle will provide an opportunity to ensure that young people are being offered a curriculum that allows them to develop a range of digital skills including an understanding of emerging technologies.
- HMIE will ensure all new inspection frameworks take sufficient account of digital technologies to support its positive impact on the delivery of high quality education and successful outcomes for all learners.

How we will measure progress

An approach to monitoring and evaluation will be included in the Digital Education Strategy.

We will use the evidence from HMIE inspections to assess the impact that digital technology is having on the quality of education.

Measuring the attainment gap

Progress towards 2025/26 local authority stretch aims

For primary school attainment, ACEL data showed strong improvement between 2020/21 and 2021/22 and the poverty-related attainment gap returned towards pre-pandemic levels. In 2022/23 and 2023/24 this improvement has continued for primary school literacy with ACEL data showing that collectively local authorities have made progress towards the stretch aims set for 2025/26. However progress across the four aggregate stretch aims varied for individual local authorities.

The 2023/24 ACEL data for primary school numeracy shows that although the percentage of primary pupils achieving expected levels in numeracy increased slightly for those in the least deprived areas, there was no change for those in the most deprived areas. Therefore, the gap has increased slightly. However progress across the four aggregate stretch aims varied for individual local authorities.

For school leavers with one or more SQA A-C awards at SCQF levels 5, the gap increased pre-pandemic, before decreasing to its narrowest in 2020/21 (18.2 percentage points) but the gap has increased again in recent years. For school leavers with one or more SQA A-C awards at SCQF levels 6, the gap has narrowed most years, reaching its narrowest in 2020/21 (34.4 percentage points) before increasing again in recent years.

For the Annual Participation Measure, Skills Development Scotland data published in August 2024 showed that progress was being made towards the aggregated aims for the poverty-related participation gap, with the gap at its narrowest since 2016/17.

13 key NIF measures

Of the 13 key NIF measures, the data source has changed for one measure (HWB: Children total difficulties score (age 13&15)) and so data is available for 2022 only. Of the remaining 12 measures, there has broadly been a narrowing of the gap in seven of the measures, and a widening of the gap in five of the measures over time. The percentage point gap is calculated on data rounded to 1 decimal place.

27-30 month review (children showing no concerns across all domains)

A number of changes to the approach to development assessments and recording of outcomes were implemented in April 2017. The decline in the percentage reporting 'no concerns' around 2017/18 is mainly due to this change. Trends in this measure should therefore be interpreted carefully.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to changes in how reviews were delivered, as well as in the circumstances of daily life for many children in 2020/21 and 2021/22. It is therefore possible that both factors relating to assessment and recording, and genuine changes in the occurrence of developmental problems are contributing to the changes in the trends.

The percentage of eligible children with identified developmental concerns was similar in 2022/23 compared with 2021/22. However, the gap between children living

in the most and least deprived areas of Scotland showing no concerns across all domains increased from 11.7 percentage points in 2021/22 to 14.3 percentage points in 2022/23. This is due to an increase in the percentage of eligible children living in the least deprived areas of Scotland showing no concerns in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22. There has also been a small decrease in the percentage of eligible children aged 27-30 months reviewed. The percentage of eligible children reviewed decreased from 89.6% in 2021/22 to 88.0% in 2022/23. Speech, language and communication remains the most frequent developmental domain in which concerns are noted at this review.

HWB: Children total difficulties score (age 4-12)

The proportion of children aged 4-12 with borderline or abnormal total difficulties is similar between 2018-2022 combined (17%) and 2019-2023 combined (19%). The gap between children with borderline or abnormal total difficulties in the most deprived and least deprived areas has increased slightly since 2012-2015 combined (16 percentage points) and was at 19 percentage points in 2019-2023 combined.

HWB: Children total difficulties score (age 13&15)

In 2021/22 the Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Census recorded 43% of 13 and 15 year olds with a borderline or abnormal total difficulties score. The gap between children from the most deprived and least deprived areas was 13 percentage points, with 50% of 13 and 15 year olds from the most deprived areas reporting borderline or abnormal total difficulties scores compared with 37% of those from the least deprived areas.

The HWB Census statistics are the aggregated results for the 16 local authorities who collected data, and are not weighted to population totals. These statistics are not directly comparable with the Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS) estimates previously used to report this measure. As such change in this measure will be reported as data becomes available in future years.

Primary - Literacy (P1, P4, P7 combined)

Primary - Numeracy (P1, P4, P7 combined)

In 2023/24, the data shows the percentage of primary pupils achieving expected levels in literacy increased slightly for both those in the most and least deprived areas compared to 2022/23. The gap between the proportion of primary pupils from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in literacy has narrowed to 20.2 percentage points and is now lower than that in 2016/17 and at its lowest ever level.

Although the percentage of primary pupils achieving expected levels in numeracy increased slightly for those in the least deprived areas in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23, there was no change in the percentage of primary pupils achieving expected levels in numeracy for those in the most deprived areas. Therefore, the gap between the proportion of primary pupils from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level has increased slightly since 2022/23 and stands at 17.4 percentage points.

Secondary - Literacy (S3, 3rd level or better)

Secondary - Numeracy (S3, 3rd level or better)

In 2023/24 the gap between the proportion of S3 pupils from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in literacy narrowed to 12.7 percentage points, lower than the level seen in 2016/17 and the lowest on record. This was due to an increase in S3 pupils from the most deprived areas achieving expected levels of literacy from 80.9% in 2022/23 to 82% in 2023/24.

Similarly, the gap between the proportion of S3 pupils from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in numeracy narrowed to 12 percentage points, lower than the level seen in 2016/17 and representing the lowest level ever recorded. This was due to an increase in S3 pupils from the most deprived areas achieving expected levels of numeracy from 82.5% in 2022/23 to 84.1% in 2023/24.

SCQF Levels 4, 5 and 6 (1 or more National Qualifications on leaving school)

The data presented here is based on school leavers achieving 1+ National Qualifications at SCQF Levels 4 to 6. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to changes to the way in which National Qualification results at SCQF Levels 5 to 7 were determined. This attainment data considers all of the attainment which a school leaver gains over their time at school. This means the attainment of school leavers in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 may be based on a combination of different approaches to determining results. Data is presented here from 2016/17 however there is a longer time series available in the [Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations](#) statistics.

At SCQF Level 4 or better, the gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas attaining 1 pass or more in National Qualifications was 5.9 percentage points. This is slightly wider than in 2021/22, when it was 5.8 percentage points. The proportion attaining 1 pass or more in National Qualifications at this level decreased for school leavers from both the most and the least deprived areas between 2021/22 and 2022/23. But it decreased by slightly more for those from the most deprived areas, which has led to the gap between the two groups widening. Since 2016/17, the gap at SCQF Level 4 or better increased from 5.9 percentage points to a peak of 7.1 percentage points in 2019/20 but has since decreased back 5.9 percentage points in 2022/23.

At SCQF Level 5 or better, the gap was 20.2 percentage points in 2022/23. This is wider than in 2021/22 (19.1 percentage points). The proportion attaining 1 pass or more in National Qualifications at this level decreased for school leavers from both the most and the least deprived areas between 2021/22 and 2022/23. But it decreased by slightly more for those from the most deprived areas, which has led to the gap between the two groups widening. Since 2016/17, the gap increased pre-pandemic, before decreasing to its narrowest in 2020/21 (18.2 percentage points) but the gap has increased again in recent years.

At SCQF Level 6 or better, the gap was 36.9 percentage points in 2022/23. This is slightly narrower than in 2021/22 (37.0 percentage points). The proportion attaining 1 pass or more in National Qualifications decreased for school leavers from both the most and the least deprived areas between 2021/22 and 2022/23. But it decreased

by more for those from the least deprived areas, which has led to the gap between the two groups narrowing. Since 2016/17, the gap has narrowed most years, starting from 37.6 percentage points in 2016/17 and reaching its narrowest in 2020/21 (34.4 percentage points) before increasing again in recent years.

School Attendance

School attendance rates across all sectors in 2023/24 are similar to those in 2022/23 (90.3% compared to 90.2%). In 2023/24, the gap in attendance rates between children living in the most and least deprived areas of Scotland was 6.6 percentage points, compared to 6.7 in 2022/23 but higher than 4.8 percentage points in 2016/17.

Participation measure

The gap between the proportion of 16-19 year olds participating in education, employment or training in the most and least deprived areas has decreased over time from 11.5 percentage points in 2016/17 to 8.2 percentage points in 2023/24. This is driven by an increase in the proportion of 16-19 year olds from the most deprived areas participating in education, training and employment from 84.8% in 2016/17 to 88.4% in 2023/24.

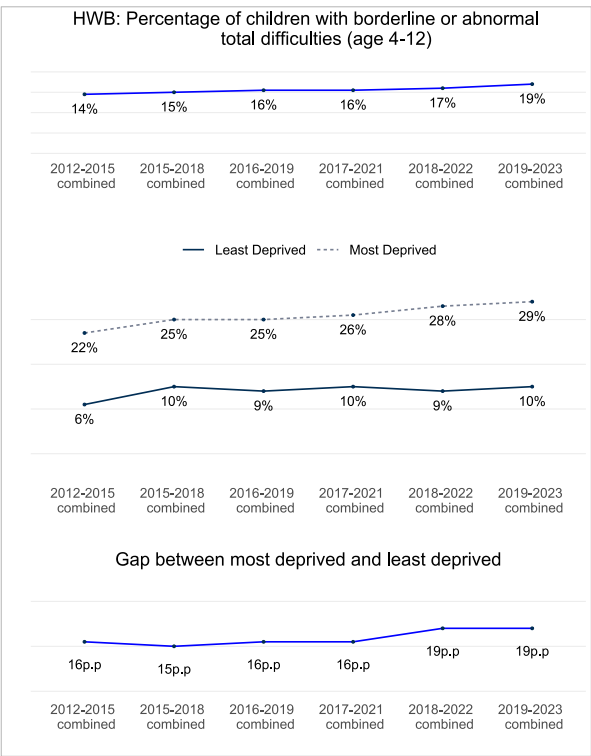
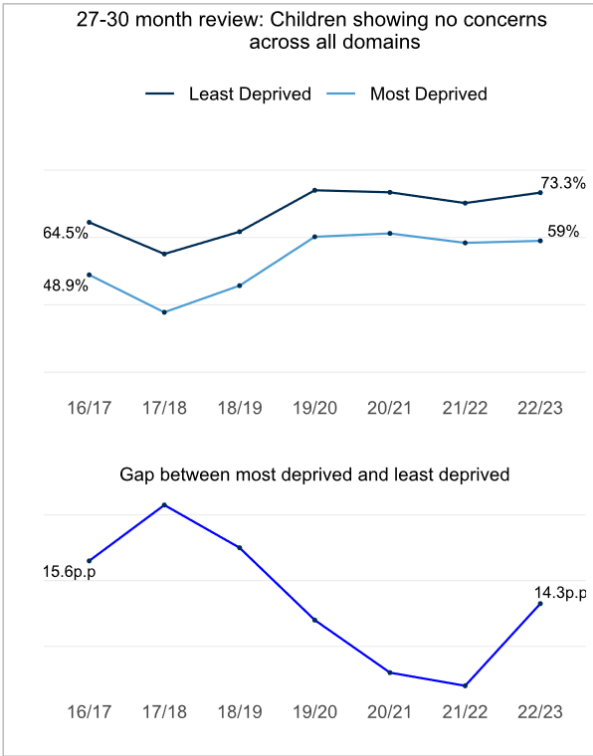
Initial Positive destination

This measure provides information on the outcomes for young people approximately three months after the end of the academic year (the first Monday in October). Positive destination includes higher education, further education, training, employment, voluntary work, Personal Skills Development and Activity Agreements (up to 2017/18).

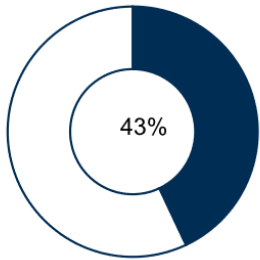
The time series includes years where school leaver destinations have been affected – either directly or indirectly – by the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of COVID-19 should therefore be kept in mind when considering changes over time in school leavers' destinations. The greatest effect of the pandemic on school leaver destinations is likely to have been seen in 2019/20. However, it is likely that there has been some ongoing impact on the destinations of some 2020/21 and 2021/22 school leavers. The pandemic may also have influenced some pupils' decisions on when to leave school.

The gap in the proportion of school leavers in an initial positive destination has narrowed each year since 2016/17 (with the exception of 2019/20) and is now at 3.7 percentage points compared with 6.9 percentage points in 2016/17. This was due to an increase in school leavers in an initial positive destination from the most deprived areas from 89.8% in 2016/17 to 94% in 2023/24.

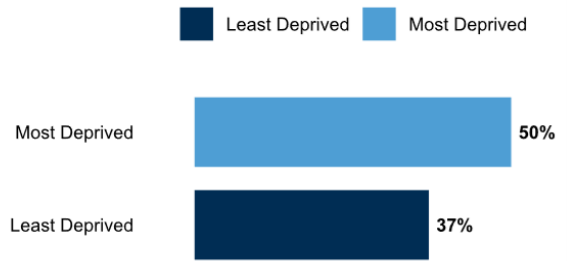
Summary tables of the key measures are set out below, while the remaining sub-measures can be seen in the [NIF Interactive Evidence Report](#).



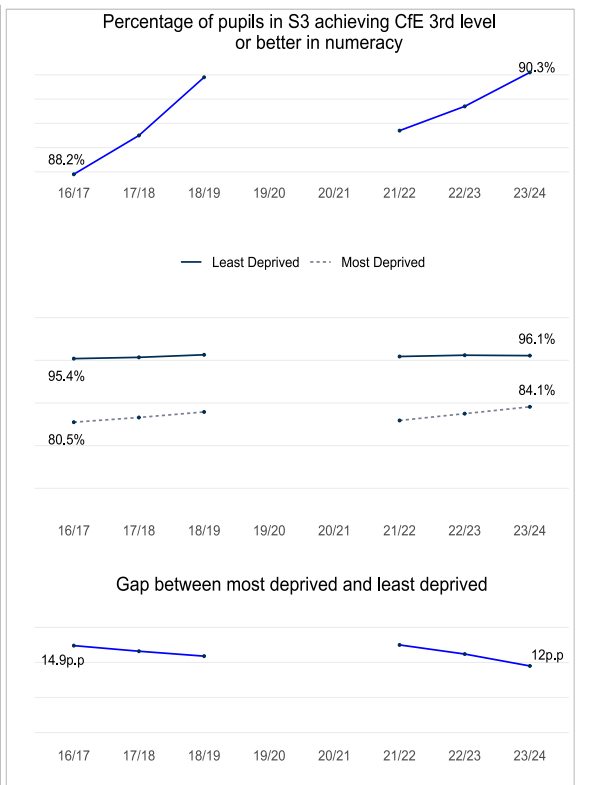
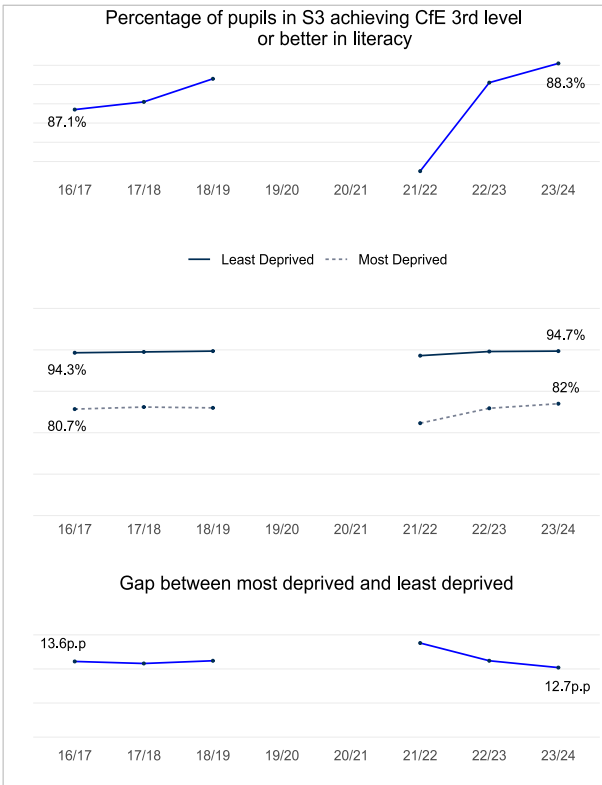
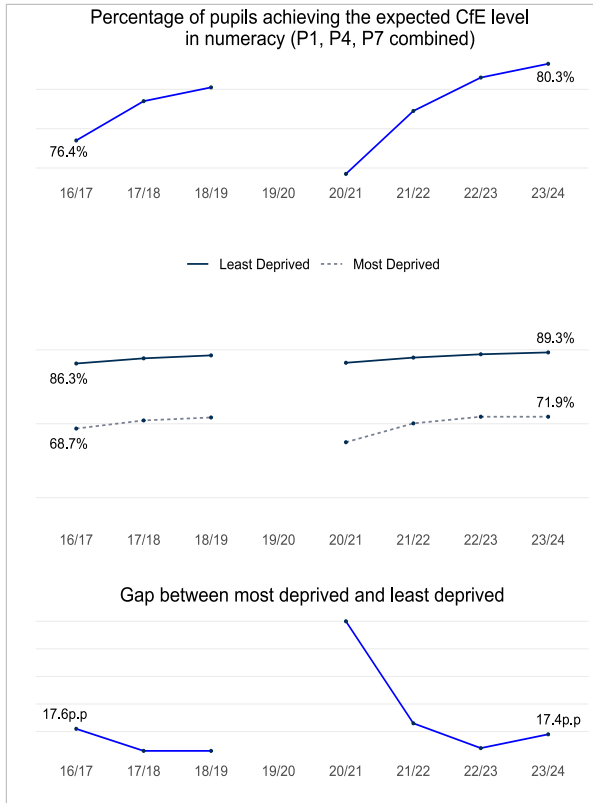
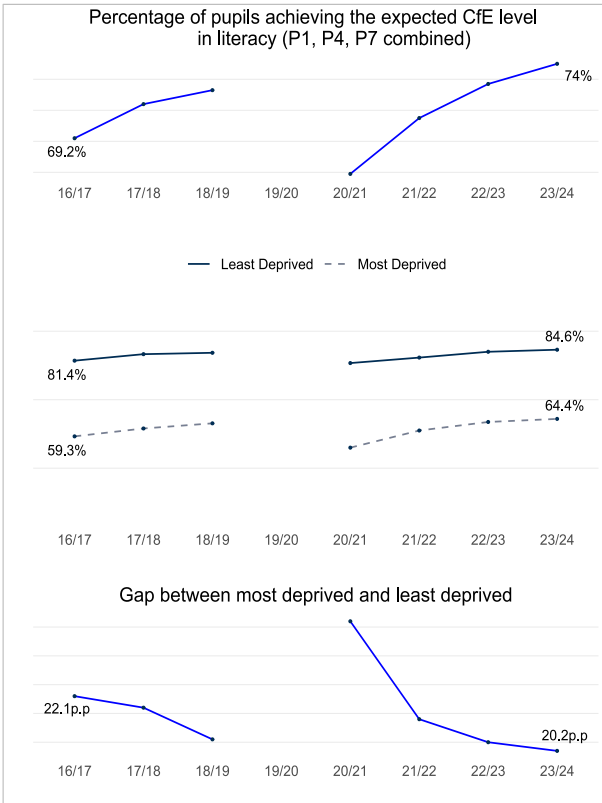
HWB: Percentage of children with borderline or abnormal total difficulties score (aged 13 and 15) 2022

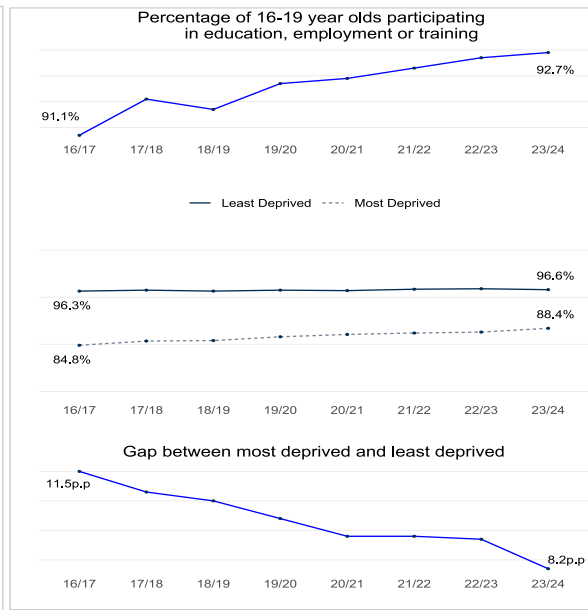
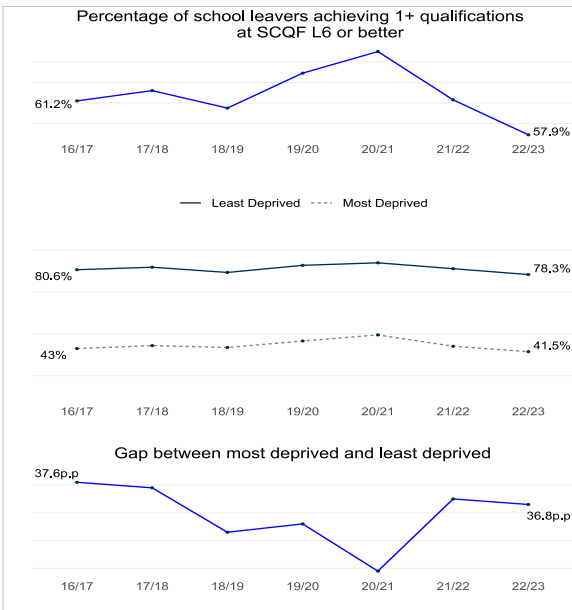
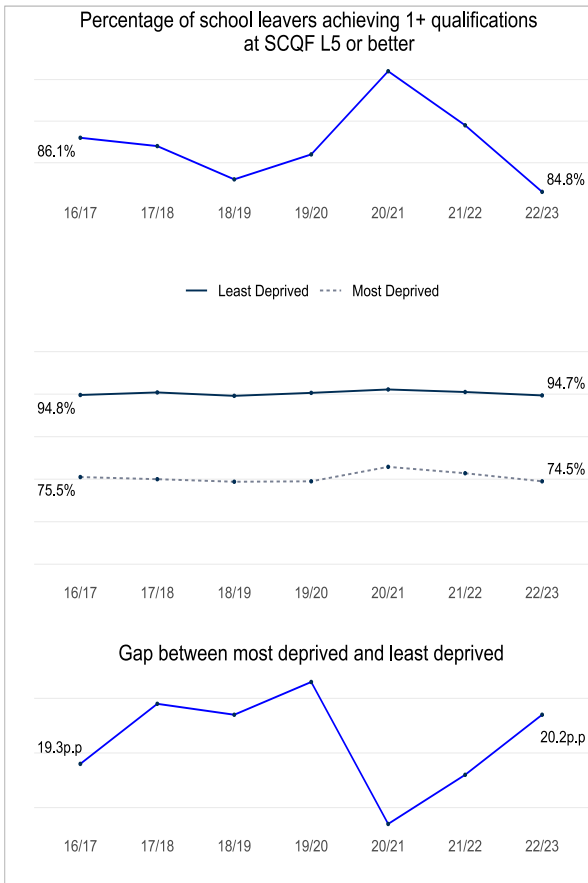
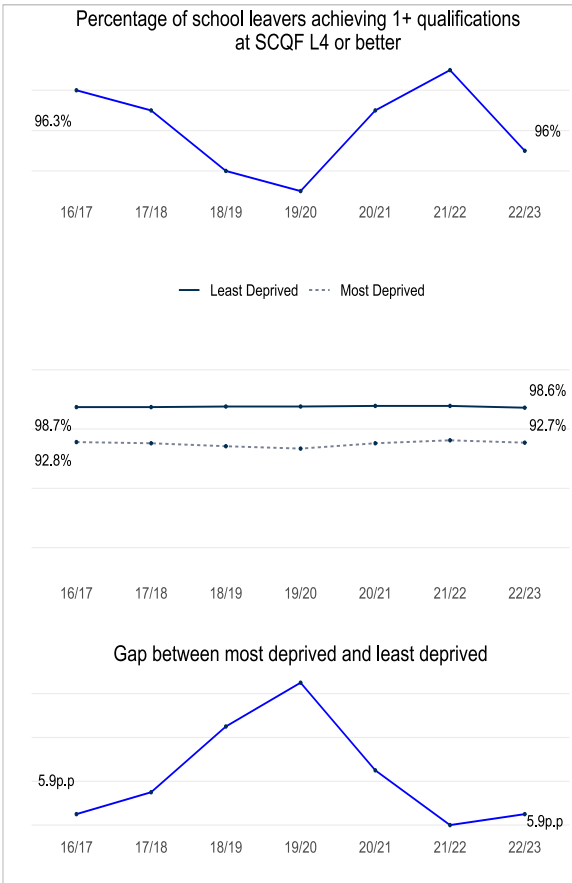


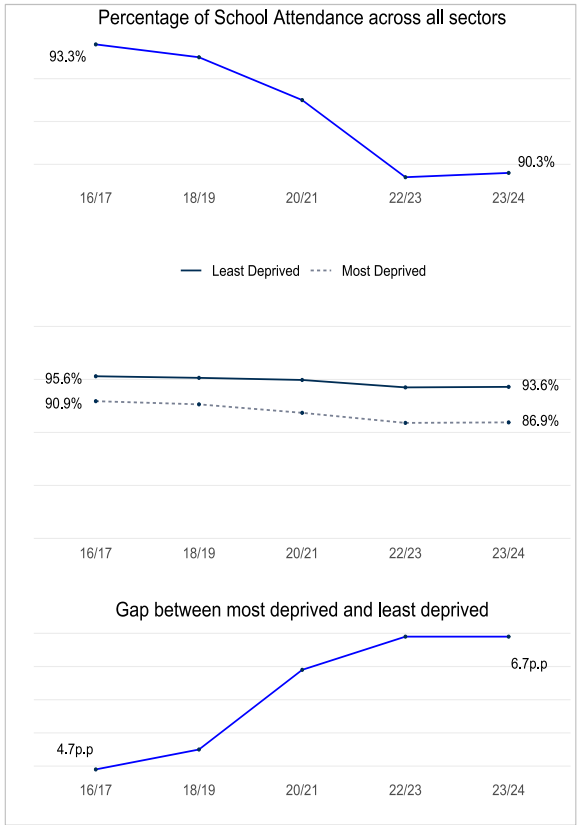
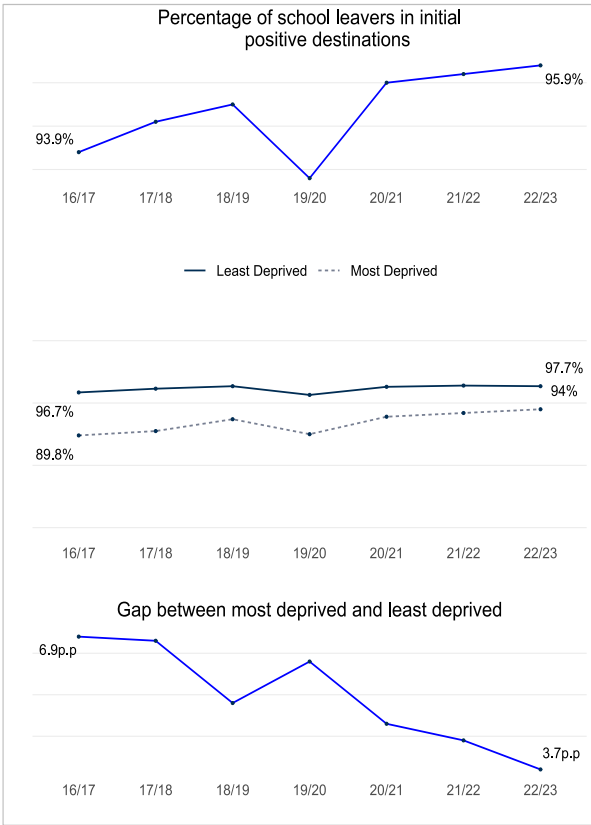
All children



13 percentage points between SIMD Quintile 1 and SIMD Quintile 5









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